

11/8/71

Chapter 25: Shoring Up Proves Not Enough

Militarily, the two months from early April to mid-June were a test of a strategy of limited air attacks on the North, limited ground involvement by American and other outside forces, and attempts to build up the South Vietnamese capacity. From (33,000) in early April, including the pre-March core of (24,000), US force strength in South Vietnam grew to (53,000) by early June, with another 15-20,000 already decided and on the way. This was an important series of build-up decisions, made in part on what seemed clear cases of individual need, in part to lay a groundwork for whatever might be needed in the future. It went side by side with much larger plans to expand South Vietnamese forces.

These outside force increases were the main stuff of high-level decision during this period. Less notably, the application of American air power grew rapidly at this time, and established itself as a central element in the way the war was being fought on the ground.

Yet, despite these American actions -- indeed, before they could possibly have taken full effect -- the test came between the expanded (NOT MUCH REINFORCED FROM THE) Viet Cong, (AMERICAN) North, and the South Vietnamese Army. It was an all-too-conclusive demonstration of who was on top. Between May 11th and June 15th, a series of military disasters engulfed the South Vietnamese; whole battalions disappeared, others were shredded, and the morale of the whole Army became defeatist. The in-between (AMERICAN) strategy of this period had clung to the old thesis that only the South Vietnamese could win their own fight. By mid-June this thesis was rapidly confronting the

11/9/71

practical fact that, given only moderate support from US forces, the South Vietnamese were rapidly losing. The revelation set the stage for the period of final and all-out decision that followed from mid-June through the month of July. Finally, as if to clear the slates completely, civilian government in Saigon collapsed, and power went by default to the younger generals.

The April Honolulu Conference

b. Up to the Baltimore speech, there was a tentativeness and uncertainty about the President's decisions. I do not believe he had seriously thought that any reasonable level of bombing of the North would bring Hanoi around in a short period, and in March he had given, with a new order-of magnitude in mind, the general order that everything possible be done in the South, or at least put forward for decision. But the actual decisions of April 2 had been limited in intent, and well below what the military men had urged. After the Baltimore speech, however, and with Hanoi's firmness now clear to almost anyone, the President became visibly more sympathetic to proposals from Westmoreland and the JCS. The idea that the war might drag on indefinitely was vivid to him, as to all of us. Probably the President had never believed in the idea, put forward by Ball and Thompson in February, of a "balance" that might permit "negotiation." Rather, he thought from the beginning that Ho would never accept peace until the situation was extremely adverse from his standpoint. As the President put it to a member of his staff, the process would be like a "filibuster -- enormous resistance at first, then a steady whittling away, then Ho hurrying to get it over with."*

* Goldman, p. 404.

11/9/71

doubt if the President really thought Ho would hurry even when the tide had become strong against him, but in any case, the breaking of his initial "enormous resistance" was crucial.

Moreover, General Johnson's report of March, and the subsequent JCS papers, had registered a basic point. If we were correctly estimating Viet Cong main-force strength at 37,000, with an additional 100,000 in regional forces and local guerrillas, then the South Vietnamese total forces comprised only a ratio of about 4-to-1, much less than the ratios that had been found necessary in other guerrilla wars*. In terms of combat battalions, the ratio was less than 2-to-1 -- a reflection of the capacity of the Viet Cong to live off the land and perhaps to some extent of the way the South Vietnamese forces had been laid out on the American pattern in organization and equipment. While the South Vietnamese forces had American-supplied mobility and now both their own and American air support, their basic rifles and other equipment were now being matched by the (mostly Chinese) flow of new weapons to the Viet Cong. Moreover, it became clear in April that at least one regular North Vietnamese regiment, and perhaps three -- the full 325th division -- was operating in the highland area, while another division, the 304th, was just across the border in Laos.** Washington continued to doubt that Hanoi would send down any substantial number of divisions, although these were known to be available.*** But even without a marked step-up

* Figures from LBJ, 138. Check whether I have covered ratios elsewhere. Note also Falk 1204 giving the retrospective figures.

** Later evidence established fairly conclusively that four regiments of regular North Vietnamese forces, totaling about 8000 men, arrived in South Vietnam between December 1964 and April 1965. These units were over and above the continued flow of trained men who went into Viet Cong units. It is striking that after the April entry, there was a gap of five months, with the next organized regiment not arriving till September. Falk, 1205. Perhaps Hanoi stayed its hand after February 7th, to see if the US made any move that threatened invasion of the North. Check sources at the time.

*** Boche exchange

11/9/71

in the flow from the North, it was becoming apparent that the Viet Cong were much stronger than they had been thought to be even at the end of 1964. The February surge had shown this, and even the relatively quiet months of March and April were taken in military circles to be a lull before the storm.* Taylor's overall reports for this period were significantly more sanguine than those from General Westmoreland, although I do not recall that in Washington the difference was important. Taylor saw dark grey skies possibly lightening, the military appraisals saw the same skies turning even darker; it was still all grey.

Whichever was right, the President in mid-April bore down hard, and it was his prodding that produced a flood of ideas to Taylor, including additional troops, blending Americans into South Vietnamese units, and an abortive notion of using military "civil affairs" units widely to assist in pacification.** To much of this, Taylor remonstrated sharply, and it was this growing divergence of view that produced a conference at Honolulu on April (19-20) bringing together under McNamara's chairmanship Taylor, all the senior military commanders, with McNaughton and myself in support.

The discussion at Honolulu was vigorous, and produced agreement on both a strategy and the estimated time it would take to carry it out. The bombing of the North was to be kept limited, focussing overwhelmingly -- as had actually been the case since early April -- on lines of communication south of the 20th parallel.*** To the end of June, this focus was

* LBJ, p. 141, quoting McNamara at Honolulu.

** Cooper, p. 275.

*** It was envisaged that the bombing program would continue at the tempo then established, for at least six months, and perhaps a year or more. This meant not striking Hanoi or Haiphong, which Taylor in particular regarded as a "hostage" to be struck only in an extreme case -- presumably massive North Vietnamese forces being sent down, although he probably had Chinese intervention even more in mind.

11/9/71

retained, with the result that by that time not one of the original 94 JCS target list ^(of 94 targets) had been hit: to this great extent did the applied program differ from the various options the JCS had urged in late 1964, and also from the "Option C" that had been visualized in late November, 1964. Both the fear of Chinese intervention and the sense that in any case bombing could do only a part of the job had now become gospel throughout the senior advisory circle -- with the exception of John McCone, who left the government at the end of April with a parting memorandum repeating his view of ~~April 2~~ that more American ground forces would get nowhere without a much tougher bombing policy.

The rejection of this was accented by another clear Honolulu decision, that the need for air in the South should always have priority over needs in the North. If the airpower available could not do both jobs, more would be sent. This policy, doubtless directly authorized by the President, was I believe ^(FIRST) put forward by McNamara, in part as a brake on the bombing of the North; its effect, however, was in time both to multiply the airpower deployments and to lead to an increasingly liberal policy in the use of air in the South. It was a striking case of the authorization of resources without limit and without any continuing procedure for restraint, other than the judgment of the military command. The result was that the use of air power in the South grew by _____, in terms of sorties, between ____ and _____. Even the bombing of the North, thought of as essentially static or going up only slowly, went from 3600 sorties in April to 4800 sorties in June, a one-third increase.

11/9/71

With these air policies went a substantial expansion of the plan for ground force deployments. The keynote was the active defense of coastal areas -- later to be called an overall "enclave strategy" but viewed at this time much more as a case of ^(INDIVIDUAL) ~~several~~ critical needs, which American forces could meet and thus free South Vietnamese forces. In addition to the four Marine battalions already committed to Danang (and the Hue area), protective deployments were now recommended for four other key areas. The resulting total force would have been 82,000 Americans, along with the 2000 Koreans who had arrived in late February for engineer tasks, and an Australian battalion just being approved in Canberra. The total force to hold the five areas was set at 17 combat battalions, of which 13 would be American, 1 Australian, and the additional 3, if politically possible, from Korea.

In terms of their missions, these forces would patrol out to about 20 miles from their base areas, with the possibility -- as with the Marine battalions at Danang -- that they could be used as a reserve force, and sent in that capacity out to a distance of possibly 50 miles. At this stage, however, the expanded combat activity would be on a local basis, not (or so it seemed) a basic shift, since in any event the troops would almost certainly get into serious fights anyway in their defensive and patrolling activity. With the 50-mile perimeters of activity, American and other foreign forces would still be active only in a very small fraction of South Vietnamese territory, and predominantly in a defensive role. It may be asked whether these limitations were taken

11/10/71

seriously or truly expected to last. The answer for the civilians, at least, is affirmative; like Taylor, we thought that even this much was near the limit of what foreign forces could attempt without major drawbacks, and we believed everything possible should be done to stick to it. Our military colleagues probably had a more skeptical (and realistic) view of what would happen ~~to~~ such arbitrary limitations; but the civilians thought we could hold to it, at any rate for several months. This would take the situation through the monsoon season, which by then seemed likely to be the testing period.

Behind this enclave or "stiffening" strategy lay a newly defined basic design, to demonstrate VC failure in the South. The force deployments would "bolster the South Vietnamese government forces while they are building up" -- and eventually a frustrated Hanoi would permit a political solution, with the bombing as the extra persuading element. As to how long this might take, the conference report by McNamara contains almost the only time estimate of any "consensus" paper through the whole critical period of decision. The job, it was thought, would take "more than six months, perhaps a year or two."* It was a judgment more in line with the guardedly optimistic Embassy view than with the picture that was coming from the Military Command.

Almost certainly, the President's own judgment was then in this range. Eric Goldman, ^(A MEMBER OF) ~~then on~~ the White House staff, cites apparently direct evidence that in early 1965 the President thought the war would be effectively over in 12 to 18 months.**

* DOD Study, Vol. 4, IV.C.3, p. ----.

** Goldman, p. 404. Goldman tells me this was the President's informal statement to him on March 14, 1965. Note that this was in March, after Pleiku. Goldman's suggestion that the President had decided both bombing and troops in January seems to me erroneous. IN THE SAME MESSAGE, SEEMS TO

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11/10/71

In essence, McNamara's report to the President showed, the conferees had concluded that success required stepping up the pace, and above all injecting a considerably greater stiffening of outside forces. On April 22, the President approved the basic plan, directing Taylor to seek Quat's concurrence, and at the same time telling Ball to pursue intensively the Acheson-Cutler examination of possible new settlement plans and methods.*** Plainly, the President felt -- as he did at each stage from this point on -- that any military step-up should have alongside it, ready for use, a possible peace approach.

Arrangements with South Vietnam, Troops from More Countries, and the SEATO Meeting

c. Returning from Honolulu, Taylor at once detected a highly skeptical attitude in Prime Minister Quat on the wisdom of bringing in more American forces. However, a long lecture on the manpower prospects, a careful explanation of the limited nature of the proposed deployments, and a week-end of consultation between Quat and his generals produced what appeared to be total acceptance of the need. Quat thus formally requested the suggested nine American combat battalions, the immediate forces being an airborne brigade to arrive promptly at Yung Tau near Siagon, and a Marine force, with engineers, to develop an airfield and enclave at Chu Lai, near the threatened northcentral coastal area.

The discussions showed that within the South Vietnamese government there was almost the same division of views as in the American representatives in Saigon. Quat was with Taylor in fearing the adverse impact of American forces on a large scale, and not fully persuaded that the situation was beyond the reach of South Vietnamese action. The South

* See Chapter 24 above.

11/10/71

Vietnamese military, like their Ameircan counterparts, saw things in darker hue, and were beginning to grasp the problem symbolized in the force-ratio numbers. The root was, of course, that in the face of the kind of well-armed and organized force the Viet Cong now represented, only a far ^{more numerous} superior and offensive-minded force could cope; these adjectives did not describe the South Vietnamese forces, although the hope was that with foreign stiffening they might come around.

It remained to work out the contributions of other countries. Australia was no problem; as a result of the close consultation of months and Prime Minister Menzies' strong personal views, the Australian government had informed Washington in mid-April that it was prepared in principle to contribute a battalion very shortly. Similar discussions with New Zealand -- in each case dating back to the idea of an international force in December -- went more slowly; in March, Prime Minister Holyoake was negative, largely because of the political confusion in Saigon. He and his Cabinet came around, slowly, however, and in late May approved the sending of a battery of artillery. Since both Australia and New Zealand were substantially engaged in the defense of Malaysia, these contributions were substantial parts of the small forces each had available at the time for overseas use.

As a practical matter, the enlisting of outside forces had by this time become an American responsibility -- almost inevitably as American thinking on the bombing and total force levels was more and more openly controlling. Australia, once having made its government decisions, readily arranged with the Saigon government for a formal request; however,

11/10/71

as a show of independence, Quat and Do forced the pace with New Zealand and also with South Korea, by making formal requests before there was agreement on the response.

South Korea was a complicated situation. The 2000-man Korean engineer force, decided before Pleiku and sent in late February, had evidenced strong support for the cause. No observer could doubt that the decisive factor was the underlying conviction of the Korean leaders that their own security was involved in the Vietnam outcome; they were passionately anti-Communist, and worried only about whether the United States would prove strong and wise enough to meet the test. No doubt the Koreans also thought the contribution would stand them in good stead when the American Congress voted on military and economic aid, but this was a marginal factor since by this time Congressional attitudes were very favorable to Korea, as it became more and more evident that Pak and his colleagues were pulling the country together at a remarkable rate.

The difficulty in April and May was not, then, conviction but rather practical political difficulties. Through the winter, new negotiators for Japan and South Korea -- Shiina for Japan, Lee Ton Wong for Korea -- had made great progress on the terms for normalizing relations, and agreement appeared near, being in fact initialled on _____. However, this only led to the most critical stage of all, that of ratification in both countries. Then, old passions were sure to surge, and the outcome in Korea seemed doubtful, ⁹after the outcry of only the year before. The best judgment of a wise American Ambassador, Winthrop Brown, was that the Koreans would back the sending of combat troops to Vietnam, but that it might be risky to force the issue while the Japan normalization

11/10/71

issue was center stage. At any rate Park should be approached very gently, and with a readiness to accept his political judgment.

This was the line followed by the travelling Cabot Lodge in late April, then by the President himself in mid-May, when Park paid a successful official visit to Washington in which other bilateral arrangements were central.* As Brown had foreseen, Park wanted to go slow, and the result was that the Honolulu Conference idea of three Korean combat battalions to ^{TAKE OVER} (man) one of the enclaves did not mature. Nonetheless, as we shall see, the Korean desire to help was so evident that future planning still included substantial Korean forces. With an army of more than 500,000 men kept in fighting trim by the constant threat across the 38th parallel, the Koreans did not suffer, as Australia and New Zealand did, from any shortage of ready forces.

At this stage, the Philippines too figured in planning, with the Honolulu hope sheet referring to a single Philippine battalion. In terms of military preparedness, the Philippines were low, both in numbers (with a total ground force of only _____) and combat readiness. However, their ready adjustment to the conditions of mainland Southeast Asia had already been demonstrated by the success of Philippine medical and other civilian volunteers in Laos, and the Filipinos had had experience a decade before in the fight against the Huks, involving such key factors as the wise handling of civilian populations.

However, the Philippines were in a campaign year, in which any issue was under the shadow of the upcoming bitter fight for the Presidency

* See pp. _____ below.

11/10/71

between the incumbent Macapagal and the contender Ferdinand Marcos, who had been elected as Macapagal's Vice-President, double-crossed (he claimed) on a promise that he would succeed after one term, and had now moved over to the opposing Nacionalista party -- whose nomination he won in _____. Although Marcos stoutly asserted to Americans his support for the defense of Vietnam, by May he had got himself into the position of putting up so many objections to any Philippine force contribution that a major fight was inevitable. To jump briefly ahead of the story, in July a blocking group of Marcos-backed Senators prevented the passage of the bill to send the small force to Vietnam. Apart from the Presidential situation, the result reflected long-standing Philippine tendencies to let Uncle Sam handle any tough problems, and some sense that whatever happened in Vietnam was a little remote. In the years since 1962, when the Philippines had been ardent in support of SEATO, there had been a steady sea-change in Philippine attitudes, reflecting particularly the growing influence of Sukarno. In the spring and summer of 1965, this was at its peak, and the Philippines were like Cambodia in reflecting the magnetic forces at work in a swirling Southeast Asia.*

Some of these same magnetic forces showed themselves in the annual SEATO meeting, held on May 3-5 in London. In the alliance diplomacy of the months since December, the SEATO members who supported standing firm in Vietnam had been clearly identified: Thailand was by this time furnishing extensive air base facilities under the specific SEATO label

* See Chapters _____.

11/10/71

and on the sole condition that there be no open announcement,* Aus-
 tralia had urged the bombing and was now sending troops, New Zealand
 was about to move to the same step, and the Philippines were ^{AT LEAST} ~~by now~~
~~GIVING STRONG~~ case-of-muted verbal support.

At the other extreme, France's opposition to what America was doing
 was almost total, at least in public.** In effect, France had declared
 itself out of policy discussions in SEATO the previous year at Manila --
 choosing nonetheless to retain formal membership. [The American Admin-
 istration resisted the occasional suggestion, from the Thai in particular,
 that France be pressed to withdraw from SEATO], largely because this might
 have tended to accelerate the threatened French withdrawal from NATO in
 Europe. It was a minor charade on both sides, and by the spring of 1965
 there was no surprise in France's decision to send only an observer to
 the London meeting.

The real question, however, was whether SEATO would emerge from
 London with two dissenting members. In the end, Foreign Minister Bhutto
 of Pakistan -- young, bright, and tart, with a chip on his shoulder at
 every turn -- played it straight in London, making several critical re-
 marks in private but merely dissociating his country from the Vietnam
 part of the communique. One suspected that this was on instructions
 from President Ayub and somewhat at variance from Bhutto's by-then-evident
 leanings toward China. Or perhaps, since Bhutto was vehemently anti-Indian

* This for fear of giving the Chinese any formal justification for inten-
 sifying the subversive campaign already under way in Thailand. Like
 Souvanna Phouma in Laos, the Thai resisted strongly the American practice
 of making everything public that the other side could be presumed to know
 about.

** Check the DeGaulle quote in the spring that the US had been right to
 escalate.

11/10/71

his attitude reflected a desire not to antagonize the United States at a time when fighting was still continuing in the disputed Rann of Cutch.*

"Pakistan Half Out" was the theme of the headlines from London, which got little play in the United States in Dominican week. George Ball, who replaced Rusk because of the pressures of that crisis, upheld the American position firmly and well, and the meeting concluded with a strong communique, referring several times to North Vietnamese "aggression," and in effect reaffirming the Manila position the previous year, that member countries assisting South Vietnam were doing so "pursuant to" their treaty obligations.

Such was the surface diplomacy of the London meeting. More fundamental, though almost unnoticed, was the behind-the-scenes negotiation that had preceded the gathering. In late April, intensive consultation was initiated from Washington, seeking to determine if there was adequate support either for making the action in Vietnam a totally SEATO affair, or at least for having the supportive members declare that their actions were being taken in direct fulfillment of their individual obligations under Article IV (1) of the Treaty,** the tough clause dealing with "armed attack" situations.² To make military support for South Vietnam a full-scale SEATO matter would have involved outright repeal of the SEATO tradition of unanimity, and was quickly discarded as the responses came in.

* 1965 CFR, pp. 216-7, says it started April 3 and went on all that month. The quarrel was finally eased at the Commonwealth meeting in June, thanks (he says) to Harold Wilson. Wilson Memoirs, pp. _____.

** BM Get wording exactly, and give standard citation to SCFR document.

11/10/71

The second proposal, however, had many supporters: in effect, it would have meant that at least five of the SEATO members, six if Britain were agreeable, would have branded the North Vietnamese actions as "armed attack" and invoked their SEATO obligations accordingly, publicly accepting the 1962 Rusk-Thant view that the execution of these obligations did not require unanimous consent of the members.*

The difficulty was not in defining the aggression as "armed attack." What was being done in Vietnam, North and South, had already been defended by the United States, at the UN and in published legal defenses, under international law and specifically under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which requires "armed attack" to justify individual and collective self-defense. The American position had been strongly supported by Britain and a host of other countries.**

The difficulty, rather, was that to invoke the obligation would put one country, Great Britain, the host of this gathering, on the spot. Already, Harold Wilson had made it both publicly and privately clear that Britain would not contribute even the smallest of token uniformed military forces in Vietnam. Moreover, British support for American military firmness had by now taken a heavy toll in Wilson's relations with his own Party; more and more, it was muted in favor of stress on the British peacekeeping role. To pronounce the SEATO obligation aloud would tilt things just the wrong way, as well as tending to commit Britain to some military support she did not intend to provide.

* See Chapter ____ above. ^{†*} THE US HAD TAKEN THIS POSITION OFFICIALLY, THAT THE SITUATION WAS NOW "ARMED ATTACK" IN THE FEBRUARY WHITE PAPER. BRITAIN WAS IN CONTRAST TO THE SKEPTICISM OF THE BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE THE YEAR BEFORE. See Chapter ____ above.

11/10/71

Hence, the British resisted with great vigor even the second and milder proposal. Had the other five countries involved in the consultation pressed the matter, quite possibly the British would have had to yield. But the British position found some support in New Zealand, and it did not seem possible to press an uncomfortable struggle. At this point, even the United States was not clear how far it meant to go, while no others yet had forces on the ground. So the chance was lost to put American action more solidly onto a SEATO basis. The President continued to refer to the SEATO obligation as governing, but the London result deprived him of explicit multilateral backing for a legal position that was in fact very strong.*

The Handling of Congress

d. With the Honolulu conference decisions, foreshadowing an increase to 70,000 to 80,000 men within the next two months, the problem of Congressional approval became more urgent. In February and March, the President had relied on an intensive series of briefings of groups of Senators and Congressmen, but these had been confined, as the situation then was, chiefly to the bombing program and aimed, at that, to placate what he supposed to be widespread sentiment for hitting harder.** Ground forces were not touched on, and of course no decision beyond the two Marine battalions for security duty had yet been made.

The April 2 decisions raised the ground force element considerably, ^(AND INCLUDED) ~~even without taking into account the~~ authority for future broadening of

* On May 4th, for example, the President referred strongly to the SEATO treaty and the strongest basis for the American commitment in VN. Message to Congress, 1965 CFR, Docs., p. 160 (BM: get Public Papers cite.

** Cite Evans and Novak.

11/10/71

the mission. It does not appear that senior members of Congress were consulted before these decisions, and there was some protest when they were revealed by McNamara at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on April 7th. However, this was also the day when Congressional leaders were carefully informed and given a chance to comment on the Baltimore speech, so that feeling did not become acute at this point.

However, the Honolulu decisions raised the number of American combat battalions from ⁴four to ¹⁰ten, to arrive at once, and with ³⁻⁴four more possible in July. Rusk disclosed the May deployments to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April (30th?), together with a fairly clear indication that the forces being sent would find themselves in limited combat in their enclave role -- but not getting into the question of use as a reserve within a 50-mile radius, since this was still thought of as requiring final Presidential approval before it was exercised. This disclosure, coupled with similar information from McNamara and Vance to the senior members of the military committees, touched off a wave of concern in Congress, with several expressions that it was time for Congress to be given the full picture and perhaps to be asked to act formally. The water was getting deep -- deeper, many felt, than what the Congress could be thought to have approved under the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, at least in the absence of serious consultation.

Whether the President might have invited such a full consultation at this stage, if there had been no other preoccupation than Vietnam, I have no idea. In the week from April 22 to April 29, he was close to putting together the kind of total policy picture that might have fitted with a thoroughgoing review with the Congress. A systematic force program and strategy had been developed, new peace tactics were under intensive

11/10/71

study under George Ball, and other countries were being canvassed actively for force and assistance contributions. All these actions might have "put it all together" for an intensive consultation with Congress during May, and perhaps a reaffirmed Resolution of some sort. While this would have been after the fact to some extent, it would have served a major purpose in enlisting Congressional support (which would not have been in doubt) and above all in educating both Congress and the public on the difficulties and uncertainties of the situation -- by then abundantly clear to sophisticated newspaper readers, but not, in any full sense, to the general public.*

Between April 30th and May 7th, however, the Dominican crisis intervened, and from then until the end of May took up the overwhelming attention of the President and all his senior advisors. Vietnam was handled with the left hand, and whatever chance there might have been of a careful Congressional review went by the board.

Instead, the President reacted to the Congressional pressure by what can only be described as a gimmick. On May 4, in the middle of an exhausting week of action and explanation on the sending of large forces to Santo Domingo, the President sent to Congress, for immediate approval, a bill for a supplemental appropriation of \$700 million to support the enlarged American effort in Vietnam. His message to Congress said that this was "not a routine appropriation," and that "each Member of Congress who supports this request is also voting to persist in our effort to halt

* See Chapter 25A below.

11/10/71

Communist aggression in South Vietnam." In effect, the President sought to make the appropriation of a relatively small sum -- not in fact related to any specific program or its costs -- into a small-scale new Tonkin Gulf Resolution. And all this in a week when the American people were confronting the idea of a "second Cuba", of a Communist threat at their doorstep.

Undoubtedly, the basic elements of the President's position had at this time overwhelming support in Congress. ^(HEAVY MISFEELINGS) Almost all would have agreed that, as he put it, "we can't go North (bomb really hard) and we shouldn't go South (withdraw) and we can't negotiate. So what do we do? Well, this is the situation that I inherited. It is the policy we decreed in 1954. So with the problem confronting me, they are the facts as I see them. I have tried to provide the maximum amount of deterrence to aggression with the minimum loss of life to ourselves and to our allies. That we will continue to do until someday, somehow, we find a civilized solution and a readiness to exchange views around the conference table."*

So, despite ^(SCATTERED) some protests that Congress' hand was being forced by the President's method and timing, the bill was passed within three days by overwhelming votes, 407-7 in the House and 88-3 in the Senate. The two outright dissidents of August 1964 had grown only to 10, on the surface. In fact, the issue was loaded, ^(FOR) for a negative voter had to take a position that could be depicted as denying help to American soldiers -- already in the field.**

* DSB, May 24, BM please get pages and check text and setting.

** See Chapter _____ below.

11/10/71

The New Viet Cong Offensive

e. In describing the key military operations of the Indochina War, it is hard to ^(convey) give scale and significance. One defeat sounds much like another, and we have already seen the effect of Viet Cong local successes in late 1963, February-March of 1964, June of 1964, September of 1964, around the turn of the year in December and January, and again in February of 1965. A rough pattern of dates can be discerned even from this recital, corresponding somewhat to climate factors and somewhat to the taking effect of peak periods of supply and infiltration. In Laos, the pattern had in the past been even clearer, with April-June the time of offensive action from the Communist side in 1961, 1962, 1963, and 1964.

In the late spring of 1965, Laos was quiet, but the scale of action in South Vietnam was what scientists would call a quantum jump from anything that had been experienced before. Past engagements and defeats had been humiliating to the South Vietnamese, temporarily depressing to morale, and damaging to units of a battalion or two. On the Viet Cong side, one or at most two battalions were engaged at a time, and the battle would be over in a day with no "second effort" of any size. Now all these past limits were broken through in rapid succession. It is too much to say that in late May of 1965 the war moved into a truly "conventional stage;" technically, it remained on the border line, with small incidents still a large percentage of the action. There is no evidence that Hanoi gave the order to move to what classic Chinese doctrine had called "Stage III" of guerrilla warfare. Yet what took place was a long step toward that stage, and was devastating to the South Vietnamese government forces on a new and unprecedented scale.

11/10/71

The major dramatic engagements were three. The first was the capture of ^(THE CAPITAL OF PHUOC LONG PROVINCE,) Song Be, ___ miles west of Saigon, on May 11, (~~capital of Phuoc Long province~~). A regiment of Viet Cong over-ran the town, causing (and taking) heavy casualties, held it for a day, and then withdrew. The symbolism of the first capture of a provincial capital was very striking, and one in the heart of the populated area near Saigon at that. Yet the fairly ready recapture of the town led Westmoreland and Taylor not to take it very seriously, even when it was followed in the next two weeks by a series of lesser battles in which the VC generally came out on top.

On May ___, the second dramatic action came near the north-central coast, where the adjacent province of Binh Dinh and Quang Ngai had become steadily more threatened over the winter and spring. This time, near a place called Ba Gia, a South Vietnamese battalion (ARVN) was cut up, and successive rescuing forces ambushed, so that in the end two battalions were decimated. The command decisions on the government side were stupid and the behavior of officers in the scene inept and in some cases cowardly. Almost with the suddenness of a thunderclap, it sank in to American military men, and through them to Taylor and Washington, that ARVN, or at least much of it, was outclassed and in danger of collapse.* The tone of Taylor's situation reports changed abruptly at this point, and on June 7, as we shall see in the next chapter, Westmoreland triggered the issue of really large-scale American forces.

In the following week, still a third terrible defeat occurred, this time in the area northwest of Saigon -- just on the outskirts of the Hop

* DOD Papers, Book 4, Vol. IV.C.5, p. 47.

11/11/71

Tac area around Saigon which had been the focus of the main government military effort since the previous September. This time, a newly manned Special Forces camp at Dong Xoai was overrun by VC forces later estimated at a full division. As in the Ba Gia case, relieving forces were then ambushed, and at the end of four days two government battalions were for practical purposes wiped out.

The sequence of these battles, interspersed with lesser ones, for the first time hit hard and demonstrably at the basic strength and capacity of the government forces. By mid-June, four regiments and nine battalions were judged no longer fit for combat, while many others were at less than half authorized strength. Replacements went entirely to trying to build back existing units, and the idea of adding more combat units -- basic to the April Honolulu strategic plan -- was dead for many months to come. More serious than losses in numbers was the failure of leadership, and most serious of all, underlying both, was the decline in morale. The most seriously hurt units were the very reserve units which had been considered the best; now, injudiciously committed time after time, the reserve had dwindled almost to nothing.

It was these military debacles that dominated the reporting, and came quickly to obsess the policy-making circle in Washington. Less dramatic, but adding to the cumulative effect of the reporting, was the steady cutting of communications, which in turn led to non-delivery of rice to the cities and, for the first time, a need to import rice.* The main coastal road and railway to the north were now cut in several places, roads formerly secure were harassed, and a main power line to Saigon was broken. Altogether, the sense was of a country being carved

* DOD Papers, Book 4, Vol. IV.C.5, pp. 54-5.

11/11/71

up, isolated, and then dispatched by quick military strokes.

Against this background, and as the wheels began to turn toward a decision on much larger American forces, a succession of "quick-fix" actions were taken on the ground, which however had little impact. First, the contingent authority for use of American forces as a reserve-reaction basis in an emergency, was finally invoked, after a fiasco in its announcement.* Through mid-June, however, this remained strictly local, and at the battle of Dong Xoai, the 173 Airborne Brigade was not committed. Only at the end of June was General Westmoreland given blanket authority to use American forces in any way he, with the South Vietnamese generals, saw fit.**

Similarly, the battles of this period served to increase the use of tactical air within South Vietnam, since it appeared that the enlarged VC formations, and more persistent tactics, lent themselves to much more effective use of air attack than had previously been thought possible. The crisis also advanced, though it did not trigger, the initiation of the use of heavy B-52 bombers in the South; originally proposed in mid-May to hit at the major "COSVN" headquarters area near Cambodia -- then and later believed to exercise command control throughout the southern and central parts of SVN -- the use of B-52's was finally approved on June 18th for a VC base area near the site of the Dong Xoai battle.

* A low-key announcement of the expanded mission was made, after some preparation, by the State Department spokesman, Robert McCloskey, in Washington. The resulting clamor led the White House the following day to issue a second release that toned down the impression of change. LBJ, p. 142. The whole sequence was attacked with some reason as lacking in candor, although no secret was made of what was being done on the ground, and the knowing press had long since assumed that direct combat use of American forces, as a reserve, was inevitable.

*(On June 23, 1968)
** Use was not authorized when "necessary to strengthen the relative position of GVN forces." On June 9, "aggressive attack", unavailability of other reserves, and an "urgent" situation had been required. LBJ, pp. 12-3

11/11/71

Thereafter, with careful review of targets in Washington continuing for a long time, the use of B-52's -- "Arc Light" as the program was called -- became a regular and increasingly frequent form of military action.*

Altogether, the period from mid-May to the end of June was the true military crisis of the war. Slow and grinding decline, more political than military, had been the prospect at the time of the December-February policy debate. By mid-June, the prospect of imminent military collapse, the disappearance of ARVN or its reduction to uselessness, was a vivid possibility. It was a drastic and rapid change, which knocked out the Honolulu program and strategy almost before they could get started.

Another Political Overturn in Saigon

f. As these military events unfolded, a new political crisis arose almost without warning. It ended with the collapse of the Quat government, for reasons that were part factional, part personal, and part sheer ineptitude and inexperience. Civilian rule in South Vietnam ended, for years to come, not with a bang but a whimper.

In terms of the important labels of South Vietnamese politics, Dr. Quat was a Northerner and a Buddhist. His three months of power since mid-February had been the first since August of 1964 in which there had been no disruption from the Tri Quang Buddhists. Moreover, the Army -- with many Northern senior generals -- seemed to get along well with Quat, and in April (?) the Armed Forces Council had been formally dissolved. By late May, although Quat did not seem to be giving dynamic leadership with any special positive appeal, he seemed to be in a steady position and not threatened.

* See Chapter ____ below.

11/11/71

The issue that did him in turned on a reshuffle of the Cabinet. Quat sought to replace two Ministers who to American eyes had been lack-luster at best, and to replace them with men who seemed more promising. The trouble was that the two men were political Southerners, or "Sudistes," and the replacements, although also from the South, were not political about that fact.

The second element was strictly personal. Chief of State Suu had vanity and the crotchets of age and infirmity. He had felt himself upstaged and left out in all the changes since November, in spite of his high title, and he and Quat did not get along. Suu counted himself an ardent "Sudiste," so that the cause of the two displaced Cabinet members was made to order for a test of strength.

Thus, Suu and the Sudistes, with popular Catholic backing as well, suddenly took a stand on the proposition that the Constitution of October, so hastily drafted by the Council of Notables, did not expressly give the Prime Minister power to change members of the Cabinet without the President's consent. To American eyes, and apparently to most Vietnamese, the omission seemed insignificant, the power surely inherent whether or not expressed.

But Quat played his hand badly, failing to give notice of what he was doing and appearing abrupt and high-handed. Thus, when the issue was joined, Suu had enough support to stand firm and create a deadlock that ran for nearly two weeks, with all kinds of backstage compromise efforts but no breakout. In this process the American Embassy, which had assumed Quat knew what he was doing in initiating the changes, had little communication and less leverage with the contending parties; again, there was the humiliation of total powerlessness.

11/11/71

Eventually, the spectacle of a divided and powerless government proved too much for the military men -- as indeed it had by this time for most civilians as well. With the military conflagration, the revival of small-bore politics seemed unbearable. So far as one could tell, the military men had had no part in the struggle, and were not motivated by personal ambition. They simply could not put up with a situation of non-government.

In that spirit, on June __ the senior generals, grouped this time under a new title, the _____, declared that the Quat government was at an end, and that they were assuming power. In a week of maneuvering that followed, the two generals whose stars had been rising, in different courses ever since the previous September, emerged on top. Nguyen Van Thieu emerged as Chairman of the military group and chief of state, Nguyen Cao Ky as Prime Minister with the chief operating responsibility. Again the American Embassy played no effective role, although Taylor did convey doubts about Ky in a quiet way.

It was the end of the frail claim of legitimacy that had existed since October and the Council of Notables, and a return to the frank power base of politics of the Khanh period in 1964. Yet there was no outcry, or even any noteworthy private objection from the many civilian politicians usually so ready to criticise anything. Part of this was perhaps a sense of shame at the civilian bickering that had brought on the change. Mostly it was an almost universal sense that someone must rule, with the country on the verge of total-collapse and disappearance. In this spirit, the civilians enlisted for the Ky Cabinet were in considerable part the better holdovers from the Quat government, including the Foreign Minister, Tran Van Do.

11/11/71

To Taylor and Alexis Johnson on the spot, and to Washington, the change was not so much another downward move as a simple registering of what was already the fact. If civilian leadership was completely discredited contrary to the hopes of late 1964 (and at one time the firm policy), at least these generals were not Petains.

Conclusion

g. By late June, the picture both militarily and politically was indeed desperate. Steps seen at the April Honolulu Conference as likely to hold at least through the summer were already revealed as insufficient. Any idea that Hanoi would come around in "perhaps a year or two" should likewise have been dead. With all allowance for errors in applying the strategy of pressure since February, it now seemed clear that its chances ^(AT MODERATE FORCE LEVELS) of working were approaching the zero point. The only peace in sight was the peace of a Hanoi takeover in the South.

11/15/71

Chapter 26: The June-July Policy Debate: The Framework and the Issues

a. On July 28, 1965, President Johnson announced his decision to send 50,000 more American forces ^{AT ONCE} to South Vietnam, to employ these forces for combat missions without limit, and to send still further forces as needed. America was committed to a land war on the mainland of Asia. No more critical decision was made in 1961-65, or at any time in the history of American involvement in Vietnam and Indochina.

In telling the story of the debate within the Administration that led to this decision, one faces two major difficulties. First, the decision was a rolling one; in narrow terms, the President adopted short-term military recommendations first submitted on June 7th, but he did so piecemeal and in the light of later recommendations that looked beyond the end of 1965. In short, the decision became by late July a long-term and open-ended commitment, with all the strategic and policy weight this was bound to have. The issues became much bigger, and were seen to be much bigger, as the debate wore on.

The second difficulty relates to the first. Was the decision to send really large-scale combat forces a new decision? Or was it simply the logical extension of the successive decisions since Pleiku; bombing, then security forces, then more forces and extended combat responsibilities -- and thus, inevitably and inescapably, large-scale forces and unlimited missions? On this question, the participants in the debate are not themselves unanimous: President Johnson regards the July decision as separate, and on a par with the Pleiku decision (also with the Gulf of Tonkin decision and the Baltimore speech); some of his senior advisors, on the other hand, feel that everything decided on ground forces from

11/15/71

February onward was simply the spelling out of an original post-Pleiku decision to see the struggle through.

My own view, and the perspective and framework of this account, is that the July decision was both new and avoidable. In other words, it was not foreclosed by earlier decisions and actions, and it could have gone another way. Having said "A", the Johnson Administration did not feel compelled to say "B" and did not decide on this basis. Whether in fact the weight of the past was nearly decisive, whether any nation at the point the United States had reached by June of 1965 could have changed course, is an interesting question to be assessed in the later section of this book that seeks to get beneath what was argued to what was in fact controlling. The point, for purposes of this narrative section, is what was felt and argued by the great bulk, though not all, of the participants in the process.

The present chapter tells how the issue was framed in the month of June. In the first stage, ending June 11, the President ~~after an exceptionally careful discussion~~ provisionally approved an American force level of 95,000 men, to be sent during the summer. This program was endorsed by all his civilian advisors, though it fell well short of what was by then being proposed by the field Commander, General Westmoreland.

By June 23rd, however, under pressure of further military reverses in South Vietnam, the issue had grown much bigger. Levels of 150,000 or more were now seen to be quite possibly required to prevent collapse even during the summer, and once any such number was sent it was virtually inevitable that more would follow. In other words, the issue was now seen to be one of large-scale ground involvement. George Ball, already

11/15/71

a strong proponent of risk-taking in the search for peace, left the train at this point, and in a deeply felt memorandum of July 1 argued for cutting American losses and finding the best way out, no matter what outcome we had to accept in South Vietnam or what secondary results might, despite American remedial action, follow in other parts of Southeast Asia. Others, including myself, argued for a middle course, in effect clinging to the level of approximately 100,000, buying time, and perhaps preparing to accept that it would not do the trick and that South Vietnam would go under.

Thus, the issue was joined by the end of June. The arguments concerned Vietnam, they concerned Asia, they concerned basic world priorities, and in a muted way they concerned American domestic support and priorities. Each of these areas of concern will be covered in detail in the following chapters for which this one sets the stage.

The First June Meetings

b. On Saturday, June 5, Secretary Rusk held a small lunch to prepare for Ambassador Taylor's return to Washington on June 8th. Present were McNamara, Ball, Thompson, McGeorge Bundy, McNaughton (?),* and myself. The atmosphere was relaxed, with an undercurrent of relief that the Dominican crisis had begun to ease; Responsibility had passed to an Inter-American Peace Force, and much of the American force had been withdrawn. On another front, Prime Minister Erhard, ^(of West Germany) had paid a one-day visit the previous day; MLF was now dead and buried, without visible ill effects and the European situation seemed calm.

* Ball Papers suggest not.

11/15/71

As the group addressed the Vietnam problem, the main concern was the just-detected introduction into North Vietnam, from the Soviet Union, of IL-28 jet light bombers. Although outmoded in any sophisticated setting, these had the range to reach the northern cities of South Vietnam. Hence, the JCS had recommended pre-emptive strikes on the air fields.

All present were opposed, but felt at the same time that a quiet warning should be conveyed through private channels to the Soviet Union. The conversation moved to the 72,000 approved level of American forces, involving three additional battalions due to arrive in July in the Qui Nhon area along the central coast. This was the total then envisaged through the summer, and it was thought that their combat role would expand slowly, along lines already foreshadowed to Congressional leaders and committees, though not yet announced.

At this point the President joined the lunch, walking unannounced into the Secretary's dining room and saying simply: "Lady Bird is away, I was all alone, and I heard you fellows were getting together, so I thought I'd come over." As always, he enjoyed surprising people. Perhaps also he felt the need to ^(TALK A BIT) ~~look at where we were headed in~~ Vietnam without the haste and formality that had dogged policy meetings in the previous hectic month. The meeting went on, and developed into a reflective discussion of where we were headed, with no attempt to decide anything, but with much light on the basic approach.

Mac Bundy reviewed the ^(NEGATIVE) reactions of the group to the idea of hitting the IL-28's, and the affirmative idea of a quiet message to Moscow. Rusk mused that letting the Soviet Union build up a position in Hanoi might in the long run be an advantage in the effort to bring peace to the area.

11/15/71

The discussion turned to troops in South Vietnam, and the President pitched in. Would more Americans, he asked, mean that the Vietnamese would do less? McNamara said there was no sign of this reaction now. What about the morale of the American forces, and the political reaction of the Vietnamese to having a lot of Americans around? Again, McNamara thought these were satisfactory.

The President then turned to peace efforts, referring to a long memorandum prepared in my office, at his direction, and conveyed by him to Prime Minister Shastri of India. It covered the extensive history of negotiating efforts, Hanoi rejections and American encouragement. The President wanted it to go to leading Senators. More substantively, where did we stand in getting the Saigon government to come out with its peace position, to match Hanoi's four points? Quat's political troubles had slowed this down.*

And then the toughest question of all, which appears in my notes as: How do we get what we want? He got three answers: Rusk that if we showed the other side it could not succeed without major escalation, Hanoi would once again think of the takeover of the South as a long-range project, revert to political rather than military tactics and "live to come again;" McNamara that the combination of a stalemate in the South and growing pain in the north would do it -- but as things stood there was doubt we could get a stalemate, for Hanoi must surely be convinced it was winning; Ball that we must make it tough for the Viet Cong and Hanoi, but also give them an alternative -- which he thought could be done if the Saigon government could be held together and could offer amnesties and other parts

* See page ____ above.

11/15/71

of the Acheson-Cutler Plan. Sober answers, all fundamentally embodying a defensive and long-term strategy, premised on the rational belief that a frustrated and pained Hanoi must in time call it off.

My notes tail off at this point. In terms of decision-making, the discussion had no importance. It does seem to me to show the mood of the President and his civilian advisors on the eve of major changes and new thinking. This was the way they hoped to carry through, with 72,000 Americans, supplemented by a few thousand Koreans, Australians, and New Zealanders.

The mood was brief. On Monday, the 7th, these same men had before them a much darker picture of the state of the war than ever before, with the field commander's estimate that another 75,000 men were probably needed by fall, 45,000 definitely by mid-August, 30,000 possibly by mid-October. The Westmoreland message, addressed for action to the JCS but sent for information to all top policy officers, spelled out the riddled state of ARVN from the VC offensive, the diversion of all new manpower to fill up losses, and the resulting force-ratio problem. The only answer was to send "additional US or Third Country forces as rapidly as is practical during the critical weeks ahead." They could be deployed according to need, along the coast or inland, and used both offensively and defensively.*

The views and news from the front thus changed completely the consultation of Ambassador Taylor. He arrived on June 8, having planned to touch base only, to confirm his resignation after serving the year he had undertaken the previous June, and to arrange the date and manner of

* The bulk of the Westmoreland message is in the DOD papers, Book 4, Vol. IV.C.5, pp. 47-49. *See also LBJ, p. —*

11/15/71

the turnover of responsibility. Instead, he found himself in the middle of another policy debate as fundamental as on his earlier visits of early September, December, and April. The President chaired White House meetings on Tuesday and Thursday, the 8th and 10th, and on the 11th there was a formal meeting of the National Security Council with a much larger attendance.

From the first, Taylor threw his influence toward at most half-support of Westmoreland. In military terms ^(THIS MEANT) ~~expediting~~ the remainder of the already-authorized 70,000 and perhaps adding some additional forces, but not on the scale of the recommendation. Conceding that the events on the ground could mean a wholesale break in morale, Taylor thought it more likely that the effects would prove to be temporary and local. His initial view was that only 8000 added Americans should be sent, with a Korean division to follow as soon as it could be negotiated.

McNamara's view was along similar lines, but went a little further. By the 10th, he recommended a total of 18 American combat battalions, 5 above the presently authorized 13 and adding up to 95,000 men roughly. Rusk concurred in this figure, as in the end did Taylor. At the end of the meetings on both the 10th and 11th, the President made remarks suggesting strongly that he accepted the recommendation, but he obviously wished to mull it over further and to put it into an overall plan that included Congressional consultation, some careful explanation to the country, and perhaps a renewed form of Congressional authority. In my own detailed notes of these meetings, all these possibilities recur spec-

11/15/71

ificantly and with emphasis.*

So the debate was incomplete, and at its end no party thought that a decision had been made. In particular, the JCS had not been heard from.

From the ~~very~~ outset, Taylor and others saw two basic issues. The first, and smaller one, was military at least in description: the key difference between the forces and locations suggested for a level of about 100,000 Americans and the higher Westmoreland level of 150,000 lay in the concept of deployment. Under the higher figure, an American division would be sent to the highlands and given territorial responsibility. This would be a major expansion of the then-approved concept of keeping American forces concentrated in enclaves, although available for use as a reserve-reaction force. One was controlled, the other unlimited; one was a case of experimenting step by step on how far to go, the other was a plunge into unknown military problems, of which General Wheeler himself was initially skeptical.

To the President, Taylor, and above all George Ball, there was however an even larger issue readily visible. Almost at once on the 8th, (and over and over on the 10th,) the President asked again whether this many Americans would cause the South Vietnamese to let up; no one attempted a confident answer at either 100 or 150 thousand. Taylor thought we must continue to move one step at a time, to find out where the line of negative effects was reached. To Ball, the decisive question was: When does

* At White House and other high-level meetings, I was normally not in the thick of the discussion, but almost always one of those charged with follow up action. Accordingly, I kept careful handwritten notes, usually destroyed within a day or two. Only for the two crucial periods of late November, 1964, and June-July 1965 did I retain full notes of a series of meetings, ~~in both cases~~ because I was drafting, or expected to draft major papers based on the discussion. Cryptic and indecipherable except to myself, these notes reconstruct ~~to~~ a fairly full and revealing picture of the course of debate.

11/15/71

this become a "white man's war"? It was not, of course, a new phrase or thought in council.* Now, however, it became Ball's keynote for the next three weeks. To him, 100,000 men in carefully controlled locations and missions could be kept from becoming a "white man's war." Once you got above that figure, and widened the mission as well, you were sure to reach the point at which the "white man" appeared to be taking over, with all the extra hostility among the people, and reduced effort by the government, that this would entail. Thus, as Ball trenchantly put it, the issue was not 150,000, but an eventual 300 - 400,000. Once you crossed an invisible boundary you were bound to go all the way.

There were many other voices on the 8th that tended to draw the same line, between 100 thousand and anything higher -- my notes show Taylor and Mac Bundy particularly strongly. As McNamara put it, we should try to hold the situation together through the summer, and not commit ourselves to a ground war.

The meeting of June 10th had a special added feature, the presence of Senator Richard Russell of Georgia. This extraordinary man, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee and at the same time the most influential voice in the Appropriations Committee, had through the Fifties and early Sixties exercised very great influence in the Senate on national security matters. Defeated in 1964 in the Civil Rights fight, his power in the Senate was less than it had been at its zenith, but his influence with the President was still very great. As much as any man I have ever seen

* Cite previous references.

11/15/71

in council, Russell had that indefinable quality sometimes called "weight" a careful and courteous listener, he would come in at the close with a tersely summed up view that took into account all the high spots of the discussion. ^P On Vietnam, he was, I am sure, the one man to whom the President most looked outside his official circle; their intimacy went back more than a dozen years, and included a deep sense of gratitude on the President's part, for Russell had been both his mentor and his principal backer for the Democratic leadership in the Senate.* Though the President and Russell had long since parted company on civil rights and other domestic issues, the bond was as close as ever on personal matters and on issues that ^einvoked their common patriotism. Moreover, Russell symbolized for the President, and all who knew him, the responsible conservative strain of opinion on the war -- in Russell's case with special force because he had often outspokenly said that he thought our progressive deep involvement in Vietnam had been a mistake. Thinking this, he nonetheless took the issue as it stood, and had to this point backed the President on the grounds that failure or defeat would damage the United States seriously.**

I do not know how Russell came to be present that Thursday. Ordinarily, the President kept separate the meetings of his policy circle and meetings with Congressional leaders. In this case, the result of Russell's presence was a shade more formality than usual, but no sense of falseness or pretence in any quarter.

McNamara led off with his own view -- the 95,000 level, or half Westmoreland's first add-on, and nothing at all on his second. Rusk con-

* As a man whose influence was almost always exerted privately, Russell has had no adequate biographer and perhaps will never have. The best account of his personality and influence in the Senate, and on Lyndon Johnson, will be found in William S. White's Citadel (_____, 195_)

** Cite statement of 11/25/64, and see if any others.

11/15/71

curred, and Taylor made the case that this appeared to be about right to prevent serious losses of territory and lead in the direction of a stalemate in the South. The President asked whether there was any dissent to the proposal, and McNamara and Rusk responded that the top-level men in both their Departments agreed. Rusk added ~~the thought~~ that the prospect now seemed to be a series of short, sharp battles, for which an expansion of the mobile reserve capacity was the right answer.

The President then went through a long series of questions. One, probably asked for Senator Russell's benefit, concerned whether the Administration had adequately revealed the combat role being played by American forces to this point. Rusk responded that White House briefings of members of Congress, and the testimony of himself and McNamara before key committees, had surely made it clear that forces were being committed in situations where combat was likely if not inevitable. However, Rusk added, combat divisions with territorial responsibility would be different.

On another question, Admiral Raeborn, who had taken John McCone's place at the end of April, gave the CIA estimate of Viet Cong strength: 64,500 hard-core professional soldiers, of which 47,000 were in combat units, another 80-100,000 thousand guerrillas, militia, and part-time forces, and 30,000 administrative personnel. (How often one mused on the ratio of these force types, almost inverse to the proposed American force, which had 18 battalions, or about 25,000 fighting men, in a grand total of 95,000 men!) This was higher than Westmoreland's figures, reflecting a continuing disagreement that ran for more than a year, with the verdict eventually more in the CIA direction. For policy purposes, it was not

11/16/71

a significant difference: almost all of the inner circle sensed that whether the numbers were right or not, the obvious fact was that the Viet Cong were both winning battles and rolling up the countryside, with the aid of a cutting edge of North Vietnamese regulars.

Some of the other questions and answers give the feel:

--Q. What would be the effect if the added 25,000 men were not sent? A. The situation would be "not quite lost" during the summer. Even with the new forces, there would be some losses, even a whole province.

--Q. How do we extricate ourselves? A. These added measures should not get the US into deep trouble; there was still room to pull back, or even out, if ARVN could not carry on.

--Q. Would any more forces be needed after the 100,000? A. This was the maximum that could be used on the reserve-reaction basis. But we might later find we had to do more on general grounds, that is, if the situation was worse on a widespread basis.

--Q. What solution do you see? A. If we can stalemate the VC, and keep the North under pressure, there is hope.

--Q. What American losses are likely? A. Many hundreds more, at the outside a total of 4000 Americans dead as compared to the 400 Americans who had been killed to that point.

--Q. What signs from Hanoi and Peking? A. Hanoi is plainly not interested in peace, or talks toward peace, if they think they can win, as they do now. China seemed cautious, especially a new statement from Foreign Minister Ch'en Yi.

--Q. Have the bombing results been disappointing? A. We never thought bombing alone would bring Hanoi around. Yet there have been

11/16/71

clear military benefits, and the encouragement to the South had been crucial in arresting the slide, both political and military.

--Q. Did the bombing pause of May have any adverse effect? A. Little in Saigon. In terms of meeting criticism, it killed off one point used by critics, but merely diverted comment to dealing with the VC. Above all, McNamara pointed out, the present cry at home and abroad was: Where are we heading? We had to make clear what we meant to do, through a major Presidential speech.

--Q. What is our objective? A. Here there were divergent answers. A true "stalemate in the South" was put forward -- and challenged as requiring many more American forces than were proposed. A bargaining position in which there were "some prospects" that South Vietnam would have self-determination was put forward -- and contested as probably inadequate, and certainly not remotely attained to this point. If American forces were pulled back to narrow enclaves, the countryside would be handed over to the VC, and Hanoi's unwillingness to negotiate would be all the greater. Finally, Ball summed up his own sense: we had only a SHORT-RANGE present objective, of holding on during the adverse monsoon season, to October 1st or so, and then seeing what the hopes and possibilities were. It was a fair summary.

--Q. Is there any stone unturned on the negotiating front? A. The chief one would be dealings with the NLF, but this would entail great risks of leaking and causing a very heavy blow in Saigon, in return for no significant prospect of gain. Hanoi was still in charge. To Rusk in particular, such proposals as dealing with the NLF were really a cover for defeat.

11/16/71

--Q. How does a force increase relate to bombing? A. Both are essential. The present bombing program is about right. Hanoi should not be hit, nor should the newly arrived IL-28 light bombers or the soon-expected operational missile sites for SAM missiles. (This view was polled ~~again~~ for the Senator's benefit; it was unanimous.)

--Q. If the level were set at 95,000 men now, what odds of more before September? A. A small but significant chance. It is not clear we can get a stalemate, but it is worth a try at low risk. If not, we will face a tough decision in September.

--Q. What is the difference between 100,000 and 150,000? A. Ball once again vehement that 150,000 "puts us all the way in" and "clearly implies more." McNamara notes only that the real difference is the division in the highlands, by implication skeptical of Ball's thesis.

All these were the thoughts of men only three days into the sense of really grave crisis. They give, however, the sense of the first reaction: "Let's hang on through the summer, with a modest increase, if we possibly can -- and even if we can't see clearly beyond that."

It was not a position satisfactory to Senator Russell. He spoke only briefly and drily. Driblets were not the answer; if a division in the highlands would help, or bombing the SAM sites, these things should be done. He would like a way out, but did not see one that would keep our word.

Finally, there was discussion of how the situation and new program (Section missing from yellow copy, page 26-9, Section comes before "The Split Becomes Clear").

11/17/71

should be put to Congress. Three possibilities were aired: further briefings of the leadership ^(in combination with) ~~and~~ a series of executive sessions with the key committees, a major speech, and a new resolution similar to the Tonkin Gulf one (or reaffirming it). Rusk tended to favor the first; McNamara had already spoken for the second and was joined by Mac Bundy; it was the President who argued out loud the pros and cons of a new Congressional Resolution. Many on the Hill felt that the August 1964 Resolution and the recent May appropriation had not been intended to authorize ground action on a large scale. To use the Resolution as the basis for the proposed scale of action would stretch it. Congress should be heard from through a debate. The opponents would "howl" and in the end something like the August resolution would pass by a 70-30 or 60-40 margin. Yet there would be bad effects through the process -- divisions, an impression of irresolution, effect on other programs. Senator Mansfield was against a resolution.

It was the first inconclusive discussion of a subject that thereafter disappears from my full notes of meetings and papers. In late July, it was to become a central focus, and a crucial element in the final decision. How the President mulled it over, what his consultations may have been with Congressional leaders, all these must await records and recollections not yet available. The small peek at the President's thinking on June 10 merely shows how much the question was on his mind -- and that his first instinct, I believe honestly expressed in this gathering, was to tackle it frontally.

11/17/71

After the meeting of June 10, the meeting of the National Security Council the following day was an anticlimax. Taylor summarized the situation. Adlai Stevenson was present with a new negotiating idea from U Thant, which the President asked him to suggest be explored with the other side; it was a variant of earlier proposals for a cease-fire pending discussions of the conditions for a peace conference, and seemed especially hopeless at this point. Nothing more was heard from it.* McNamara summarized the Westmoreland proposals, and his own lower alternative. The President, at the end, spoke in general terms -- of the past history that had brought us to this point, ^(AND) of the variety of proposals before him, from bombing the SAM sites to withdrawing or "hunkering up" around a few enclaves. The implication was clear, that he would try to keep to the middle ground; just what this meant in terms of forces was not spelled out or decided.

* U Thant tried to visit Hanoi and Peking to advance the idea, but was refused even a "private" visit on the familiar grounds of UN incompetence to deal with Vietnam.

11/11/71

The Split Becomes Clear

c. As so often in the history of these Vietnam decisions, the civilian consensus of June 10-11 was short-lived. All might have continued to agree on a holding operation for the summer, but both events and new practical pressures operated to carry away that consensus within a week. By July 23rd, a clear-cut issue had been framed -- between holding at 100,000 and being prepared to go up substantially and without defined limit.

First, events during the week appeared to vindicate the Westmoreland estimate of the situation. Both Taylor and Washington intelligence had challenged it as too gloomy, but the disastrous outcome of Dong Xoai became clear on the 14th, and by the 18th Taylor himself was cabling from Saigon that, while the Westmoreland estimate might have been a little overdrawn, the damage to ARVN was about as described -- by now four regiments and nine battalions rated completely useless, and even "effective" battalions going into battle at strengths of about 300 compared with the intended 700.* On the same day, the 18th, the authority was given for the first B-52 strike, in an atmosphere of steadily building tension about how serious the military crisis might become.

Meanwhile, McNamara spent hours with the Joint Chiefs discussing the practical problems. By the 11th, the Chiefs had joined with Admiral Sharp in urging that the full division be sent, not to the highlands but to Qui Nhon to operate on a reserve basis. The specific unit in mind was the newly formed "airmobile" division, later called the 1st Air Cavalry. Lavishly equipped with helicopters and other attached aircraft, this division arose from _____ studies of army organization, under General Hamilton

* DOD. Book 4, IV.C.5, p.27.

11/11/71

Howze. Although the Howze Board had not spoken of the Vietnam war, the airmobile concept now seemed ideally suited to it, and since March the formation of the division had been rushed, as a contingency measure. Now it appeared that if it were to be sent to Vietnam by the first of September, as both Westmoreland and the Chiefs wanted, final plans would have to be made at once, and a decision by July 10th. Thereafter, the movement of the division would become known. In a nutshell, what this meant was that the readily disposable forces that could be sent in small batches were at an end. The line above 100,000 was a practical line of advance visibility, the end of "dribblets;" if the President decided to go above that point, the scale of future plans would at once become clear to press and public. And, from a military standpoint, if the division was needed by September, a decision had to be made by July 10th. In a comparatively small but significant way, the President's hand was being forced: the next decision would have to be a big one.

Meanwhile, McNamara held a press conference designed to clarify what had been decided and was actually being done up to this point. On the 16th, he announced that total American strength in South Vietnam was being increased to between 70,000 and 75,000 men, of which 20,000 were combat forces. This total embraced the last agreed increment of the April Honolulu conference, an Army brigade to go to Qui Nhon on the coast, arriving in July. At the same time, McNamara's statement that more would be sent, as necessary, was meant to foreshadow the almost-decided additional five battalions put forward in the McNamara alternative of June 10. In fact, on June 24th final approval was given for two Marine battalions, at Qui Nhon

11/11/71

and Danang, and on _____ approval was given for the Airborne brigade. The Marine battalions actually brought the late July strength figure in SVN to (75,000), the upper limit of the McNamara announcement of June 16, but the decisions made in late June effectively envisaged the 95-10,000 figure that had emerged on June 10-11.

The obvious upward pressure of June 14-18 confirmed George Ball's strongly expressed opinion that this was the last chance to hold the line. The President then envisaged deciding on a level of 100,000 and explaining that figure to the country and the Congress in some manner not yet agreed. One possibility was a major speech, on which work was well advanced mostly directed to American conditions for peace. However, a complicating factor at this time was that the 20th Anniversary of the United Nations was to be held in San Francisco on June 25-26; it hardly seemed the right two weeks to bring the country face to face with the now-seen dimensions of Vietnam.*

To Ball, however, merely deciding on 100,000 and explaining it was no longer enough. As he explained in a hard-hitting personal memorandum to the President on June 18th, the holding force during the rainy season should be regarded, and privately explained to the top Secretaries, as a "controlled commitment for a trial period of three months," not the commitment of "US forces on an open-ended basis to an all-out land war in South Viet-Nam." Only after the experience of that period should the President make a final decision, and in the meantime there should be intensive work on (a) what a stepped-up land war might look like, (b) the design and chances of a renewed

* The speech on American conditions of peace was given by Secretary Rusk on June 23rd, before the (BM-fill in). See page ____ above. The President's speech at the UN Anniversary included a general appeal to the UN members on peace in Vietnam, but no specific proposal or description of American views. My basis for stating the President's intentions at this time is the private record of conversations with certain close advisors.

11/11/71

political and diplomatic effort for a settlement consistent with American objectives, and (c) plans for the best solution attainable without more US forces -- to be "regarded as plans ^(L&R) cutting losses and eventually disengaging from an untenable situation."*

As in the previous October, and earlier in November 1961, much of Ball's argument was derived from his intimate observation of the earlier Indochina War. This time, however, the dangers to which he had often referred, both in writing and in oral argument to many of us, were palpable, and gave his statements special force. The section on the prospects, as he saw them in light of the French experience, is worth quoting in full:

III.

Where We Are Now -- On the Threshold of a New War

In raising our commitment from 50,000 to 100,000 or more men and deploying most of the increment in combat roles we are beginning a new war -- the United States directly against the Viet Cong.

Perhaps the large-scale introduction of American forces with their concentrated fire power will force Hanoi and the Viet Cong to the decision we are seeking. On the other hand, we may not be able to fight the war successfully enough -- even with 500,000 Americans in South Viet-Nam -- to achieve that purpose.

Before we commit an endless flow of forces to South Viet-Nam we must have more evidence than we now have that our troops will not bog down in the jungles and rice paddies -- while we slowly blow the country to pieces.

A review of the French experience more than a decade ago may be helpful.

* A truncated version of this memorandum appears in Brandon, pp. 57-59. Because of its private Presidential character, the memorandum was not in the files available to the compilers of the Pentagon Papers, and ~~was~~ based ~~thereon~~.

11/11/71

The French fought a war in Viet-Nam, and were finally defeated-- after seven years of bloody struggle and when they still had 250,000 combat-hardened veterans in the field, supported by an army of 205,000 South Vietnamese.

To be sure, the French were fighting a colonial war while we are fighting to stop aggression. But when we have put enough Americans on the ground in South Viet-Nam to give the appearance of a white man's war, the distinction as to our ultimate purpose will have less and less practical effect.

Nor is our position in Viet-Nam without its historical ambiguities. From 1948-1954 we identified ourselves with the French by providing almost \$4 billions of United States aid to help the French in Indo-China wage war against the Viet Minh. As soon as our aid contributions began to mount, Ho Chi Minh denounced American "imperialism".

This campaign of denunciation was continued over the radio and through other propaganda media after the French withdrew and we began to help President Diem.

Today no one can say for certain how many Vietnamese are for us or against us. We have trouble collecting intelligence because few Vietnamese are willing to risk their necks to aid the American effort. And our popularity will diminish even further as we are forced to indulge in more and more area bombing, crop burning, etc.

Ever since 1961--the beginning of our deep involvement in South Viet-Nam--we have met successive disappointments. We have tended to underestimate the strength and staying-power of the enemy. We have tended to overestimate the effectiveness of our sophisticated weapons under jungle conditions. We have watched the progressive loss of territory to Viet Cong control. We have been unable to bring about the creation of a stable political base in Saigon.

This is no one's fault. It is in the nature of the struggle.

The French had much the same experience.

They quoted the same kind of statistics that guide our opinions-- statistics as to the number of Viet Minh killed, the number of enemy defectors, the rate of enemy desertions, etc. They fully believed that the Vietnamese people were on their side, and their hopes received intermittent shots of adrenalin from a succession of projects for winning the war--the DeLattre de Tassigny Plan, the Salan Plan, the Navarre Plan, etc.

11/11/71

This does not mean that we cannot succeed where the French did not; we have things running for us that the French did not have. But we cannot yet be sure--and that is the reason for the trial period.

For we have not so far seen enough evidence to be sure that the South Vietnamese forces will stand up under the heightening pressure--or, in fact, that the Vietnamese people really have a strong will to fight after twenty years of struggle. We cannot be sure how far the cancer has infected the whole body politic of South Viet-Nam and whether we can do more than administer a cobalt treatment to a terminal case.

Yet the more forces we deploy in South Viet-Nam--particularly in combat roles--the harder we shall find it to extricate ourselves without unacceptable costs if the war goes badly.

With large forces committed, the failure to turn the tide will generate pressures to escalate. There will be mounting domestic demands that we expand our air attacks on the North so as to destroy Hanoi and Haiphong. Yet if our air attacks threaten the total destruction of the North Vietnamese economy, Red China can hardly help but react. And our best Soviet experts do not believe that the Soviet Union could stand down in the event that we became involved directly with the Chinese.

This was the bulk of Ball's argument, a vehement "Stop, Look, and Listen." Perhaps all would go well, in which case the war could be prosecuted with confidence, and peace could be sought by a combination of foreign efforts and the initiation by the South Vietnamese of the Acheson plan. If, however, things did not go well, then the US would have to find a way out. Outlining general ways to do this, Ball went into detail on none, at this stage.

On the weekend of the 19th-20th, the President retired to Camp David where he read the Ball memorandum carefully. Early in the week, the President talked with Bill Moyers among others. Moyers had by this time become deeply enmeshed in Vietnam policy, holding views close to Ball's; he got the impression that the President was much affected by Ball's memorandum,

11/15/71

and inclined to limit his decision in the way Ball urged. At the same time, the President still awaited a full program from McNamara.

This was the situation on the 23rd, when the President again met with his senior advisors at the White House. By this time, the generals had come to power led by Ky and Thieu, and their first act had been to break diplomatic relations with France, informing Taylor only at the last moment. It seemed a captious action, though not terribly serious: the decision was simply to tell the French we had done our best to stop it. (Check). Hanoi's position once again seemed hard: an interview in Pravda by Pham Van Dong had spelled out that the four points must be accepted in advance (get text), and said also that a mere bombing pause would not produce negotiations. There was also discussion of a Javits Resolution.

From such secondary topics, the discussion moved to "What alternatives at the end of the summer?" -- as my notes have it. A political plan was put forward, apparently from Senator Mansfield.* But the general feeling was that the outlook was that more forces would be needed. Alexis Johnson, back from Saigon on consultation, was skeptical: 15 American battalions was a good level-off point, and we must accept that this would be a long war, without shortcuts and with only the grinding proof to the Viet Cong that they could not win. Ball at once chimed in, giving the gist of his argument that we should stop at 100,000 and then think hard -- even about plans for cutting our losses and shifting our focus of action in Southeast Asia to Thailand.** Rusk and McNamara objected to the last idea: Thailand, they thought, could not be held if SVN had given up. Rather, Rusk said, we would end up with the only secure areas Australia, New Zealand, the

* BM. See if we have any clue on this. May want to write Jorden.

11/16/71

** Ball's full memorandum had been sent only to the President and Rusk at this point. My recollection is that it became available to a few of us in the State Department in ~~that~~^{the} week, and probably to McNamara at the same time.

THE FOLLOWING

11/16/71

Philippines, and NATO, with even India falling to the Communist Chinese. It was an extreme statement, and my notes show an exclamation point in the margin -- and a note to myself to get an estimate of the consequences of withdrawal from SVN.*

After this exchange, McNamara moved in the opposite direction from Ball. His proposal was a combination of a lot more force, in the South and possibly selectively in the North as well, and a much more intensive negotiating effort than he felt had yet been made. At least, he said, let us show the President what might be done on these two lines, coordinated with each other. He had the ideas on additional forces, and Ball had the ideas on moves toward a settlement; perhaps the two meshed with each other, and were less contradictory than some might suppose.

The result was at least agreement on the next steps. The President, who had for the most part let the discussion rage around him without injecting his own views, directed McNamara and Ball, with one or two staff men each, to produce studies covering military and political moves over the next three months and beyond. These were to come back in a week, although there was of course no assurance that the issue would then be decided.

Procedure and Setting

d. Accordingly, the week from Thursday, June 24th, through the following Friday, July 2, was what a lawyer might call the "time for pleadings." McNamara worked on his proposal with a small team headed by McNaughton, and with assistance on negotiating possibilities from Leonard Unger. Ball went to work on his with the aid of ^(MYSELF) his own immediate staff, and two or three other helpers from the intelligence office in the State Department.

* BM. Again, check if this was done.

11/16/71

This was a very different procedure than in the previous November. At that earlier time, the atmosphere had been comparatively calm, ^{IN A} ~~the~~ post-election lull. Now the military crisis was being reported daily, and with it speculation from all sides on the next American move. It was already, as the Times noted, a war atmosphere, affected by the security concerns that go with war.* Moreover, the President's personal sensitivity to leaks and staff comment had grown with the passing months. Perhaps with the November leaks in mind**, he wanted no airing in the press of the various positions to be put before him. At this particular time, the concern seemed reasonable; press reporting of the kind of differences that existed, dramatized as it would surely have been, would not have helped either the atmosphere of decision and discussion, or the continued usefulness of the men involved. By this time it was, of course, generally known that Ball was a fairly consistent advocate of moderation and a maximum search for peace; the revelation that he actually envisaged American withdrawal -- as practically no one in the public arena was then doing*** -- would have been a bombshell, quite possibly tending to drive the President and his other advisors into more downright positions, almost certainly ending Ball's service at a time when, whether his basic views were accepted or more likely not, he was the constant prod for peace and compromise.

Thus, the security measures of this policy review did not seem to me at the time excessive -- nor do they in retrospect. On the rough rule of thumb that anything known to more than 30 substantive people will get in the papers somehow, the actual policy circle for the exchange of studies

* Citation to Times editorial (BM)

** See page ____ above.

*** Cite NYT story about Schlesinger letter saying that McGovern had not advocated withdrawal.

11/16/71

and memoranda in this period was about 10, with another 10-15 aware of the work and of the general positions being taken. This narrowing of the circle was undoubtedly very frustrating to those at the fringe, and has contributed to highly misleading accounts of the reality of the process.* Perhaps the lack of wider staff discussion deprived the inner circle of some insights; *CIA, for example, was limited to comment on draft papers, furnishing* ~~one of its special features was the exclusion, until July~~ *none of its own.* ~~of participation from Admiral Raborn or the CIA staff.~~ Certainly, the documentation of views is much less than it would otherwise have been, ~~but~~ I am inclined to doubt that, on issues now litigated and argued almost to a fare-thee-well through the long winter and spring, anything especially novel would have been injected from the persons and groups excluded from the late June policy review.

Turning now to the substance of the debate, it had been envisaged on the 23rd that there would be two papers, by McNamara and Ball, with some ambiguity whether Ball would urge holding the line at 100,000 -- as he had in the ^(early) June meetings -- or whether he would go further and suggest ways of extrication. In an intense meeting on the morning of the 24th, with his State Department helpers including myself, Ball ^{presented his first draft. The} ~~outlined again the gist~~ ^{was} of what he had put in his June 18th memorandum for the President, the dangers of our becoming "like the French" whether we wished or not, and despite all we might do. This time, however, his ending was not to hold the line, but to find a way to "cut our losses" just as soon as possible.

* Cite Thomson article in the Atlantic and Cooper on Ball being a charade. In both cases, the writers, as subordinate members of the White House staff, were not privy to the papers of late June, or to the discussions of the whole month of June. Their impression of superficiality and of decisions already made seems to derive from the large meetings of late July. By that time, indeed, as I shall note in the next chapter, the main decision had been made, and Ball's main arguments considered and rejected. June and early July, the crucial first phase of decision, were a different story, when debate was very much "for real."

** Explain this -- that R. simply had no weight

11/16/71

My own conclusion was different, and as Ball returned to his office to start drafting I joined him in a small state of personal crisis. Agreeing with his view of the difficulties, I still could not accept the idea of early American withdrawal. So I parted company with Ball and went to write a third paper, to lay out the "middle way" of holding on through the summer at roughly the present committed level of 85,000 men. In taking this position, I was, I am sure, much influenced by the views of Alexis Johnson, who was in Washington all that week and told many of us of his feeling that the situation was not quite so critical as it was being painted by Westmoreland, and that American forces above 15 battalions were sure to raise serious problems. This was, of course, the position that Maxwell Taylor had urged for months; by now Taylor's cables gave signs of a shift in response to his military view of the need. Alexis Johnson, however, was still highly skeptical, with the discretion and restrained expression of a senior career man, but equally with the feel of one who had watched Asian nations and conflicts all his life. At this point, he most definitely did not have a feeling of panic, and his instinct was that the South Vietnamese, however surprised they had been in May and June, were tougher than we gave them credit for.*

Johnson was one influence on my own thinking. Another was a private exchange of messages with five of our Chiefs of Mission in East Asia, which I initiated on June 14th by a long letter describing the situation as I then saw it. Edwin Reischauer in Japan, Winthrop Brown in Korea, Edward Rice in Hong Kong, William Sullivan in Vientiane, and Graham Martin in

* Cite DOD papers, June 26 UAJ with McNaughton.

11/16/71

Bangkok were all men of long Asian experience and of high character and intelligence. Their replies, received in this last week of June as I was working on my "Holding On" paper, gave me a varied base of judgments and ideas that crucially affected my own thinking. More on this in the next chapter; it was the only time I resorted to a demanding but highly rewarding procedure.

So much for the policy review procedure of this crucial last week in June. It was not held in a vacuum but in a week packed with other developments that in themselves forced the pace and must have affected the President's set of mind.

On the 23rd, the President decided to send two Marine BLT's, to Danang and to Qui Nhon, in response to a new Westmoreland plea on urgent security grounds. But June 29th, a further series of incidents and actions near Danang led to still another plea, and the further decision to send two additional Marine BLT's to Danang, rounding out the full _____ Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF). An Army Brigade was still slated to arrive on July 12, and by this time full approval had been given for a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division to arrive at the end of July. The effect of these decisions was to raise the committed American force to 20 battalions, with the reversible possibility that 2 might be withdrawn.* Overall strength would now rise to about 75,000 by July 25, and to 79,000 by the end of July -- the outer limits of the total McNamara had announced on June 16th and with a higher combat proportion.

* The 173d Airborne Brigade of 2 battalions was the ready Army reserve for the Pacific. When it was committed in May, it was planned that it should be replaced during the summer by a full three-battalion brigade of the 101st Division. In the late July decisions, the 173d stayed in Vietnam as part of the overall increase.

11/16/71

In the same fast-moving series of events and decisions, on June 26th Westmoreland was given expanded and essentially unlimited authority to use American forces in offensive missions. The 173d Airborne brigade was promptly launched in a "search-and-destroy" mission against a part of the long-time Viet Cong stronghold in the heavily wooded "Zone D" northwest of Saigon. The operation was also a test of the new idea of B-52 area bombing of a headquarters or staging area, followed up rapidly by ground entry. Originally viewed very hopefully, this tactic never panned out, and was disappointing on this occasion.

On the 26th, also, there were two nasty incidents by the Viet Cong, leading to a recommendation by Taylor for reprisal air attacks on Hanoi. One of the incidents was the announced killing of an American prisoner, allegedly in reprisal for the execution by the South Vietnamese government of a VC saboteur who had tried to blow up an American barracks; the second was the setting of bombs and pre-set rockets against the largest floating restaurant on the Saigon waterfront, with heavy Vietnamese civilian, and some American, casualties. The President nonetheless rejected Taylor's plea; as in the March attack on the Embassy, he felt that the time was past for such specific retaliation. The episode was thus simply another episode in an ugly war not yet brought home to the mass of Americans by television.*

Of greater military significance was the long-expected shift of the enemy thrust away from the areas around Saigon and into the highlands. Beginning on June 25th, with the overrunning of a district headquarters, a series of VC actions -- probably with direct North Vietnamese participation

* One can speculate on what the effect would have been of television coverage in the winter of 1964-65. Certainly, the June restaurant bombing was as ugly and totally civilian-aimed an incident as there could have been. It and others like it fed morale and resolve of Americans on the spot, in a way that was probably not without importance.

11/16/71

in many cases -- knocked off a total of six district capitals and many other isolated outposts. Events were bearing out Westmoreland's fears for the highland area, and his appeal for an American division there.

These military events had a strong and visible effect on the new leaders of the South Vietnamese government. Ky had spent the first days of his premiership getting squared away and outlining a substantial and generally appealing program for domestic reforms -- a good posture even if it seemed unlikely he could do much in the countryside. On the 28th, having turned his attention back to the military picture, he told Taylor that the United States must raise its sights at once, and send many more even than the two additional brigades, and Marine battalions, all of which he had concurred in. As a result of this session, it was agreed that the top Vietnamese commander, General Co, should work with General Westmoreland's headquarters on a joint plan, looking to immediate needs both in terms of South Vietnamese and outside forces, and also to the needs as they might develop by the end of the year.

11/17/71

Chapter 27: Action Proposals and the Making of the Basic Decision

a. On July 2, the President had in hand four basic statements of view, and three possible lines of policy. Rusk, ~~supporting this position,~~ argued simply that the United States must do all possible to preserve the independence of South Vietnam. McNamara urged a major military step-up both South and North, with an accompanying diplomatic offensive on all fronts. Ball argued for a "compromise solution," freezing the level of American combat forces and opening contact with North Vietnam to work out a deal as consistent as possible with South Vietnamese self-determination, but essentially whatever could be had. And, as an added starter at the last minute, I presented the case for holding on at present force levels through the summer, then stepping up our effort if things went well, but, if they did not, seeking a method of extrication that would do as much as possible to sustain the remaining key areas of Southeast Asia, especially Thailand.

The President made no decision then, but did indicate his set of mind by directing McNamara to go to Saigon on July 15th to bring back a full report. As the trip was being mounted, further studies were made, and on July 8th the President had the advice of a panel of senior Americans, most of them men who had served in top-level policy positions in the past. On Vietnam, their advice was almost unanimously to stand firm. Though they hardly had time to soak fully in the difficulties of the problem, their ^{view} advice probably had weight in confirming tendencies already strong in the President's mind.

11/17/71

ON 9TH
By the 10th, the President indicated, in a press conference, what kind of decision might be in the making -- including its general size and the fact that it might involve calling up the reserves and other fairly drastic measures. It was surely a trial balloon, to test the reaction of Congress and the public. As this registered in the following week, the President was engaged in careful testing with key men and advisors in and out of government. Finally, on July 17th, he cabled McNamara, in Saigon, that he would be prepared to receive a full-scale recommendation for additional forces, covering the balance of 1965 and also the time beyond.

(Check latter.) The basic decision had been made, AND WAS RAPIDLY CONFIRMED WHEN McNAMARA RETURNED ON THE 21ST.

In telling the story of this period, my limitations of viewpoint and material are more marked than at some other times. The paper record, and the deliberations of the senior panel, were fully known to me, and have been reviewed. But the oral record of the President's quiet talks during this period are not available, and must form a crucial part of the whole. Only through these could one learn whether he ever seriously hesitated ^{OVER THE BASIC ISSUE,} or merely wished to be absolutely sure of the need before he moved.

Action Proposals to the President

b. The "lead" paper prepared after the White House meeting of June 23rd was that of McNamara. It began as follows:

"Introduction. Our objective is to create conditions for a favorable settlement by demonstrating to the VC/DRV that the odds are against their winning. Under present conditions, however, the chances of achieving this objective are small -- and the VC are winning now -- largely because the ratio of guerrilla to anti-guerrilla forces is unfavorable to the government. With this in mind, we must choose among three courses of action with respect to South Vietnam: (1) Cut our losses and withdraw under the best conditions that can be arranged; (2) continue at about the present level, with US forces

11/17/71

limited to, say, 75,000, holding on and playing for the breaks while recognizing that our position will probably grow weaker; or (3) expand substantially the US military pressure against the Viet Cong in the South and the North Vietnamese in the North and at the same time launch a vigorous effort on the political side to get negotiations started."

McNamara's statement of the third course did not seek to argue its basic rationale; for this, he relied on the reasoning and arguments of the past without going back over them. Rather, he gave the fullest possible outline of military and diplomatic steps. The key action was, of course, the sending of the full 44 battalions to Westmoreland within the next few months. The memorandum also advocated much more extensive air and naval actions to destroy the transportation system in and to North Vietnam, through bombing and above all through the mining of the four major ports of entry.

On the political side, the program called for just about every conceivable idea that had ever been advanced. A striking new one was the sending of a high-level American representative to Moscow for a frank discussion, devoted to pressing the Soviet Union to avoid deeper involvement and perhaps to act with the British toward peace. The sum total of all the proposed efforts would only serve in the early stages to demonstrate US good faith; they would "pay off toward an actual settlement only ^(WHEN) the tide begins to turn (unless we lower our sights substantially)." ..

On the questions of prospects for the future, the paper thought that as the tide began to turn North Vietnam would seek to counter it by sending large numbers of men into South Vietnam. As to timing, "the tide almost certainly cannot begin to turn in less than a few months, and may not for a year or more; the war is one of attrition and will be a long one. Since

11/18/71

troops once committed as a practical matter cannot be removed, since US casualties will rise, since we should take call-up actions to support the additional forces in Vietnam, the test of endurance may be as much in the United States as in Vietnam." However, the paper was hopeful in the long run. Citing a basic CIA estimate it said:

"Over the longer term we doubt if the Communists are likely to change their basic strategy in Vietnam (i.e., aggressive and steadily mounting insurgency) unless and until two conditions prevail: (1) they are forced to accept a situation in the war in the South which offers them no prospect of an early victory and no grounds for hope that they can simply outlast the US and (2) North Vietnam itself is under continuing and increasingly damaging punitive attack. So long as the Communists think they scent the possibility of an early victory (which is probably now the case), we believe that they will persevere and accept extremely severe damage to the North. Conversely, if North Vietnam itself is not hurting, Hanoi's doctrinaire leaders will probably be ready to carry on the Southern struggle almost indefinitely. If, however, both of the conditions outlined above should be brought to pass, we believe Hanoi probably would, at least for a period of time, alter its basic strategy and course of action in South Vietnam.

"Hanoi might do so in several ways. Going for a conference as a political way of gaining a respite from attack would be one. Alternatively, it might reduce the level of insurgent activity in the hopes that this would force the US to stop its punishment of the North but not prevent the US and GVN from remaining subject to wearying harassment in the South. Or, Hanoi might order the VC to suspend operations in the hopes that in a period of comparative tranquillity, domestic and international opinion would force the US to disengage without destroying the VC apparatus or the roots of VC strength. Finally, Hanoi might decide that the US/GVN will to fight could still be broken and the tide of war turned back again in favor of the VC by launching a massive PAVN assault on the South. This is a less likely option in the circumstances we have posited, but still a contingency for which the US must be prepared."*

I quote this passage at length because it was before the President at the truly critical time of decision, because it is the best short definition of the strategy and expectations held at the time -- and because one

* This passage was, in fact, supplied directly by Admiral Raborn, having been drafted by his senior staff.

11/18/71

can find in it at least a verbal mention of all the problems that were to arise in later years. A test of endurance in the US, large ground forces coming from the North as the tide turned, even the chance of a massive assault from the North if things came to look really black to Hanoi, all were foreseen, though not in the form in which they were to occur. What was predicted was a long and grinding struggle, no mistake about that.

Such was McNamara's case. Circulated on June 26th in first draft, it set up the target for Ball's efforts, which were initially framed under the provocative title, "Cutting our Losses in South Vietnam."* As presented to the review circle** on June 28th, Ball's basic plan was to form a demarche to the Saigon government, calling for it to form a civilian-led government, undertake major reforms, pledge elections when hostilities ceased, and announce amnesty for peaceable VC (part of the Acheson Plan). As Ball saw it, this demand would precipitate a crisis in which the South Vietnamese either were galvanized into unity and effectiveness, or more likely became either violently nationalist or neutralist, with Americans no longer welcome either way.

One need not dwell on this program, according to one's taste the logical or ad absurdum expression of the thesis that the Vietnamese alone could win the struggle. In a meeting of the group on June 29th, it was riddled as totally devastating -- and the worst way to lose if it came to that.

~~After all the political confusion and ineptitude the US had put up with for two years past, it would have seemed absurd to insist on a new perfec-~~

* Parts of this memorandum are extensively quoted and referred to in the DOD Papers, Book 4, Vol. IV.C.5, pp. _____ and in Book 6, Vol. IV.C.7, pp. _____. However, neither the action summary nor Part I appear to have been available in the DOD Materials.

11/18/71

tion just as the going was at its worst; to Asian eyes, it would have been the most cynical exit method possible.

Thus, by July 1, when Ball presented his final memorandum to the President, he was on a somewhat different track. Retaining many of the basic arguments of the "Cutting Our Losses" paper (some of which had also gone directly to the President on Ball's earlier June 18 memorandum), he now urged holding on militarily, while actively exploring with North Vietnam the possibility of a settlement on the basis of a "concept of self-determination that would permit the Viet Cong some hope of achieving some of their political objectives through local elections or some other device."*

If exploratory talks with Hanoi showed that such a deal on the political future of South Vietnam was possible, perhaps through clarification or de-fusing of Hanoi's third point, then South Vietnam should be induced to do its part, and the way would be open for an international conference at which the other elements of a settlement would come into place.

On its face, this was not a proposal for getting out regardless. But Ball plainly had in mind that a substantial VC role would be accepted, involving an ^N ~~equally-substantial~~ ^{EXCELLENT} chance that in the end the National Liberation Front would end up in power in Saigon. In the Appendix to his paper, Ball discussed the world and Asian reactions to a "compromise settlement" in terms drawn directly from the June 28 paper and still labelled "Probable Reactions to the Cutting of Our Losses in South Vietnam." If, in short, Hanoi was ready to deal on this political basis, the US would give up much of its past position and accept the risks and what flowed from them.

* CITATION.

11/18/71

It was a candid-enough alternative, with a well-reasoned negotiating proposal, offering the chance for flexibility.*

As Ball's proposal finally went to the President, it also envisaged a military holding operation at existing American force levels, while Hanoi's attitude was explored. Thus, his plan had elements of both of the first two possible courses of action McNamara had outlined in his introduction. However, by the 29th, I had concluded that there must be a presentation to the President of a military holding operation looking not to early compromise on the most crucial issue, but to a genuine trial period to see if the South Vietnamese were tough and American forces effective. So, after a day of hard drafting, a third memorandum on "Holding On in South Vietnam," went to the review group on June 30, followed the next day by a shorter summary entitled "A 'Middle Way' Course of Action in South Vietnam."** The latter certainly, perhaps both, went to the President at his express request.***

* A slightly garbled, but almost complete, text of the July 1 Ball Memorandum to the President will be found in the Beacon edition, Vol. 4, pp. 615-619. References to it will be found in (DOD and Beacon citations.)

** The "middle way" memorandum in its final (and only) form and the "Holding On" memorandum in its draft form of June 30th were in the McNamara/McNaughton papers available to the Gelb study group. References to both, separately, appear in DOD Papers, Book 4, Vol. IV.C.5, pp. _____, and Book 6, Vol. IV.C.7, pp. _____. The parallel Beacon Edition citations are Volume 3, pp. (473) and Volume 4, pp. (23-24). In addition a part of the text of the "Holding On" memorandum is appended as document 259 in Volume 4 of the Beacon Edition, pp. 610-615, being one of the many separate documents not printed in the Gelb Study but supplied to Senator Gravel by Mr. Ellsberg or his associates. Unfortunately the Beacon version is not accurate, containing numerous misprints and howlers ("Ray Showers" for "Reischauer" for one) and leaving out large sections of the argument. The summary of my views in Vol. IV.C.7, pp. cited above, refers only to the "Middle Way" memorandum, completely misconstruing it through omission of

27-7A

11/18/71

the accompanying "Holding On" memorandum, and indeed through misreading ~~of~~ the short version taken alone.

*** My files show slight revisions for a July 1 re-draft of the "Holding On" memorandum, presumably to accompany the other to the White House. However, no files are available to me to establish just what went to the President.

11/18/71

My action proposal was simple enough: stop at about 85,000 men and wait through the summer to see how this worked. Use air to the maximum in the South, including B-52 operations, and hit additional targets in the North, but continuing to avoid the Hanoi and Haiphong areas. Defer decision on the closing of ports and extended bombing of the road and rail lines, on the principal ground, as to the ports, that such action "would tend to throw North Vietnam into the arms of Communist China and diminish Soviet influence." Pull out all possible stops to galvanize the Ky government toward what I called "maximum revolution and reform, but minimum repression," with a view to launching a "really major reform and amnesty program" in the fall if the enemy's monsoon offensive had in the meantime been blunted. At all events, test for two months.

This was the key point. If during the summer months, the South Vietnamese forces did well and American forces fitted in, we would have an entirely different base to go forward. If not, then no amount of American forces would make much difference. I took very seriously indeed Ball's arguments about the dubious military effectiveness of American forces and their negative political and psychological effects, having myself soaked in the earlier Indochina war and its literature.* Use of Americans as a clearly defined "reserve-reaction" force where a battle had been or could be joined was one thing, their scouring of the countryside possibly quite another. Superficially, this was a "military" line of thought, open to the charge of a civilian making armchair strategy; in essence, however, it was an attempt to define strategy in light of the massive and decisive intangible of the whole Vietnam conflict -- how the South Vietnamese would

* Check whether this personal factor comes in somewhere else, for dovetailing.

11/18/71

react. If this turned the wrong way, all the military merits in the world would not offset the loss.* Thus, it was not a debate about military tactics, but on the gut question: could American forces in large numbers improve substantially the chances of success in the terms McNamara's paper had defined? After all, I had written in 1961 that "white men can't win this kind of war." Now American military men had had 3 1/2 years of experience in dealing with it, and learned much. Moreover, American combat forces were vastly better trained and equipped than in 1961. But it was still the same riddle: massive forces meant massive ways of fighting, and the essence of the problem was people, not mass.

^{TH/S}
 To which Ball added his personal doubt whether the other side would try to press forward in the classic "Phase III" toward which they were now approaching. They might lie low, as they had done in 1950-54 in the face of a massive French build-up, and thus try to wear us out.⁷

Thus, I concluded, the large-scale immediate actions urged by McNamara ran the grave risk of compounding the results of a defeat they would contribute little to preventing. Contrariwise, to follow Ball's June 28 path of an ultimatum to the South Vietnamese, followed by American withdrawal if they failed to shape up, "would create an immediate and maximum shock wave for Thailand and the rest of Asia" and would have serious effects at home and in the American leadership position. The fight was not going that badly, nor certainly was it thought to be, and the time had not come when it could be persuasively argued that the South Vietnamese had abandoned the struggle or made it impossible.**

* The writer of this volume of the Gelb study, "Phase I in the Build-Up of US Forces, March-July 1965," must have been a military man. His summary of the period makes the arguments appear almost wholly military ("security" vs. "enclave" vs. "search and destroy"). In fact, there were overwhelming

11/18/71

political, from Taylor's reservations of January through April, to Ball's and my arguments of late June. Problems of sheer size, proportion of total effort, effect on the South Vietnamese military performance, and above all effect on popular attitudes -- these were the real stuff of the debate, not the narrow military concepts of employment.

** The Beacon Edition, Vol. 4, p. 611, prints a bracketed comment next to this thought of mine. The comment is not mine, and appears to have been written about 1968.

11/18/71

The middle way I tried to outline was not a hopeful one. I saw a "fair chance" that in 4-6 months, an 85,000-Americans holding operation would produce a military stalemate and lead Hanoi to consider a political settlement in the South. There was the second possibility, "that neither Saigon nor Hanoi would weaken, and that we would be carrying on an inconclusive fight for a period of many months or even far longer." And, thirdly, the "chances are greater that the Viet Cong tide could not be stemmed, that Hanoi would not come to terms, and that at some time -- on the order of 2-4 months -- Saigon would in effect throw in the sponge and make a deal with the Liberation Front, and Hanoi."* In the first case, we should try to put forward at the critical time a proposal for political settlement that Hanoi might accept, namely the Acheson Plan, which was summarized though not labelled. This path would have "tremendous problems," but still offered the only hope of true compromise which Hanoi might accept rather than simply pressing ever forward to achieve its ends by force.**

Quite different was the kind of "deal" that might be made in the third, or losing, case. Almost certainly, as I saw it, this would mean Communist takeover in SVN, and the question would then become what to do to limit the impact of this on the rest of Asia. (On the basis of an important exchange of views with five American Chiefs of Mission in East Asia, I had by this time concluded that Thailand, Korea, and Japan must be the

* Beacon Edition, Vol. 4, p. 612, accurately renders these assessments, but without the connecting language that would make clear that the top of p. 613, following, refers to the first, or favorable case, while the entire section headed "Problems in the Rest of Asia" refers to the third, or losing case. Actually, ten typewritten pages of the original memorandum are omitted between the third and fourth paragraphs appearing on p. 613. These dealt mostly with the negotiating approach to be taken in the losing case, including above all the hope of salvaging a neutral international framework for Southeast Asia.

11/18/71

** Ibid, p. 613, has this passage almost correct, though with a few sentences omitted.

11/18/71

key targets of effort in any event, but particularly if the Vietnam situation turned totally sour. Let us come back later to this exchange and its meaning, (As part of the attempt to separate and analyze the arguments of this June-July period.) In summary, the thrust of my views was that the situation would be very bad indeed, but that many actions could still be taken that had some hope of stopping the rot. I concluded:

"Despite its obvious difficulties, and the uncertainty of success in South Vietnam under this or any other program, this 'middle way' program seems to us to avoid the clear pitfalls of either of the major alternatives. It may not give us quite as much chance of a successful outcome as the major military actions proposed in the McNamara memorandum, but it avoids to a major extent the very serious risks involved in this program in any case, and the far more disastrous outcome that would eventuate if we acted along the lines of the McNamara memorandum and still lost in South Vietnam.

Above all, we must think of our South Vietnamese effort as giving us the best chance we can reasonably have of bringing Hanoi to terms, but also as an essential effort to sustain the credibility of US action in Asia and worldwide -- and, right alongside this, an effort to play for time and to give us the chance to line up a different kind of non-Communist structure in Southeast Asia if the worst should happen in South Vietnam.

Finally, an essential point in this memorandum is that we must start now to consider South Vietnam, our action and the possible outcome, in the wider context of preserving the free countries of Asia and the US position in Asia. This dictates immediate attention to Thailand, possibly some change in our view of Korea, and a particular focus on our relations with Japan."*

Thus, the Presidential notebook compiled by Mac Bundy on July 1 had three plans of action -- McNamara's for going hard both militarily and diplomatically, Ball's revised proposal for holding on while seeking urgently a high-risk compromise, and mine for holding on and being prepared to move either way. In addition, however, it had one memorandum that may have been of greater weight than any of the much longer ones from others. In terse language, and in a rare direct and personal memorandum not shown

*Ibid, pp. 614-615, has this passage with only minor dictating errors.

11/18/71

to others before its submission, the Secretary of State advised the President to do whatever was necessary to fulfill the American commitment to South Vietnam. His key passages read:

"The central objective of the United States in South Vietnam must be to insure that North Viet-Nam not succeed in taking over or determining the future of South Viet-Nam by force. We must accomplish this objective without a general war if possible."

and

"The integrity of the US commitment is the principal pillar of peace throughout the world. If that commitment becomes unreliable, the communist world would draw conclusions that would lead to our ruin and almost certainly to a catastrophic war. So long as the South Vietnamese are prepared to fight for themselves, we cannot abandon them without disaster to peace and to our interests throughout the world."*

So Dean Rusk, skeptical in the fall of 1961 and uncertain in January of 1965 that South Vietnam had the political cohesion to be worth going all out for, had now concluded that to walk away from an American commitment, to temporize in our actions to meet it, to do anything short of all we possibly could, was to pose the gravest possible danger to world peace. General war must be, if necessary, risked, for such a risk would be less than the risk of general war that would arise if the communist world concluded the US would not carry through on an undertaking once it became difficult. It was the quintessence of the Secretary's point of view, laid down in this hour of decision, to be repeated over and over in the coming years of trial.^{TP} Such were the main papers put before the President. Analysis of the supporting arguments and judgments is best put off to a later chapter, after we have carried through to its first big conclusion the story of the President's deliberations.

* DOD Papers, Book 6, Vol. IV.C.7, pp. ____; Beacon Edition, Vol 4, p. 23. Although I have not had access to the full text of this key Rusk memorandum I am told that there is no major additional argument in it. (Check.)

11/18/71

The Process of Decision Continues

c. Having received the papers, the President met with his senior advisors on Friday, July 2. My notes do not record anything of significance on that day, and my recollection is that the discussion covered the next practical actions to be taken. Like a Judge, the President expected to mull over the pleadings, and gave no direct indication what his final decision would be. Instead, he plucked ideas from each of the papers, and set them in motion. Averell Harriman should travel at once to Europe and set up the faint "cover" of visiting Moscow on a sightseeing trip. McNamara should go to Saigon in mid-July with General Wheeler and with Cabot Lodge, now picked as Taylor's successor, to look over the situation and evaluate the military plans which Westmoreland was already working to project into 1966. Ball should work intensively to refine the negotiating possibilities, with a particular eye to his latest proposal of direct American contact with the North Vietnamese representative in Paris, and a secondary look at how contact with NLF representatives, through private Americans, might be arranged and to what end.

The series of moves tended to set its own timetable, that a fully worked out decision would not be reached much before the end of July. Except for Harriman's trip, a long shot at best in terms of changing any of the key elements of the situation, the other steps could have been pressed more rapidly. I had the feeling that the President wanted that most precious of all commodities, time -- time to think, to talk, to feel the Congressional pulse, to get all the facts. It was a typical pre-decision

11/18/71

mood for him, far more typical than his handling of the quick-flaring Dominican Crisis. By temperament Lyndon Johnson was a deliberate and cautious man to the point of decision, and thereafter totally action-minded and hard-hitting -- till the next need for decision became evident. Since early June he had slowed down; all through the weeks from June 7th to the end of July his meetings on Vietnam were measured and careful in tone, with only a very occasional digression to comment on his critics or the speculations of the news media. He was an impressive center of the policy process.

No doubt there were other reasons for the President's not wanting to make a final decision any sooner than he had to. The Congress was just completing action on other key parts of the domestic program, but still had many important Administration measures to go. All through this summer, Lyndon Johnson had to keep the Congressional scorecard in his head, and to imagine what would happen to his most deeply felt new plans if the Congress were diverted to a big debate on the Vietnam war. It was not a factor he ever argued, or even noted, in my presence, except for the ruminative comments of the June 10th meeting (p. ___ above). One could sense its vital significance, however, simply by instinct.

As to public opinion, the President undoubtedly also felt the need to take careful stock. In one conversation of the period, he told a visitor that he thought the American public was about 65-35 in favor of taking much stronger ground action if this were needed, but that this ^[MARGIN] was likely to get closer as the issue sank in. By this time Ball in particular had im-

11/18/71

pressed upon him the course of domestic public opinion during the Korean conflict, showing that support had dropped in remarkably close inverse proportion to the number of casualties. As July began, only (4) Americans had been killed in South Vietnam, but the weekly totals were running 15-20, enough to give warning of what might be to come.

So all these factors were in the President's mind in the first week of July. On the 7th, he approved a message from McNamara to Westmoreland giving the main themes of the McNamara trip; it was more a request for an action plan than a request for basic review of the whole situation, but this was natural for the field commander in any event.

More important, on the 8th, the President had the advice of a senior advisory group of men from outside the government. This group (title?) had been picked during the 1964 campaign, largely as a device to portray the President as receiving the advice, and by strong implication the electoral support, of the most distinguished possible group of Americans who had occupied high foreign policy positions in the past. It had never been convened, and the idea of doing so on this occasion seems to have come up in early June. Vietnam was the foremost, but not the only issue to be put before them. The group of (about 15) was broken up into three panels, each of which received extensive briefing material the day before, met separately and then at lunch on the 8th, met as a large group in the early afternoon, and finally presented their conclusions to the President in the late afternoon.

The Vietnam Panel consisted of General Omar Bradley, former Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, Dr. George Kistiakowsky of Harvard, Arthur Larson (title as of then), and John L. McCloy, former High Commissio

11/18/71

in Germany and Assistant Secretary of War during World War II. They met with Messrs. Rusk, McNamara, Thompson, and myself, after having the chance to read papers covering the situation and the key questions on which their advice was sought. Leading these, to state the "government position" first was a paper drafted by me raising first and foremost the issue of "stakes and objectives in the conflict." This asked the following questions:

"A. If it is accepted that a Communist takeover in South Vietnam would lead fairly rapidly at least to the accommodation of the rest of Southeast Asia to the Chinese Communists, and possibly to outright Communist Chinese and North Vietnamese control of mainland countries, how serious would this basically be for US security?

"B. To what extent would a Communist takeover in South Vietnam, in the face of the US commitment, affect US credibility and standing in holding to the key areas such as Northeast Asia, the Philippines, India, and even Europe?

"C. To what extent would a "compromise" settlement that preserved South Vietnam for a time but that involved risks of eventual Communist takeover by political means, have the same consequences?"

Framing these questions, I stated the current Administration viewpoint in the following terms as a starting point for discussion and possible criticism.

Our current objective is to bring about a settlement under which South Vietnam is free to determine its own future without external influence. It is thus to repulse Hanoi's campaign to take over the South, which has drawn on local feelings and discontents but with Hanoi supplying key assets. Although the VC's degree of control has been growing somewhat, we continue to believe that withdrawal of military support from Hanoi would create a situation in which the South could eventually bring its situation under control and continue to operate, although shakily, on a non-Communist and independent basis. If this were achieved, we believe the question of unification could be faced as an eventual issue, on which we and the South Vietnamese could stand for a long time on the principle of free choice in both parts of Vietnam.

11/18/71

The consequences of Communist takeover in Vietnam would be felt first in Laos and Cambodia, which we believe would become indefensible and would either fall under North Vietnamese control or, in the case of Cambodia, survive temporarily by accommodating.

The real linchpin for the rest of Southeast Asia would be Thailand. Unfortunately, the Thai -- who doubted US firmness at the time of the Laos settlement -- now have swung to an excessive faith in the US ability to save South Vietnam somehow. Thus, if South Vietnam goes bad, we now estimate that the Thai would have little faith in the US, whatever we did for them, and would probably recognize Communist China, ask us to leave militarily, and seek to survive by accommodation.

Burma, is already pursuing such a course, and we believe Malaysia, with strong Chinese elements which might then change their orientation, would be under the strongest possible pressure to do likewise. Thus, in the event of Communist takeover in South Vietnam, the prognosis in mainland Southeast Asia is very gloomy, although it is just possible that we could strengthen Thai resolve by our actions over the period prior to the assumed situation coming about.

We do not believe that Communist takeover in South Vietnam would, except possibly in the worst circumstances or by US military defeat, seriously shake the orientation and US position in Japan, Korea, Nationalist China, or the Philippines. Our job would be harder, but most of us think we could hold on.

Nor do we believe that even the accommodation to Communism of mainland Southeast Asia would, at least in the short run (and recognizing that such a change would come only over a period of months and more likely years) shake the position of internal politics of India to the point of its turning away from the US and the West. However, we would have new and entirely different problems in India, and a great deal to do.

As to Europe, we believe that a US defeat in South Vietnam would not seriously hurt our position, unless it took place in circumstances of a major military defeat or if it involved reduction in the US military presence in Europe.

I quote these papers in length because they show a state of mind that was in its totality mine alone, but that was pretty close to the consensus viewpoint, George Ball conspicuously excepted. Moreover, the papers elicit

11/18/71

from the Panel a clear and unmistakeable reaction. With the exception of Arthur Larson, the members felt that the stakes were very high indeed. Going further than my summary, they thought that not only would Thailand fall under Chinese sway, but that the effects in Japan, India, and even Europe could be most serious. In Europe, deGaulle would then (in the words of my notes) "find many takers for his argument that the US could not now be counted on to defend Europe."

Beyond these specific and largely Asian judgments, the Panel accepted both the argument that Vietnam was a test case of "wars of national liberation" and the argument that a US defeat would lead to widespread questioning whether US commitments could be relied on. It would be going beyond my notes to find any particular weighting of all these elements. What was important was that the Panel thought that standing firm in Vietnam was of very great importance to American interests and to the independence of many nations and areas.

In line with this basic view, the Panel (as my notes again read) "felt that there should be no question of making whatever combat force increases were required." Indeed, several members thought that American actions to that point had been too restrained, and had probably led Hanoi to conclude we were less than wholly determined. This conclusion was reached from a somber picture of the military situation, which impressed the group that the struggle would be long and tough -- and led two members of the wider group to say that the government had consistently painted too rosy a picture.*

* On this point, see Chapter ____ below.

11/18/71

On the other hand, the Panel appeared to accept the continued limitation of the bombing program in the North to exclude the Hanoi and Haiphong areas. Rusk, McNamara, and Thompson joined in pointing out the fear of a harsh Soviet reaction or of driving the Soviets and Chinese closer together.

Finally, as to negotiation, ^(ARTHUR) Larson in the Vietnam Panel and Paul Hoffman in the wider group pressed for taking the conflict expressly to the UN. The great majority of those present, however, did not think this would be practical or useful -- and that it would be a dangerous sign of weakness.

Thus, the effect of this Panel's views on the whole group, and of the whole group on the President, can only have been to do whatever was necessary to see the conflict to a reasonable conclusion, facing up to the clear prospect that this would be a serious task and that, as one Panel member remarked orally, "we are about to get our noses bloodied."

Just what weight to give the account of this day's work is a puzzle to me. At that time, I thought we had done as good a job as possible of bringing home to the Panel the gravity and essential facts of the issue, within the time available. But neither the Panel nor the full group was exposed to more than a short oral statement by George Ball, who was necessarily engaged as principal spokesman for the Administration in the separate Panel concerned with Europe. Second-hand summaries of his arguments were no substitute for their full force. Perhaps the visitors got as much as they could have got in an hour's reading and a day's discussion, but it was not nearly enough to frame a worthwhile judgment.

11/19/71

To carry the digression one step further, the slightly queasy feeling I and others had at the time becomes much deeper as I look back on the whole procedure of such "quickie" consultations with outsiders. They were to recur at intervals in the next three years and to come to a climax, with a slightly different group of men, in March of 1968 -- when their influence was important in the direction of pulling back and in effect altering the whole policy of the war.. In July 1965 there was no searching examination, no built-in familiarity with the picture, no broad contact with an aroused public opinion. Lacking these elements, the men who met with the President on July 8th were bound to give him and his advisors every benefit of acceptance, and to throw their weight in terms overwhelmingly of their own personal experience and very little in terms of a really hard look at the difficulties of the particular case. It was a poor way to proceed, and will always be on any truly serious and complicated question.*

In saying this, I do not for a moment suggest that the President, or those who urged on him the convening of this group at this time, knew how it would come out, or planned it as a "rubber stamp" exercise. On the contrary, the fast-moving situation had permitted very little informal give-and-take with men of past experience, and the meeting was designed and carried out wholly seriously. In the circumstances of the spring of 1954 a similar group would probably have advised President Eisenhower not to take American military action; it was by no means off the cards that in

* It has already been recorded that in February and March of 1968, Dean Acheson refused to give the President advice, or to participate in a similar meeting of senior men, unless he was first given several days to read papers and to talk with any staff man he chose. One of the 1965 participants has expressed to me the view that the Panel's reactions were so clearly superficial and general that they should not have been taken

11/19/71

mid-1965 as wide a group as this would at least have included dissenters more formidable than Messrs. Hoffman and Larson -- and that this would have given the President pause, as it always did when he encountered different advice than he expected.

As it was, the President probably expected that most of the Panel would be generally in favor of a firm policy. What he found was that almost all were solidly of this view, and this must have had a distinct impact on his personal and private deliberations. There can be no doubt that a large strand in the President's make-up that he could not fall short of the standards set by those who had played leading parts in World War II and throughout the period of American successes in the Cold War. Now a fair sample of these men, of the American "Genro" if you will, had advised him to see this one through.

Coming to a Head

d. For me, the two weeks from July 4th to July 17th, were devoted to finding the right new senior people to work under Lodge, and to a hard look at all the possible negotiating avenues that might be opened up as the United States in some fashion made its new large-scale commitment clear. After about July 8th, it was I think generally assumed in the inner circle that the President would decide in this direction.

On July 9th and again on the 13th, the President gave a very strong indication, in public, of where his mind was headed. In response to questions at a press conference, he said:

* I had been slated to go with the McNamara-Lodge party to Saigon on the 14th. However, a freak leg infection hit me on the 10th, and I was knocked out for four days and off the trip.

11/19/71

Insert Johnson's statement

These were surely trial balloons, and the newspapers were full, in that week, of informed speculation on the possible nature of the new decision -- this time without the usual angry recriminations from the White House. At the same time, vocal Congressional opinions were heard, including particularly strong statements from the Republican side. On the whole, the public and Congressional response seemed to accept that major further measures were inevitable, a nil obstat reaction at least.*

* See Chapter ___ below for detailed discussion of the Congressional and public attitudes and state of information at the time.

11/19/71

This was undoubtedly a large part of what the President wanted to find out. The last and decisive element, however, was almost certainly McNamara's first reports from Siagon, where he arrived on the morning of the 16th, Vietnamese time. In his first two days, McNamara saw the top Americans and particularly the top Vietnamese, including not only the new military leaders of the government, but senior civilians ^{such as} including the recent Prime Minister, Dr. Quat. He found, and must have reported to the President in essence, that far from their being deep misgivings among the South Vietnamese about a much enlarged American role, they urgently desired it and believed it would be understood by the South Vietnamese people.* This evidence, together with an even clearer picture of military danger and yet of confidence on the American side that American forces would be effective, removed whatever doubts McNamara may have held when he left. In all probability, his own mind had been almost made up, but he made a particular point in those first two days of inquiring hard, and through many individuals, on the key parts of the Ball argument. He concluded that, so far as one could tell, much larger American forces would not generate adverse reactions in any short or definable time, and that they were urgently needed to provide both the fact and sense of security.

Hence, By the morning of Saturday, the 17th, Washington time, the President had McNamara's quick reports. During that day, at his direction, Cyrus Vance and Mac Bundy drafted a message from the President to McNamara,

* Cooper, pp. 280-283 gives a colorful participant's view of the first two days of this visit. Cooper detected a South Vietnamese sensitivity to American forces in populated areas, and this may have been present. To others in McNamara's group, it seemed decisively outweighed by the strong desire of the South Vietnamese to have many more Americans at once -- indeed actually more than the 44-battalion overall level.

11/22/71

telling him in effect to forget the other possible courses, and submit a straight action plan for the 44-battalion force, including Congressional approval on a reserve call-up. After the message was sent, we sat down to prepare detailed plans. For practical purposes, the policy decision now seemed clear.*

* Thus, on Monday, the 19th, I was confident enough to inform one allied government of the probable shape of division. I found in so doing that my staff, reading only the newspapers, had assumed it, and took my revelation very calmly.

11/22/71

McNamara's Report

e. McNamara returned on July 21 and at once submitted to the President a report devoted wholly to the Vietnam situation, recommending a re-~~vised~~ plan to bring the American force level to 175,000 by October, to call up 275,000 men in reserve units, and to expand the basic overall size of the American armed forces by 375,000 over the next twelve months. Over and above the 175,000 figure, McNamara thought that a further 100,000 men might have to be sent in early 1966, and that still more might be needed in the light of developments.*

In support of this plan, the report painted a convincing picture of the military crisis, contending ~~in a nutshell~~ that without large US reinforcements the South Vietnamese forces could substantially fall apart, and certainly lose key areas, even during the current monsoon season. He did not attempt to predict when there would be total decay in the absence of a major American infusion, but the sense was that it would be a matter of months. In noting that the Viet Cong seemed to believe that South Vietnam was "near collapse", the report seemed to agree.

For this reason alone, McNamara rejected out of hand the idea of trying to hold on at existing force levels. Because the situation was bound to become weaker, the later choice would boil down to outright withdrawal or an emergency expansion of forces, perhaps too late to do any good. On this point, as in his recommendation, McNamara spoke with the

* The action recommendations of this memorandum are adequately reflected in the text contained in the Beacon Edition, Vol. 4, pp. 619-622. However this text actually comprises only about 40% of the total, omitting long sections of the argument on strategy, anticipated results, and other key matters.

11/22/71

concurrence of both Taylor and Alexis Johnson; their long-standing reluctance to enlarge the American force presence had disappeared in the face of the decaying situation, and in Johnson's case this was a change in the position he had held less than a month before during his visit to Washington.

To me, this part of the report was persuasive (and indeed remains so today). Talking with McNamara's group, I found that to a man they shared his estimate. The "middle way" of holding on for a test period of a few months just was not practicable, and was not urged thereafter. The general feeling, reflected in the report, was that since February we had been setting our sights too low, finding that the situation was worse than we had supposed, and then trying to catch up belatedly. What McNamara was saying was that we should not do this again, but try rather to get on top, ~~of the situation~~, break the trend, and start it moving the other way. I was forced to agree, even though it meant accepting the chance that the war would be increasingly Americanized.*

As to the role that American forces should play, the McNamara report represented a major change. Far more than in any previous civilian paper, the concept was now to be an offensive one. American forces would perform security missions where needed, and would provide a small reserve-reaction

* Note that this choice was not "Option C" (5a1b).

11/22/71

force. But in the main, as the numbers grew, American forces should go over to pressing the fight against the VC/North Vietnamese main force units, battalions especially, with a view to bringing them to battle and destroying them. The label "search and destroy" was not used, but the essential concept was what came to be known under that title.* In time, with the evidence of physical destruction of villages, many people came to think of the concept as aimed at such damage, involving civilians and the structure of the country. As of mid-1965, it was definitely not thought of in this way; on the contrary, the concept was designed to get Americans in substantial degree away from fighting in heavily populated areas. It was a major miscalculation, arising at a time when the bulk of battalion-size VC/North Vietnamese actions were in the more isolated highland area, and in the fringe areas around Saigon. Broadly, the extent to which the VC would use villages for protection and force ugly choices of civilian damage was simply not foreseen; to this point, it had not been a marked feature of the war.

Thus, in the civilian debates all through the June-July period, the question of military tactics and strategy was hardly argued at all. Even the change ~~that~~ McNamara laid out was not contested. No one was prepared to argue for simply pulling back and trying to defend local areas -- even though such a proposal had been put forward in June by Sir Robert Thompson, the British expert. ~~To~~ To do so it was felt, would simply hand over wide areas of the country to the VC, greatly augment their already substantial

* The full passage is in Beacon Edition, Vol. 4, pp. 298-299. (DOD citation)

~~to search and destroy.~~

11/22/71

recruiting pool, and lead to slow defeat.* Between such an overall "enclave" concept (itself to be sharply distinguished from the "local enclave" concept of April) and the new "search and destroy" concept, one might well have discerned a middle ground, of staying alert for opportunities while sticking mainly to set areas. But I am out of my depth: experts in guerrilla-type warfare will doubtless argue for years whether the American Army under General Westmoreland was drawn by its bent for "offensive" strategy into an unwise and counter-productive mode of fighting in South Vietnam. As of mid-1965, the plain historical fact is that the senior civilians -- having exercised tight political constraints up to that point pretty much handed the military conduct of the war in the South over to the Command in the field.

Not so with the bombing of the North. On this, McNamara's recommendation was more modest, and retained tight Washington control. The focus should be on supplies and supply lines, with the total number of sorties rising slowly. The idea of blocking the main ports was omitted, having been effectively ^{RULED OUT} ~~discarded~~ in early July on the ground that it would throw

* Get details and check notes in one meeting. I perhaps do not do justice to Thompson's proposal, which was doubtless more selective than its news summary sounded. (He was not at this stage in close touch with the American or South Vietnamese governments, having left South Vietnam to retire to England in _____.) Insofar as Thompson urged the abandonment of many isolated outposts, his views would have been congenial. On the wider basis he appeared to be urging at this time, it seemed much too extreme. I mention the apparent Thompson view partly because it is the only one I can locate from the period that tended in the true "enclave" direction. McNaughton rejected it categorically. Beacon Edition, Vol. 4, p. 293; (DOD citations).

11/22/71

Hanoi into the arms of China, and perhaps also force much closer Soviet and Chinese cooperation.* I am sure that before McNamara left for Saigon, the President had made it clear that he would not step up the bombing program sharply -- as was being urged at the time by leading Republicans. On this point, then, the McNamara report merely registered a part of the decision that was already made.

In summary, the Report presented a bleak present picture, but a coherent and persuasive plan for dealing with it. Once security was improved through the elimination of the other side's main force units, then the extension of government control could be pressed through the program of pacification, or rural reconstruction. In any case, McNamara thought that the South Vietnamese would somehow see things through, and that American forces could be effective in an increasingly conventional war. Thereafter, the war might revert to the guerrilla level, testing the morale of VC and government alike.

Thus, salient parts of the Report had a decidedly hopeful ring. More than any other Internal McNamara paper, this one has the flavor of a brief for a course of action. Yet the difficulties show through clearly enough on careful reading. The prospect was that the program "would stave off defeat in the short run and offer a good chance of producing a favorable settlement in the longer run; at the same time it would imply a commitment to see a fighting war clear through at considerable cost in casualties and

* These arguments were in my "Holding On" memorandum of June 30, in one of the sections omitted from the Beacon Edition version. More important was the strong negative judgment of Llewellyn Thompson. See Chapter 28, below.

11/22/71

material and would make any later decision to withdraw even more difficult and even more costly than would be the case today."* And the possible scope of the war was at least suggested, if not spelled out, by the prediction that North Vietnam

"may well send up to several divisions of regular forces in South Vietnam if they see the tide turning and victory, once so near, being snatched away. This possible . . . action is the most ominous one, since it could lead to increased pressures on us to 'counter-invade' North Vietnam and to extend air strikes to population targets in the North; acceding to these pressures could bring the Soviets and the Chinese in."**

The Report was silent on the effect of such developments on the scale of the American effort; it ~~just~~ had not been thought through that far, and perhaps in many minds new North Vietnamese divisions would only take the place of a largely defeated Viet Cong, with both finding their flow of men and supplies kept to low levels by the bombing. At this stage, there was no complete strategy for bringing the military struggle to a conclusion -- only the generalized belief that frustration in the South and pressure from the bombing of the North would eventually cause Hanoi in some fashion to revert to a political track.***

The White House Meeting of July 21

f. For the major issue, July 21 was the clear-cut day of decision. Starting at 10:30, the McNamara party met with the stay-behinds. When the President joined the group, he at once requested a layout of military and diplomatic actions, along with a plan for presentation to the Congress

* Beacon Edition, Vol. 4, p. 621.

** Ibid.

*** The final CCI-drafted paragraphs of McNamara's July 1 memorandum do not appear in the July 20 memorandum. Their sense, I believe, remained controlling.

11/22/71

and the public. As always he insisted on a full-scale approach to other countries for added help.

The discussion turned then to McNamara's case, with the President particularly asking whether Hanoi could not send more forces. Wheeler responded that air attacks should limit this; Hanoi now had one division-plus in the South,* and a total of six divisions in the North. He thought it less than a 50-50 chance that there would be a "wholesale" introduction of forces from the North, and that the best estimate would be that about a quarter of the total North Vietnamese regular force would be sent. The President remarked that we needed much more hard intelligence on the situation in North Vietnam and their intentions; he implied, if he did not actually say, that we were making pretty broad guesses on a critical point -- which was true.**

After about an hour of particular points, the wider meeting adjourned to permit a fuller reading of the report, and a private meeting between the President and McNamara and Rusk. The wider meeting was then resumed, with a fairly large group as I recall. It was George Ball's last stand. Almost at once, at the President's request, he presented with force and eloquence the main points with which readers of his papers were already familiar, but not others present.*** According to my notes, he argued

* By this time, interrogations in South Vietnam had confirmed that the whole 325th division was present, with other elements, and also that the 325th had started to come in in December and January, before the bombing. This had (had not) been known at the time through other sources.

** Hanoi's total regular forces were then estimated at _____. In fact, they were increased rapidly in 1965 and 1966, so that they totalled _____ by the end of 1966. The total in SVN at any one time went from _____ at the end of 1965 to a peak of _____ in _____. The estimate of one-quarter was not bad, but the total was seriously underestimated. (Check.)

*** No footnote given

11/22/71

that:

--domestic support for the war would surely drop in inverse ^{LY} ~~pro~~ ~~portion~~ ^(THE RISE IN) to casualties, as it had in the Korean war;

--increased ground forces would inevitably mean domestic pressure for hitting the North to the point of grave risk (again the Korean experience, by implication);

--there would be a steady attrition of US prestige as the war went on inconclusively; protracted indecision ~~in the war~~ would in the end hurt American credibility worse than not acting now;

--Americans would be westerners in an alien cultural setting, sure to blunder, get no information, and set off popular antagonism;

---South Vietnam was hopelessly weak politically.

--the situation in the rest of Asia could be handled - even Thailand might be saved, and if Malaysia were more seriously threatened by Indonesia, we might have to help the British, but this would be much cheaper than the Vietnam undertaking. The rest of the area would react individually, and not too seriously. In the end, only South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia would come under Communist sway.

Rusk, McNamara, and Mac Bundy all joined in counter-arguments, that while we faced a somber picture with no time limits, the costs would be far greater if we withdrew, in Asia and in the world. But the discussion was a formality, a pale shadow of the heated verbal and written exchanges of late June. It was obvious that the President was not moved, although equally plainly he was taking careful account of Ball's points as a list

11/22/71

of problems he must somehow handle as they arose. The serious arguing of alternatives had taken place earlier; only if Ball had picked up unexpected adherents might the debate on July 21 have come to life.*

At the end the President summed up. Withdrawal would be a disaster, a harsh bombing program would not win and could easily bring a wider war, and standing pat with existing forces ("hunkering up"-as he called it) was only slow defeat. Only the fourth possibility, doing what McNamara urged, was left. Did anyone disagree? There was only a murmur from Ball that the President knew his views. All the others present nodded. It was the end of the debate on policy, and the beginning of a new debate on tactics and above all on presentation to the country. In his own favorite phrase, the President had decided to "put in his stack."

* See Cooper, pp. 284-5. Cooper is correct in saying that there was no real soul-searching from July 21 onward, but incorrect in implying that it never took place. It had simply come earlier, before the departure of the McNamara party.

12/14/71

Chapter 28: Three Areas For Judgment: The Communist Powers, Asia, the World

a. The last two chapters have described what was proposed and what was decided in June and July of 1965, on the basic issue of American policy, whether to make a large-scale open-ended commitment of ground forces in South Vietnam. The outlines of the various arguments have been presented, but to understand the setting and above all the "why" of that big decision, it is necessary to go back and dig deeper. What, expressed or unexpressed, was the map of the minds of the President and his senior advisors, so far as it can be reconstructed?

Externally, there were four areas of judgment: Vietnam itself, the Communist nations involved there, the situation in East Asia, and the effective world impact and reaction. Of the situation in Vietnam itself, enough has already been said: suffice it that the outlook was gloomy and forbidding on any measure. If it had stood alone, I have no doubt whatever that the United States would have pulled back and said "enough," perhaps long before July of 1965, but certainly then. The costs of going on now loomed large in every way.

Why then did the President go ahead, and almost all of his senior advisors urge him to do so? The answer lies, as throughout the history of these years, in the three wider areas for judgment. As before, though with a significantly different set of reasons and perceptions than in 1961, it was judged that failure to act would mean a dangerous unravelling of the balance of power in East Asia, and a devastating blow not merely to American influence in the world, but to the prospects for a relative peace in which at least major armed conflict among great powers could be avoided.

11/30/71

Hanoi, Moscow and Peking

b. By July of 1965, much of the uncertainty of the January period had dissolved. In the intervening months, Hanoi had made it clear that it was in control of its own destiny and ^{HELD THE} power of decision on war and peace. With Moscow and Peking balanced against each other, neither could exert the pressure of granting or withholding help in order to get Hanoi to go as it wished. Advice might be accepted and influence exerted if the tide of the struggle turned, but for the moment there was no sign of this. Hanoi was in charge, and Ho and his colleagues were determined to achieve their great ambition of uniting Vietnam under their own control. In one revealing conversation reported through private sources at this time, the North Vietnamese representative told a visitor that Vietnam must be one. Reminded that the position of the National Liberation Front called for an independent South Vietnam, he was momentarily taken aback, but then recovered to say that this would be all right, that an "independent" government in the South under the NLF program would quickly elect to join the North.

It seemed a fair picture, still, of Hanoi's basic command of the Liberation Front. Since March, the claxons of Communist propaganda had taken up the cry that the United States must deal with the Front; Hanoi now went further, that the National Liberation Front was "the sole authentic voice of the Vietnamese people."* It was a shrewd cut at the legitimacy of the coup governments in Saigon, but what of the Front itself? In Washington we strained all intelligence sources to find who ran it, where they operated, what they stood for, whether there might -- as private Frenchmen and their contacts kept telling us -- be a strain of Southern nationalism

* Citation

11/3//71

in the Front that could be reached and appealed to. It was an empty search; the Front was invisible, its leaders faceless names.* By July of 1965, the speculation was that if the Viet Cong, with North Vietnamese help, got control of a highland province in the South, they would proclaim a provisional government. But the Front was not allowed to say this; it was heard from only through its radio station, and a very occasional foray by a Western reporter.**

By July, too, the speculation that the Front might come under Peking's special influence had died away. It had been allowed to open an office in Moscow in April, with considerable fanfare, and it seemed plain that Hanoi's balancing act was being duplicated, not by coincidence. Keeping the Front under deep cover was surely Hanoi's decision. It might also reflect latent differences, but if so the Front did not dare to air them, or to flaunt the Hanoi Presidium.

As for Peking's own policy, by July it had taken fairly clear shape. However, whether from the American message of late February, or from the pace of American bombing and other actions -- most likely from the one confirming the other -- the Chinese fear of American direct attack on their territory had disappeared almost completely. ^(Multiple) Messages from Peking through reliable third countries in ^{LATE JUNE AND} early July seemed to be saying that China would not intervene militarily unless actually attacked. The limited

* A leading government researcher on the Viet Cong and the Front summed up his views the following January in an article that has never been contested on its facts. George A. Carver, Jr., "The Faceless Viet Cong," Foreign Affairs, April 1966. (Check date and whether Carver has been effectively rebutted.)

** Cite Chaffard in April if not done earlier.

11/30/71

scope of American objectives was once again conveyed in a Warsaw meeting in late June (check), and altogether the fear of direct Chinese involvement was low -- provided the air war in the North stayed limited. Its extension to Hanoi and Haiphong, or effective cutting of the supply lines from China down to Hanoi might, it was thought, bring in Chinese air power on a limited basis. But basically China's main policy was the confident encouragement of Hanoi and the consistent rejection of any move toward peace -- partly because it was wrong in their eyes, partly because of the Soviet role in the Geneva peace machinery. Chinese military equipment and other aid to North Vietnam was steadily going up, and by now included some rear service military forces, apparently to repair air raid damage and free North Vietnamese manpower.*

~~=====~~ SLIGHTLY CHANGED

Soviet policy, on the other hand, was ~~more uncertain~~ by July. Ambivalent as always between its desire for a Hanoi victory and its opposition to any Chinese gain, the Soviet Union was seen as under growing pressure as the months went by to take a firmer stand by giving much larger help to Hanoi. On July 12, a large new economic and military assistance undertaking was announced in Moscow. Concurrently, however, from Foreign Minister Gromyko down, Soviet representatives were trying to keep their lines open to Americans, and so stress continued Soviet interest in improving US-Soviet relations. Faced with the clear possibility of an escalation in the American scale of effort, the Soviets were responding by trying to ease the crisis a little.**

* These men were not in uniform, and their presence was kept in the lowest possible key by Hanoi. To American eyes, they never seemed to presage Chinese combat forces, but perhaps the focus on this issue obscured their importance in fortifying the North Vietnamese manpower pool. At peak, by (1967), the Chinese in North Vietnam numbered _____, in effect releasing hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese for combat and related duty.

11/30/71

This view of Soviet policy, already tentatively formed in Washington, hardened as the returns came in from Averell Harriman's visit in Moscow in mid-July. When the trip was ^{PROPOSED} set-up, many doubted that Harriman would be received, or if received that the discussion would break any new ground. However, the Governor's previous acquaintance with Premier Kosygin, from his wartime service as Ambassador in Moscow, may have ^{SEEKING REFUGAL} played a part; Harriman for a host of Russians, still stood for friendship, frankness, and the conclusion of the Test Ban Treaty two years before.

Thus, he was able to hold (2-3) long conversations with Kosygin, getting not only general assurances of Soviet desire to keep working on other policy problems, but strong evidence of the Soviet desire to cool Vietnam off somehow. Moscow, it seemed, would like to get negotiations started, while continuing to insist that ^{if} the US must deal direct with Hanoi without putting Moscow in the middle. More specifically, Kosygin thought Hanoi's four points might be negotiable, and seemed himself to favor keeping the 17th parallel ^(AND TWO VIETNAMS). Still not referring directly to Soviet concern about Chinese expansion (as lower-level Soviet representatives were now occasionally doing) Kosygin did suggest that Hanoi might negotiate at some point even if Peking disapproved. Unlike the shrill Soviet propaganda demands of February, Kosygin made no mention of a cessation of the bombing, although it could still be surmised that only such a move could allow the Soviets much chance to play a constructive role.* In short, there was still hope on the Soviet front, with the usual proviso that the tide must first turn.

* Despite the faint encouragement from these talks, we did not suppose it likely that the Soviet view of peace conformed at all to the American one. Probably, it was thought, the Soviets envisaged a large NLF role, with a high probability of eventual takeover -- less than Hanoi's "sure thing," more than anything except George Ball's compromise proposals might have envisaged.

11/30/71

A final worry existed, however, in late July. This was the meeting of the Warsaw Pact countries in Bucharest on July ___. Coinciding with the President's planned time for announcing his new policy moves, ~~this had an impact to be discussed in the next chapter.~~ An apparent challenge to the Soviet Union at that precise time might have tended to force them into a tough position before an expectant audience. The same point, as we shall see, applied all along to the various proposals to bring the Vietnam issue before the UN Security Council. Private Soviet behavior and attitudes were one thing, but if forced to take a public position before an audience that included the Communist world, the Russians were bound to out-Herod Herod -- and in the process to take positions from which they would then find it hard to retreat.

For the rivalry between the USSR and Communist China had, if anything, become more acute in the four months since the public dust-up of early March. Much that was later to come to light was not yet known, but recriminations over transit to Vietnam itself had been noticeable for some time. The latest information was that Chinese consent had been given to the movement of additional Soviet arms across China, but Moscow was still complaining in public that the Chinese had failed to coordinate their Vietnam policies with the Soviet Union.*

* At this stage, there was no knowledge either publicly or through intelligence sources of the dramatic Soviet proposal for military coordination, in April, and the Chinese refusal. The Soviets apparently put forward the idea of stationing their aircraft on South Chinese bases adjacent to Vietnam. For details, see _____.

11/30/71

Apart from the edgy state of cooperation over Vietnam, the Soviets and Chinese were outright rivals in two key theatres: the Communist world and the Afro-Asian grouping of nations. On the first, there had been no new developments, other than the Soviet re-entry since February into both North Vietnam and North Korea, vying for influence at China's doorstep. But in the Afro-Asian world the rivalry was acute over the planned Algiers Conference in June, a broadened reconvening of the 1955 Bandung nations, which Peking had hoped to use in part to shame the Soviet Union by excluding her as a "have" and "white" nation. The story of that conference belongs only partly under a Sino-Soviet heading, however. More broadly, it was a part of the picture of peaking Chinese influence in the "Third World," and should be told in that setting primarily.

China in the Afro-Asian Sphere and Africa

c. Preparations for the Algiers Conference, originally slated for (March) but finally postponed to late June, were a major part of the diplomatic calendar throughout the first six months of 1965. Never, before or since, has Chinese diplomacy been so active. Top Chinese officials visited (list of countries). At the 10th Anniversary meeting, in Bandung itself in April, the Chinese were the center of attention. Their cohorts were Indonesia, Pakistan, (list), and a number of African countries. Against this array of strength, India directly and courageously, and Japan and others more quietly, were almost powerless. One procedural decision after another went the way China wanted it, and by the early part of June it seemed likely that Algiers would be a festival of triumph for all that the Chinese stood for.

12/1/71

Using the rhetoric of revolution, with the element of power politics against India and the Soviet Union, well concealed and muted, China was riding high.

Then, fate intervened. On June 19th, ten days before the conference was to meet, a sudden military coup in Algiers threw out President Ben Bella in favor of Colonel Boumedienne. The causes were apparently local, though no doubt both the Communist giants suspected each other of having had a hand, and some suspected the US. The last was wholly untrue; the event was a complete surprise in Washington.

There ensued a strenuous ten days, in which the Chinese quickly embraced Boumedienne, and, through Foreign Minister Chen Yi, lobbied frantically to get the meeting held on schedule. In the end, ^{he} failed, and in the process ^{LOST MUCH OF HIS} ~~lost considerable~~ ground. The conference was postponed to November.

Apart from Chen Yi's aggressive arm-twisting at Algiers, the Chinese had by this time done much to hurt their own prestige in Africa. In another visit in early June, following up on his generally successful trip of early 1964, Chou en-Lai, supposedly the most sophisticated and worldly of all the rulers in Peking, told a Tanzanian welcoming audience that "an exceedingly favorable situation for revolution prevails today not only in Africa but also in Asia and Latin America." It was hardly the message to give to leaders who thought that they themselves embodied revolutions already accomplished, needing no second wave.*

* Stebbins, pp. 200-201.

12/1/71

Altogether, Chinese behavior in Africa, and her role in the Algiers debacle, "added up to a pronounced shift in the political balance not only in Africa but throughout the Afro-Asian world."* The militant group of nations led by China had lost ground to the more moderate group, but more properly what had happened was a failure by China to line up the under-developed areas of the world into any fixed pattern -- against the Soviet Union, against the advanced nations, or arbitrarily against each other. It was, as events turned out, a lasting failure for the expanded Chinese effort and policy that had begun in late 1963. An ebullient China could both over-reach and blunder.

China and the East Asian Balance

d. All this was generally sensed in Washington at the time. But if China had aimed too high and for the time being fallen on its face in the wider sphere of the 60 Afro-Asian nations, this did not appear to mean any loss in Chinese power and influence closer to home, in East Asia. There its two main allies, Indonesia and Pakistan, appeared to be as staunch as ever. They, with Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, went down with the ship at Algiers, fighting to the last alongside the Chinese. The group, moreover, had one success, the exclusion of Malaysia as a "colonial stooge."

The episode served, however, to line up ever more clearly who was with the Chinese and who was not. The private apprehensions evident for some time in India were expressed when Harriman, on his return trip from Moscow, stopped there on (late July date); while pressing all the time for a new bombing halt, Prime Minister Shastri made it abundantly clear that an American defeat in Vietnam would gravely concern India, as a harbinger of Chinese gains to come. (Check.)

* Ibid, p. 201.

12/1/71

Closer to the Vietnam scene, several actions in these months showed how strongly Prince Sihanouk's weathervane pointed to Peking.* In addition to this rejection of the very Cambodian Conference, he, himself, had urged for two years, Sihanouk now went far to embrace the NLF, and his utterances took on a stronger, leftish hue all the time.

In short, the line was being drawn ever more clearly. China was pressing, with one group of nations, and another group was clinging to American protection. The significance of the Vietnam conflict for this basic confrontation was of course the ^{key} area of judgment in Washington. But before turning specifically to this, let us look at the conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia, the Indonesian political situation, and American relations with Indonesia. Almost unnoticed by the United States public, to an objective eye this would have been seen as the second crucial area of conflict in East Asia at the time. As of July, it was going superbly for the Chinese.

True, the conflict was stalemated on the military front. The injection of British power during 1964, with substantial help from Australia and New Zealand, had stabilized the front in North Borneo. (More detailed description.)

But the military front was almost certainly less important, for Peking, than what was happening politically. Indeed, the bogging down of the best Indonesian military forces in Indonesia, and the inability of the Army leaders to reap the glory of victory, fitted well with the essential plan of the Indonesian Communist Party to gain power. As had been obvious for a long time, the basic rivalry was between the PKI and the Army, vying now

* See if we can find more vivid evidence.

12/1/71

for Sukarno's favor, jockeying for position when he died or became incapacitated from his well-publicized⁽¹²⁾ and serious kidney ailments.

In this rivalry, the gains in the spring and summer of 1965 were all to the PKI. Since _____, its program had been to "arm the people", and on _____ Sukarno issued an important decree to this end. It gave the PKI the handle to bring in large quantities of arms, almost all from China, and to create an eventual paramilitary force that would counter-balance the Army. In the meantime, one could surmise that part of the new arms might go to branches of the PKI itself. It was a major political gain, bitterly opposed by the Army.

In keeping with this steady leftward move, American relations with Indonesia had momentarily settled⁻⁶ at a very low point. The special mission of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in April produced a lot of serious discussion in an atmosphere of superficial cordiality, but no change for the better. The only fruit was an agreed rather than forced withdrawal of the Peace Corps, the last American group operating in the country. Sadly, in (May), Ambassador Howard P. Jones, who had gone to extraordinary lengths to try to win Sukarno's trust, wound up his service and was replaced in July by Marshall Green, who had been my deputy. The odds seemed better than even that Green would last only a few months before there was an outright break in relations. Before he left, there was debate whether the size of the American mission should be cut still further, to a truly skeleton nucleus. By then, it was impossible for any American official to have a conversation or a social engagement with any Indonesian; yet, at the cost of considerable hardship, it was decided to hang on for the moment and let Green form a new judgment.

12/1/71

Thus, as one looked at the trend of events within Indonesia, it seemed that an effective alignment between Peking and Djakarta had already come about, and that the PKI's chances of coming to power in a year or two were already much more than even. One did not have to suppose that a PKI-dominated Indonesia would be a simple satellite of China, in the sense that the East European countries were satellites of the Soviet Union. On the contrary, a Communist Indonesia would be very much its own master, capable like North Vietnam and North Korea, of resisting any Chinese encroachments on its own territory. ^{BUT IT WOULD BE AGGRESSIVE, AND WORKING IN PARALLEL WITH THE} Whatever comfort there might be in the picture of Tito-type conflicts 10-20 years hence, one could readily foresee that in the intervening period the mainland of Southeast Asia would have been carved up, and the independence of its countries ended.

Hence, no one within the Administration at any level, so far as I am aware, thought that the Chinese threat was reduced in importance by the nationalist character of the Communist regime in North Vietnam (or prospectively of a Communist Indonesia). This argument, strenuously urged in the spring of 1965 by Professor Hans Morgenthau of Chicago, was for a time taken up by Senator Fulbright, who included it in memoranda to the President in April. Within the Administration, as shown in the comments drafted in reply to the Senator, there was no dispute with the premise that Ho was a nationalist as well as a Communist, and that he like all North Vietnamese would resist Chinese control to the death. The difference was with the conclusion that this affected the seriousness of the issue in any significant degree.

12/1/71

Similarly, as the reader must have already noted, George Ball and those who worked with him did not at any time seek to argue that China was not in a militant and expansionist phase. Whatever differences in degree there might be on this judgment were small compared to the area of agreement. No one was vehement about it, or gave the ideological Communist component more than partial weight: the rhetoric of the Johnson Administration on China, as of the Kennedy Administration before it, was of a totally different order than the rhetoric of the 1950's. But no doubt existed that China was expansionist, and, as the situation appeared in mid-1965, prepared to take advantage of weakness wherever it occurred.*

The View of Southeast Asia

e. Where the difference within the Administration came was not on the actuality of the Chinese threat, but on the degree of vulnerability to it in Southeast Asia. None disagreed that North Vietnam, once in control of South Vietnam, would speedily take over Laos under a nominally Pathet Lao government. Nor did any disagree that, with or without the resourceful Prince Sihanouk, the Royal Khmer Kingdom of Cambodia would lose the substance of its independence. Or that Malaysia would in any circumstances, but especially with a continued threat from Indonesia, be very weak.

* See Chapter ___ for earlier discussion of this key point, and Chapter ___ for discussion of the views held by Asian Scholars and other experts in the United States. For a very flat-footed statement of views widely held in and out of government in the 1965 period, see Stebbins, 1965, p. 32. Quote also Adlai Stevenson's final draft letter to Paul Goodman. (Get cite. Ask the Senator's office for date - 1966, I think, in NYT.)

12/1/71

The keystone was, in mid-1965 more than ever, the Kingdom of Thailand. If Thailand stood firm, even the taking over of South Vietnam would only spread to the Indochina successor states. If Thailand succumbed, either totally or more likely under a facade of independence, Malaysia would become hopeless and Burma as well.

What had happened in Thailand since January of 1965? First, of course, the Thai had greatly extended their military cooperation with the United States, with ___ American forces now on Thai air bases and another ___ present in other roles. Yet the Thai continued to be extremely sensitive to publicity on these actions, not for military reasons but to avoid giving Hanoi and Peking a propaganda handle. One could see also a desire not to alarm the Thai people, thus a sign of the underlying insecurity of a nation accustomed to balancing on the sidelines rather than getting involved in struggles outside its borders.

Involved in another way the Thai already were. True to the Peking announcements of late 1964, the embryonic insurgency in the Northeast was becoming steadily more active. Money and arms from China were flowing to the small band of insurgents, and propaganda broadcasts from China were even more strident. Fairly early in the new game, training centers for Thai insurgents were located in North Vietnam, showing that the enterprise was joint.*

Faced now with a much more real threat, the Thai moved slowly at first, and their reluctance to change old ways was a source of deep concern for the Americans on the spot. However, by far the most worrisome factor in Thailand had grown more serious since January. This was an excessive sense of reliance on the United States, combined with a naive ignorance of the

* Get more specifics and check all these statements.

12/1/71

situation in Vietnam and resulting confidence that the United States could handle the North Vietnamese threat if it really wished. This misapprehension, reported from all sides, was part of the overall sense of American power in Southeast Asia that had developed over the previous decade. But the Thai had it in an advanced form, clouding both the planning for American support and the prognosis for what would happen in Thailand if Vietnam fell apart. On the first, McNamara was inclined to be tough and to cut the cloth of American military aid very tight, to compel the Thai to make reforms; others including myself were inclined to a more gradual and forthcoming approach. It was as hard a bureaucratic fight as there was to be in this period between the two major American Departments, and the President in the end usually went most of the way with the State viewpoint.

When it came to the future, the viewpoints were consistent. McNamara, and Rusk with him, thought that the Thai were basically weak and would not possibly stand if subjected to real pressure. Ball argued in a more hopeful vein that despite the initial bad Thai reactions to compromise or even Communist control in Vietnam:

"time is on our side provided we employ it effectively. Thailand is an independent nation with a long national history, and unlike South Vietnam an acute national consciousness. It has few domestic Communists and none of the instability that plagues its neighbors, Burma and Malaysia. Its one danger area, in the Northeast, is well in hand so far as preventive measures against insurgency are concerned. Securing the Mekong Valley will be critical in any long-run solution, whether by the partition of Laos, with Thai-U.S. forces occupying the western half, or by some cover arrangement. . . Provided we are willing to make the effort, Thailand can be a foundation of rock and not a bed of sand on which to base our political-military commitment to Southeast Asia."*

* Beacon Edition, Vol. 4, p. 618. As in other cases, I have checked the text against the original and made minor emendations.

12/1/71

I found myself, as often, between the two views. Conceding that in the event of apparent American defeat in Vietnam "the odds are not good that there would be a basic will to resist in Bangkok," I nonetheless felt that with stepped-up actions, such as an immediate increase in military assistance keyed to military reforms by the Thai themselves, "we might be able to change current Thai attitudes to some degree before they came to their 'moment of truth.'" Serious but not necessarily hopeless, was the sense of my memorandum to the President of July 1.*

Immediately thereafter, I received the response from Ambassador Graham Martin to my deliberately gloomy "worst case" circular of June 14th. Martin described again the Thai belief in American omnipotence -- and it was clear enough that he personally ^(4,50) felt strongly that the United States could deal with the Indochina situation if it chose.** The Thai, he thought would inevitably conclude from any failure in Vietnam that the United States attached little weight to Southeast Asia. Thus, any additional offer of American help would be regarded as a mere gesture, and would not affect the inevitable Thai decision to get on good terms, if they could, with the power of the future, China.

In the first two weeks of July, as one knew that the basic policy decision was being made, the judgment of Thailand became more and more central in my mind. I assembled material, and privately picked the brains of officers with Thai experience in the Department. My conclusion was that the odds were very heavy that Martin was right. It was a major additional

* Beacon Edition, Vol. 4, pp. 613-614, has about half of my lengthy discussion of Thailand, including the first quoted passage but not the second.

** Graham Martin, a veteran Foreign Service Officer, had served for many years in Paris, from (1947) to (1954), through the period of French debacle in Indochina. Like many officers with this exposure (and George Ball in a slightly different way), Martin had been deeply skeptical at the time of the 1954 American commitment in Southeast Asia. Once in, however, it was imperative to hold firm. This view may have colored his judgment from time to time.

12/1/71

factor in my reluctant move away from the view that we should simply try to hold on in Vietnam, accepting the substantial possibility of its collapse and consoling ourselves that Thailand could still be sustained. It did not seem a realistic hope.

From this central judgment of Thailand, felt strongly by Rusk and McNamara from the outset, eventually shared by me, it followed that, as my memorandum to the Senior Advisory Group noted, "in the event of Communist takeover in South Vietnam, the prognosis in mainland Southeast Asia is very gloomy." Control of Southeast Asia by China, North Vietnam, and Indonesia acting together seemed the virtually inevitable result, at least in circumstances where the United States had not appeared to take every reasonable step.

But, even if this was so, was Southeast Asia important enough to risk the kind of morass Ball vividly portrayed, and which all conceded to be possible? The alert reader will have noted that this question was put at the head of the written material given to the senior Advisory Group as I recall, it was both on my own mind and had been raised in the intense sessions of late June. The Senior Advisory Group, so far as my notes show, did not take it as a separate question in concluding that the stakes were "very high." Neither then nor in the various discussions do I recall that the question was isolated. Perhaps this was because it was almost too broad; in the end, such questions almost come down to a "feel" that is hard to communicate. Moreover, it was inseparable from the question of U.S. commitment and overall U.S. prestige, to which we shall come at the close of this chapter. The issue could not be Southeast Asia in the abstra

12/14/71

but the inescapable combination of adverse change and American defeat. Finally, the consequences of defeat-through-failure-to-act were not at all seen as confined to Southeast Asia. The point was the whole sum of effects, not -- to practical men -- assigning abstract values to any one or any one group.

Yet, this very view is, of course, an important part of the mental map of the top decision-makers. The tendency to see the whole world as locked in roughly similar problems, requiring the American role in varying degree, did tend to foreclose, or at least to mute, real debate on area priorities. Looking back, I see it as a mistake by George Ball to contest what would happen in Southeast Asia, rather than to hammer that, no matter what happened there, it was not worth this many chips. The point may have been implicit, minimized because he was thought to be a Europeanist open to the charge of local bias. Even so, had it come out the debate would have been more complete. I doubt, though, very much indeed that the result would have been different.

Northeast Asia

f. By July of 1965, in contrast to the heightened fears felt for Southeast Asia, the situation in Northeast Asia was better. South Korea, in particular, seemed stronger than it had appeared in the fall of 1964. Then, it had been one of the significant concerns in terms of possible collapse for psychological reasons. Since then, however, by a process that simply reflected events, the fear, as my quoted papers show, had been sharply reduced. For Northeast Asia as a whole, including not only South Korea but also the Philippines and the Republic of China, the judgment was that even the "worse case" in South Vietnam would not be likely to cause any collapses.

12/1/71

In the case of South Korea, there was, however, the subtle problem of whether to press for major ^(KOREAN) forces ^(IN VIETNAM). In late June, Ball opposed this flatly, noting (correctly, as of that time) that the South Vietnamese attitude was negative.* It was an interesting inversion of racial feelings; Vietnamese pride was offended by having to seek Asian help, but not by having to seek the help of powerful Western nations. In a short time, the desperate character of the situation led to the abandonment of this attitude, at least among Vietnamese leaders. During the McNamara trip of mid-July, it was quickly agreed that ^(THE REQUEST FOR) a full South Korean division should be ^{pressed,} requested, and in August agreement was reached to this end. In the process, the United States agreed generally that the dispatch of forces to South Vietnam should not leave the Korean government worse off either in its economic situation or in its defense posture. At this stage, the commitments needed for this purpose were modest. The policy guideline was to become more costly in 1966 and thereafter; in mid-1965, it was scarcely debated, so obvious did it seem that a small and directly threatened country, just emerging from grave difficulties, could not be expected to risk its own security even in a cause in which it greatly believed. From the standpoint of American policy, it would have been as absurd to take risks in Northeast Asia, as it would have been not to pursue the chance for a substantial diversification of the external forces sent to aid South Vietnam.

* Beacon Editions, Vol. 4, p. 619.

12/1/71

The decision to seek a Korean division was thus unquestioned. Nonetheless, as Ball's line of argument might have brought out more than it did, it tended to commit the United States even more thoroughly, and to reduce any remaining options for flexibility in the conduct of the war. Once others were fully in the boat, to the extent the Koreans thenceforth were, their views and the psychological consequences of ignoring or going against them added a not insignificant added weight to the forces of momentum that drove the United States forward.

Equally concerned with the Vietnam conflict, but for basic policy reasons not significantly engaged, was the Republic of China, on Taiwan. From time to time, the cry was raised in Congress or the press that Nationalist Chinese forces should be used in South Vietnam. Except for a few specialists at an earlier point, this idea was never seriously considered at any time in the Washington decision-making circle. President Chiang's talks with Secretary Rusk in 1964 had covered the Nationalist Chinese position: they would rather wait and hope that the Vietnam struggle might take a turn that would permit an attempted return to the mainland, with Chinese fighting Chinese. This was one factor, which Americans understood perhaps better than the occasional South Vietnamese who journeyed to Taiwan to sound out the situation for themselves.* The other objection, of course, was the belief that Nationalist Chinese, fighting in Vietnam, would now perhaps be the one thing, apart from a threat to Chinese territory itself, that could bring China into the war. This belief, and the American policy that went with it, never wavered. I must have explained the point a

dozen times at Congressional gatherings; in the end, a cry which had origi-

* In view of Vietnamese feelings toward Chiang, I doubt if these sounding ever envisaged more than a few more specialists, but we never bothered to find out knowing how impossible it was from a policy standpoint.

12/1/71

nally had some steam behind it died out almost completely.

To summarize, in mid-1965, both South Korea and Nationalist China were small and almost totally dependent on American support. Although each felt a deep stake in the Vietnam conflict, only South Korea could contribute effectively. Meanwhile, the underlying American policy was still to strengthen both countries in their encouraging progress, including the completion of the Japan-Korea ⁿormalization.

Japan itself was, of course, an entirely different picture. By mid-1965, its economic gains were only starting to come to world attention, and perhaps only beginning to sink in on the Japanese themselves. After the kind of fear and poverty Japan had experienced in the post-war decade, it is perhaps not surprising that it took so long for ^{THE} it to sink in, even ^{AND THEN} on Japanese leaders, ^{TO REALIZE} that their country was now bound to reach out, to be more a part of the world economic scene, to play more of a role in East Asia.

In retrospect, thoughtful observers would now say that 1965 was a turning point for Japan in ^{FIRST} but this respect.* Yet, like most big sea-changes, it was not so seen at the time. In mid-1965, Japanese self-confidence still seemed low, and it was by no means certain that Japan would become deeply involved even in the kind of limited economic activity that was being explored in the wake of President Johnson's Baltimore Speech. Eugene Black made his first trip to Tokyo in late June, and through quiet persuasiveness elicited a forthcoming Japanese response on the two specific items he had, with U Thant's advice, put at the head of his task, namely the launching of the Asian Development Bank and the Nan Ghum (check sp.) dam in Laos as the most practicable step under the Mekong Valley project. It was an important first step, but only that.

12/1/71

Much more prominent, throughout this period, was the agitated Japanese reaction to the Vietnam conflict itself, and to the American bombing of North Vietnam in particular. The Japanese press, predominantly leftist and vocal, beat a drum fire of criticism of the United States, drowning out the formal expressions of support for American general policy that came from the Sato government. Above all, all Japanese left or right were ridden with fear that the U.S. might get itself into a war with China, through the bombing, and that Japan's close American ties and alliance might then mean that Japan would be drawn into an ultimate nightmare. (In fact, the terms of the alliance did not require Japan to come to the aid of America, but solely the reverse. Nonetheless, the fear had foundation if the case had materialized.) Hence, every shade of Japanese opinion was tense and nervous.

This had registered in Washington through the spring and summer, and Japanese reactions gradually came to assume some weight in policy deliberations. To me, they seemed in the end ^(ALMOST) as important as the reactions of, say, Britain. In immediate policy terms the British attitude was the more significant, causing as it did, and the Japanese did not, shock waves to the rest of Europe and back to the United States itself. Still, the Japanese view was of growing importance.

Ambassador Reischauer's usual brilliant and full reporting had kept the Japanese opinion picture in present focus. In my June circular to key Asian posts, I ~~went beyond that and~~ asked him to comment on Japanese reactions, into the future, if the United States were to pursue any of the lines of policy being considered: more bombing, large-scale combat forces,

12/14/71

or some form of accepting the "worst case" of defeat. His answer, in a letter to me, was part of the file on this exchange, circulated to the small top policy circle, and was also incorporated into my own paper of July 1.

In brief, Reischauer concluded that an attempt to win the war by harder bombing would "have very damaging effects on the US/Japan relationship."* He rejected this option entirely. Large-scale combat forces, he thought, would not in principle bother the Japanese. In practice, however:

"...if as you suggest this were to lead to a slackening of the South Vietnamese effort and growing hostility on the part of the local population toward us, this would have catastrophic repercussions here. This is exactly what the Japanese fear may already be the situation, and if their fears are borne out in reality, there would be greatly increased public condemnation of our position. Even the government and our other supporters here would feel we had indeed gotten bogged down in a hopeless war against 'nationalism' in Asia. Under such circumstances it would be difficult for the government to resist demands that Japan cut itself loose as far as possible from the sinking ship of American policy in Asia."**

It was a formidable addition to the catalogue of the consequences that formed part of the arguments of Ball and myself. Yet, Reischauer recognized that collapse in South Vietnam would also have "a seriously adverse effect on Japan, strongly encouraging neutralism and a desire to be free of the defense association with the United States."*** Damned if you do, damned if you don't (as usual). The net result of Reischauer's analysis was that the sending of ground forces might be the least bad course, if a way could be found to keep it under the point where it produced South

* Quoted in Beacon Edition, Vol. 4, p. 614. This was George Ball summarizing parts of Reischauer's letter to me.

** Ibid., with corrections from the original.

*** Not quoted in the excerpt found in the Beacon Edition.

12/1/71

Vietnamese apathy or antipathy.

Reischauer had one further suggestion, which was original and went beyond anything put forward in Washington. Since it bears directly on the American view of Japan, it is worth examining for a moment at this distance of time.

Responding to my premise that, no matter what we did, collapse was all too likely, Reischauer argued that one way to cushion the impact in Asia would be to work toward an international conference in which a group of major nations, Japan included, would take responsibility for South Vietnam and for the security of Thailand and other threatened countries. By implication, the part concerning Vietnam might be only a face-saving acceptance of Hanoi's acquired control, but Reischauer thought that the rest could be given substance, and indeed that only through such an international sharing of responsibility could Thailand, in the immediate line of fire, or the less developed countries generally, be kept secure and independent.

It was an imaginative idea, in effect a kind of neutralization with more teeth in it. I fleshed it out as part of my "Holding On" memorandum of June 30, summarizing it as an attempt to deter further Chinese or North Vietnamese actions "by guarantees, participated in by the great powers, for the territorial integrity and status of the various nations covered by the conference."** My overall assessment was as follows:

~~* Not quoted in the Beacon Edition. (No footnote noted in text!)~~

** This is one of the major parts of that memorandum omitted in the Beacon Edition version, Vol. 4, pp. 610-615. In the original, several pages, including this discussion, come between the third and fourth paragraphs on p. 613.

12/14/71

There would be tremendous problems in such a conference, not least the problem of persuading the American public of the wisdom of a wholly new line of policy toward Southeast Asia. On the surface, the proposed conference resembles de Gaulle's original neutralization proposal, with the important difference that the subsequent course of events has brought the Soviets somewhat back into the Southeast Asian picture -- and of course with the vital difference that to have accepted the de Gaulle proposals at the time they were made would have been to accept prematurely the loss of South Vietnam.

In essence, the idea of a genuinely neutral Southeast Asia would be an attempt to enlist the great powers, including the Soviet Union, and also to play upon Vietnamese nationalism so that Vietnam itself, even under Communist rule, became a part of the structure resisting Chinese Communist expansion.

It is important to note that this kind of Southeast Asia fits perfectly with the idea of a broad development program for the area. Discussion of this project could well take place to some extent within the conference itself, but more likely on a parallel basis in close association with the conference. The parallel basis would be particularly appropriate because of the necessary and heavy involvement of the UN in the development program. However, the development aspect could certainly go hand in hand with the work of the conference, lending additional economic substance to the proposals for a basic regional political structure.

Was there a real chance for such a solution? Possibly in 1970; as of 1965 I do not believe so. Even as I drafted this adaptation of Reischauer's proposal, it seemed to me too much to hope for, and not least in respect to Japan itself. The situation just was not ready for this kind of great-power action.

So, to resume the account of events, my colleagues were sure. No one thought it had merit, and it was of course part only of a cushioning proposal that assumed the loss of South Vietnam to Hanoi, dying as the whole idea that cushioning was possible became dead. At best it is a historical footnote, mentioned at this point only to show that, while it was possible in theory to see Japan playing a stabilizing role in Southeast Asia, it was almost impossible to visualize this in practice. It was a part of the 1965 situation that may, with time, have ceased to be true.

12/9/71

Let us, then, sum up the mental map of East Asia. A threatening and thrusting China, more and more closely tied to Indonesia and working in parallel with North Vietnam, stood ready to exert its massive pressures on the independence of other Southeast Asian nations. Against this force, only American help could provide the needed material support and above all the needed confidence. To a degree more than in February of 1965, as February in turn had been more somber than the previous May and June, the picture of Communist domination in East Asia loomed likely in July of 1965, if South Vietnam fell to Hanoi. Such comparisons were not expressed at the time; they are, however, clearly reflected in the tone of thought and discussion. Once again, the difficulties and the stakes appeared to have grown side by side.

Other Areas of the World

g. To me individually, as I have said over and over in these chapters on 1964 and 1965, East Asia was the heart of the matter, plus perhaps the stake in Indian progress and continued independence. It was in these threatened areas that the damage to confidence in the United States would be greatest, and the same for the encouragement of "wars of national liberation" and of the militant Chinese posture as opposed to the chance of a Soviet-led evolution toward more co-existence.

To most of those in the top policy circle, however, and especially to Secretary Rusk, the worldwide application of the "commitment" and "wars of national liberation" arguments was of great weight. Rusk's memorandum of July 1 to the President put the matter simply: the whole structure of world peace would be endangered if the US failed to carry through a clear

12/9/71

commitment such as had now evolved in Vietnam. All of us had this sense of the worldwide American role in high degree, though some like myself tended to discount the impact of the Vietnam outcome in other areas as a matter of practical judgment. In Rusk, both principle and practical judgment coincided.

This was not because he held a different and harsher view of the Soviet Union, or Communist China for that matter, than others in government or the mainstream of responsible public opinion. On the contrary, he had been both hopeful and active since the apparent turn of Soviet policy in 1963, pushing for such pending moves as air routes, the Consular Convention, and above all the broadening of trade with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that had been ringingly recommended by a Presidential Task Force in the spring of 1965. As much as anyone, Rusk wanted detente with the Soviet Union.

At the same time, he held fast to the belief that what had changed in Soviet policy could change back again if there were the temptation of visible weakness and disarray. This could present itself not only in the key alliances that linked the U.S. to the NATO nations and a few others bilaterally, but in the nations that implicitly depended on American support in a pinch -- Israel and Iran being the leading examples in his mind.

In the NATO setting, the problem was compounded by the attitude and actions of General deGaulle. Already, he had taken French forces out of NATO; two other steps seemed likely -- asking the NATO headquarters to leave, and withdrawing France wholly from the Alliance in 1969. In the three years since France had shed the albatross of Algeria in June of 1962, French policy had been unremittingly directed to cutting down American

12/9/71

influence in Europe and everywhere else. To the Johnson Administration, as to that of President Kennedy, the anti-American aspect of deGaulle's ideas was the least of it -- a pinprick in most areas though more than that in South Vietnam, where French educational and commercial influence remained strong. What really mattered was that deGaulle seemed profoundly wrong: ~~in~~ in his vision of a Europe that would be a vehicle for French ambitions rather than cooperative in itself and with others; in his incitement to crass nationalism; in his example and advocacy of national nuclear weapons in particular. In all these causes, deGaulle's leading argument was that the United States could not be trusted to defend Europe. That he also argued that the Soviet threat was virtually non-existent was the privilege of the critic not truly seeking responsibility. The point was the attack on American credibility, used to draw nations away from America and to draw Europe back into the morass of nationalism that had led to such vast tragedy in the Twentieth Century.

This may seem a blunt paragraph. So long as deGaulle was active, practical considerations and the hope of change led both John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson to minimize the depth of the differences that existed. Detached critics have written more accurately, and it is time now to confirm their analysis.*

But how did this relate to Vietnam? Here, the practical judgment of Rusk and Ball, the latter if anything more exasperated at French policy than Rusk, diverged completely. To Rusk, it was essential to stand firm in Vietnam and refute the basic French thesis: if the United States could

* Cite Newhouse especially.

12/9/71

meet a commitment in tough and distant circumstances, there should be no doubt in Europe. Not to do this, Rusk thought, measurably raised the chances of a Gaullist Europe, which in turn he thought increased very seriously the danger of great-power collision of some sort in the classic European theater. True, the French would continue to carp and criticize no matter what the United States did in Vietnam, perhaps more strongly even than before, but the point was to frustrate the French main design.

Ball, as we have seen, drew exactly the opposite conclusion. In part ^{STEMMED} from his pessimistic forecast for American effectiveness in Vietnam, in part ^{FROM} because his personal "feel" ~~from long experience~~ was that dominant sentiment, at least among government and public opinion leaders on the Continent, regarded Vietnam as trivial and a diversion of American effort. Thus, far from being heartened by an American stand there, the Continent would regard the United States as both foolish and neglectful of Europe. Moreover, as the U.S. became bogged down, the result even for confidence in American commitments would become negative, perhaps drastically so.

To me, perhaps to others, the argument seemed a stand-off. One was tempted to take refuge in almost tautological reasoning: if Vietnam went well, the effect in Europe would be good, if badly, bad. But by July the odds on Vietnam going badly at high cost were much up, so that my own weighting of European factors alone would probably have been negative.

However, the Rusk stress on "commitments", paradoxically, had greater weight, for me and others, in relation to those nations that were not, strictly speaking, in any formal alliance relation to the U.S. Of these

12/9/71

essentially dependent countries, India stood within the circle of threat from China; the memory of 1962 affected Indian attitudes and American alike, even though India by this time had strong and explicit Soviet support as well. The ^(TOUGH) ~~real~~ cases where the threat was Soviet or Soviet-aided were Israel and Iran. Although neither was specifically threatened in mid-1965, their situations still seemed inherently precarious. As elsewhere, it was not so much the present picture, as the changed one arising from apparent weakness, that was feared. For both ^(COUNTRIES) ~~were~~ politically and psychologically of great importance in American policy, and both depended on the intangible picture of American resolve -- which had helped to save Iran in 1946 and had sustained Israel over the years (as since).

I would not know what weight to assign to these two specific countries. To me, as argued and mentioned from time to time, they seemed plausible cases where the danger would increase if the U.S. failed badly in Vietnam, or withdrew -- but much less so in the more ambiguous forms of defeat.

Lastly, there were the areas of less direct confrontation, Latin America and Africa. In the former, the Dominican intervention had by mid-1965 left no doubt where the United States stood on Communist subversive efforts. Africa was in much greater ferment, but not of any uniform character or tied nearly so much as in Latin America to expectations of American action. The fear of Chinese inroads, rising to a fairly acute point in early 1965, had by the middle of the year been much reduced, in part by the visible reaction to Chou en-lai's intemperate advocacy of second revolutions.

12/9/71

Thus, if one attempts^{ed} a case-by-case analysis of the impact in the world of US failure to meet its Vietnam commitment, ^(AT LEAST) one emerges with a mixed picture rather than a bleak one, or one with clearly identifiable fear points outside of East Asia. The fact is that the sense of serious crisis in June and July of 1965 was pretty much confined to Vietnam. The coming explosions between Pakistan and India, and within Indonesia, were not at all foreseen. The unravelling effect that Rusk feared on a world-wide basis from American failure in Vietnam was not a dramatic and urgent matter outside of Southeast Asia.

Yet to approach the question solely on a case-by-case basis is too superficial even to explain what Rusk and others in the Johnson Administration thought, still less to store away the questions to be asked in the end of the history of this time. For the vision of Rusk and others was a wider vision, in which the precise picture in any one area was a part, but in which more universal and psychological factors played a greater part.

Here one comes inescapably to the American view of ideological conflict at this period, as between Communist and non-Communist nations. The reader will note that I have almost omitted any analysis of this factor, in my account of policy papers and debates. This is true to history, for in fact there was almost no ideological emphasis in these materials and on these occasions.

Yet, of course a view of Communism and of the Communist nations, and of their threat or lack of it for other nations, was deeply held and ran through the deliberations as an unstated undercurrent of considerable importance. What was this view and sense of threat?

12/9/71

To start with, very little of the sense of threat had to do, by mid-1965, with the appeal of Communist theory as a guide to how societies should be run. In Russia and especially in Eastern Europe, economic conditions were slowly improving throughout the early Sixties, but not with the glamor that had attached to the large growth figures of the Fifties or to the Sputnik period of 1957-8; Communism in its more advanced state could deliver the goods, sometimes better, more often worse, than other structures of society -- and in the process it was steadily losing its more rigid and strictly "Communist" characteristics. As for the performance of Communism in less developed countries, China as a glowing example has, as noted in an earlier chapter, almost wholly lost its charismatic appeal by the early Sixties.* True, the very consolidation of China, and in 1964 the nuclear test, had a certain continuing prestige effect, but by 1965 the lure of China, even to Overseas Chinese, was small.

Rather, the threat from Communist nations, individually and collectively, was seen in much more separate and specific terms. Russia in Europe ^(and) the Middle East, China in Southeast Asia, North Vietnam in the Indochina area, all were separately seen and analyzed. It was a formidable sum total.

Yet if Communism was neither uniform nor united -- not ideologically appealing -- it continued to represent a special threat to Americans, in and out of government, for three reasons. First, because there was enough of a connection between the Communist nations so that a gain by one was a psychological boost to gains by others. Second, because Communist tech-

* Citations

12/9/71

niques of subversion ^{AND} ~~of~~ guerrilla warfare had an effectiveness going beyond the actual grievances of disaffection that might exist. And third, because the Communist form of government appeared on the whole both more repressive and more resistant to internal change than other forms of government. If a Communist nation imposed its will on another, that other country would be not only deprived of its independence, but subjected to a harsh and unbending form of rule, that could not be shaken off. Not only national independence but something in the lives of individual men would be diminished or snuffed out. Aggression by other countries was bad too, but without the special added element.

President Johnson and the men in his policy circle would not have thought of themselves as ideologues in the world outside American borders. But this core of common belief they did have, less perhaps than American leaders in the Fifties, but very much more than sophisticated intellectual opinion in the Seventies. No account of the mental map of those who made decision in mid-1965 would be complete without noting this point. Aggression and its dynamics, far more than Communism as such, were their focus. But the Communist element did contribute to the sense of threat and unfolding consequence that guided their actions, my own included.

12/3/71

Chapter 29: Congressional and Public Opinion, June-July 1965

This chapter will be a lengthy treatment of the major publications and of Congressional utterances during the period roughly from June 10 through July 28. some of its leading motifs would be:

a. Summary

b. The gravity of the situation was pretty clearly sensed. As always the public had a lot else on its mind (specify), but this time Vietnam was on the front page all the time, as not in December and January.

c. In the face of the record, the urging of quick or easy negotiating solutions had greatly diminished since January-February. Fulbright on June 15 really defended the Administration record solidly and thought there was no early chance of negotiations.

d. The spectrum of opinion had thus moved a shade harder. More voice especially in Congress, were urging a really tough bombing campaign, the polls (but few Congress figures) favored doing what had to be done, without especially heavier bombing, some like Fulbright favored hanging on without any escalation, almost none favored withdrawal. Compare the external picture with the internal one.

e. The specific prospect in Congress was that the kind of policy now decided would have been assailed from both sides, with possible sharp pressures to hit harder. Congressional voices for frankness, new resolutions, etc. had been heard, but only in a muted way (Javits, find others). Knowing that a major decision was in the works, the voices heard most loudly to let Congress in fully were not those of the skeptics or the do-less crowd, but those of the hit-harder Republicans. Leading members of Congress, such as Fulbright, were utterly silent on any insistence on Congressional roles.

f. Similarly, the public by late July was conditioned to a tough escalation, and resigned to it. Polls and editorials both showed this, and again the number urging any Great Debate was very small.

12/9/71

Chapter 30: Changes and Chances: The Action~~s~~ Decision of July 28

a. Between July 21st and July 28th, the President was engaged in transforming the policy decision into a concrete program of action. It was a period of intense activity, in which alternate military plans were prepared in the Pentagon while negotiating plans were brought to full readiness in the State Department. The President himself ^(MET) with his senior advisors and doubtless with many others including Congressional leaders. Over the weekend of July 24-25, he was secluded at Camp David, with McNamara the principal guest.

The result was a major change in the program presented to him on the 21st. Instead of seeking Congressional approval for a major call-up of reserve forces, the President decided to raise the necessary manpower, over the next year, by the method of larger draft calls. The only Congressional action would be a modest \$1.7 billion military supplemental appropriation, sure to be comparatively easy and non-controversial. As to the proposed force strengths, the President adhered to the 44 battalion plan for 175,000-plus men to be sent in 1965, but announced as a firm additional number only the 50,000 who were to go almost at once. Finally, the presentation to the country took the form of a daytime press conference, not a set speech to Congress or an evening TV appearance.

In short, the action decision did not change the substance of the policy decision, but did notably soften the tone of its presentation to the country and the world, avoiding a new Congressional mandate and a great debate. Just why the President acted in this way -- which history may judge to be almost as important as the policy decision itself -- he

12/9/71

himself explained only in general terms at his final policy meetings of July 27th. This chapter seeks to get at the substance of the decision, and the reasons for it.

For this, the first essential is the military forecast, not only for 1965 but for future years. What kind of war, and how long, was the President advised this would be? What manpower and financial requirements were foreseen, and what ways of meeting these?

Second, what were the foreign policy factors, both in direct relation to the war and in relation to wider American objectives such as improved relations with the Soviet Union?

Third, what were the domestic and Congressional factors? Especially, what was the inter-relation between "guns and butter," between the new Vietnam program and the President's Great Society legislation?

Finally, as his personal conclusion from all these factors, what did the President remove, modify, or add? What in the end did he do?

The Military Prognosis and Prescription

b. In the two weeks before McNamara left for Saigon on July 15th, a great deal of work had gone into ^(PLANNING) ~~PLANNING~~ beyond 1965 and beyond the sending of the 175,000-man, 44-battalion force recommended for early deployment. In fact, the time period and the force went together, for this force represented close to the maximum that could be sent in any event before the end of 1965, without cutting corners drastically in terms of training and preparedness. It was a practical limitation, never at any time a judgment that this was all that would be needed. *IN FACT, MORE WOULD SURELY BE REQUIRED.*

12/9/71

This Westmoreland had made explicit as early as June 24th, in a message to the JCS.* McNamara had at once picked up the point, and in *HIS* July 1 memorandum of the President opined that the 1966 requirement might be as much as double the 44-battalion level.** Shortly thereafter the question of basic strategy and later force needs was put to a JCS Study Group by Assistant Secretary McNaughton, and the resulting study, received on July 14, estimated that 35 additional battalions might be needed in 1966.*** Even before its completion, by July 12, McNamara had directed studies to see how a total of 63 additional battalions could be made available in the period through roughly mid-1966.**** This was a composite total of possible reserve call-ups and of additions to basic strength, so that the strategic reserve in the United States would be kept at desired levels. As the study stood on the 19th, the total force increase in mid-1966 would have been about 650,000 with Reserves retained, or about 500,000 if the Reserves served only a year and then were released. Such estimates of added manpower requirements, however, did not mean at all that such American force levels actually in Vietnam were then foreseen; under the military planning required for one-year tours of duty in Vietnam, about 1 1/2 additional men had to be in the total force at any time to have 1 man actually in Vietnam, after allowance for travel and training time. It goes without saying that this was a wasteful system, ^{PARTLY} inherent in the short ~~tours of duty and the~~ immense distance to Vietnam, ^{PARTLY DUE TO THE}

* Beacon 3-481.

** Beacon 4-296.

*** Beacon 4-295.

**** Beacon 4-297.

***** See CHAPTER — FOLLOWING.

INFLEXIBLE ADHERENCE TO
SHORT TOURS OF DUTY

12/9/71

It was with these estimates in hand that both the President and McNamara in the week of July 14th referred publicly to the likelihood that there would be reserve call-ups. At this stage, McNamara's planners, both civilian and military, were firmly of the opinion that a reserve call-up of at least 150,000 men was the only way to build up total force strength rapidly enough. They so advised McNamara, and he in turn the President. The statements were not trial balloons, but fair reflections of the state of thinking. As envisaged from the legal standpoint, a reserve call-up of any size also involved a "declaration of national emergency"; ⁴ the terms thus came to be used interchangeably.

On the 16th and 18th, in Saigon, McNamara had long and detailed sessions with Westmoreland and his staff. From this he derived the figures put in his report to the President, 175,000 men in Vietnam by the end of 1965, with the understanding that "the deployment of more men (perhaps 100,000) may be necessary in early 1966, and that the deployment of additional forces thereafter is possible but will depend on developments."* With these estimates from the commander, it seemed that military thinking in Saigon and Washington was close together. In the following week, the plan for raising 63 additional battalions was fleshed out for McNamara's use on his return. On the 17th itself, when Vance's cable to McNamara conveyed the President's decision on the 44-battalion force for 1965, the message was that the President was also prepared to "bull" the reserve call-up through Senator Stennis, who was thought to

* Beacon 4-297.

12/10/71

be opposed. When McNamara returned, his report to the President called for the immediate raising of 235,000 men from the Reserves and National Guard, and a more gradual increase of 375,000 men from the draft and recruitment. This was actually larger from the Reserves and Guard than the Washington plan. All told, it called for 600,000 more men to be available by mid-1966. Orally, my recollection is that at the first meeting McNamara thought that a best guess of American forces in Vietnam by that time would be on the order of 330,000.* His planning figures thus allowed for some margin of under-estimation, even at this stage, or for making it as certain as possible that the reserves could be released at the end of a single year of service.

Thus, the question of policy started with minimum arithmetical needs. But of course the problem went much beyond this. What might be expected beyond mid-1966 was critical for the way the problem should be approached.

On this central point, McNamara's report to the President avoided any prediction, and in the large policy meetings there was no attempt to say that the military task could be "done" or "under control" in any specified time period. Hence, I at least have a real gap, unbridged by recollection or available materials. Obviously, the President had some idea of time, and so did McNamara and others. But the direct evidence of what they thought is almost non-existent, leaving one to draw inferences from available pieces of collateral evidence.

* Check any source for this.

12/10/71

The first such piece of evidence is, of course, what General Westmoreland predicted. His Concept of Operations, presented orally to McNamara during the July visit, envisaged three phases. Phase I ran to the end of 1965 and was directed to halting the losing trend. Phase II was the resumption of the offensive in the first half of 1966, with enemy forces in high priority areas sufficiently destroyed to permit government pacification work to get under way again. Phase III was the time required to destroy the rest of the enemy main forces, this being estimated to take "if the enemy persisted, a period of a year to a year and a half following Phase II."* In other words, Westmoreland estimated that by mid-1967 or perhaps the end of 1967, the significant fighting forces of the Viet Cong, even with anticipated reinforcements from the North, would have been removed from action. His estimate also carried the clear implication that the going would be downhill, with government and American forces clearly on top, after about mid-1966, and that an all-out effort would be needed for only about two years at most.

It does not appear that this Westmoreland estimate was made available to the President at least until late August, when it was sent to Washington in writing. As already noted, McNamara's report to the President mentioned no such dates or expectations, suggesting either that Phase III and its duration had not been extensively discussed in Saigon or that McNamara regarded any prediction running beyond the next year as too speculative to be useful.

* Beacon 4-296, 3-482.

12/10/71

Meanwhile, McNamara had available to him at least one thoughtful prediction that was decidedly more gloomy than Westmoreland's. On July 13, before the Saigon visit, John McNaughton gave McNamara his personal judgment in a private memorandum not shared with any others, so far as I am aware. McNaughton expressed himself in mathematical terms, on the assumption that, as he urged, the U.S. ~~should~~^{would} go up to the 175,000-man level, with additional forces thereafter as needed to try for what he called a "win." This was defined as convincing Hanoi it could not win, and thus producing a settlement or state of facts under which the government had effective control in the country.* As between success so defined, an inconclusive situation, and defeat through government collapse, his likelihood guesses were year by year as follows:

--for the year 1966: 2 chances in 10 of success, 7 of an inconclusive situation, 1 of defeat;

--for the year 1967: 4, 4 1/2, and 1 1/2 respectively;

--for the year 1968: 5, 3, and 2.**

In essence, McNaughton thought that[#] the chances were only even that a favorable outcome could be achieved within roughly three years, a pessimistic (and relatively accurate) judgment. Under his thinking, a high level of American effort would well be needed for three years or more.

Still a third line of thought existed at this time. McNaughton saw the possibility that the presence of massive American forces "over a long period of time" might set off negative reactions that would nullify their military gains; hence, his chance of defeat grew slowly over time.***

* For this point, see a separate but contemporaneous McNaughton memorandum. Beacon 4-292. Obviously, the definition^(of success) was fluid, combining military and political factors. Its phrasing is a more honest confession of the difficulty of definition than some of the more spuriously exact phrases that appeared in other papers.

** Beacon 3-483.

*** The quotation is from his July memorandum to the JCS Study Group. Beacon:

12/10/71

On the other hand, the Ball argument, which I largely shared, was that the negative impact might come much sooner and harder, and that large-scale American combat forces ^{MIGHT} ~~just would~~ not work at all. In line with this judgment, I would have rated the chances of short-term defeat considerably higher than McNaughton.* If, however, we got over the initial ^(I THOUGHT) hump and our forces proved themselves, then ^{MIGHT BE} a favorable trend ¹⁹⁴⁵⁻⁶⁶ ~~once~~ established ¹⁹⁴⁷ ~~might~~ move quite rapidly. On this, I relied in part on experience in watching the rapid change in the Greek civil war between the fall of 1947 and the effective conclusion in 1949; the lesson of that change seemed to be that once the tide started to turn it moved rapidly.*² In short, had I committed my thoughts to paper, I would probably have put the odds of a favorable outcome, or at least of one being clearly in view, at 50-50 for the year 1967, and higher than that for 1968. Two or three years of American military action at a high level would be required, then perhaps a reduced effort as the South Vietnamese government took hold and extended its control.

I believe this line of thought was not confined to myself, and may have been nearer the mid-point of judgment among the senior policy circle than either the Westmoreland or McNaughton views. But the point must remain in doubt, as to the true inner expectations of the President or of his top civilian advisors in deciding on the conduct of the war at this period. What is, of course, painfully obvious is that all of the recorded estimates, even that of McNaughton, were too sanguine from the outset.

THE SWIFT IN THE GREEK WAR IS

* Sometimes attributed to Tito's break with the USSR in June of 1948, and the resulting closing of that ^{30,000} sector of the Greek border to infiltration and arms. In fact, as the best scholars agree, the change had come earlier than June of 1948, and was simply accelerated by Tito's action. My vantage point at the time was as a young private lawyer working as junior counsel for the Greek government in its Washington dealings; in that capacity I followed the war very closely, and later read much of the literature on it. (Cite sources

* See my ...

12/10/71

Before leaving the subject, let us take a moment longer on this question of error. More than any other factor, what was misjudged was North Vietnamese reinforcement capability. For 1965 alone, the estimate of a total of 25 to 30,000 North Vietnamese regulars by the end of the year appears to have been fairly near the mark.* What was not foreseen, however, was the North Vietnamese capacity to send, and to equip with modern weapons, 80-85,000 men in each of the following years 1966 and 1967.** In essence, Viet Cong capacity was not much misjudged: North Vietnamese capacity was, ^{AND SO, LESS CONCRETELY, WAS SOUTH VIETNAMESE CAPACITY OVER-RATED.} We shall return to this subject in the later Part III of this book, assessing the whole conduct of the war.

Come back to the points that were crucial to the President's action decision. As of July 17, he had expected to "bull through" a reserve call-up, and on the 21st McNamara so recommended, on a large scale of 235,000 men from both the Reserves and National Guard. In weighing whether to do this, ^{THE PRESIDENT MUST HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY TWO NEGATIVE FACTORS} ~~the President weighed much wider factors as well~~ but within the military framework alone. ~~two must have struck him.~~ First and foremost, the needed increase of overall military strength was not just for a peak in mid-1966, but would have to be maintained for a considerably longer time. This was not, as Berlin had appeared in 1961, a crisis that would be short-lived, either dying out or getting to the point of total mobilization and conflict fairly rapidly. If the Reserves came in for a year and then left, there would still be a need and probably one that was still growing. It was not a one-shot situation.

* The CIA estimate of July 1965 will be found in Beacon 3-485. The retrospective government estimate, as of late 1967 with subsequent information used, is in Falk, II, pp. 1204-5.

** Falk, II. p. 1204.

12/10/71

Second, the Reserve units as such would not play ^{LITTLE} any part at all in the Vietnam war. For the most part, their unit specialities were those designed to flesh out a full mobilization of American military strength for a sophisticated war. Again, this had been relevant in 1961, although even then there had been an outcry about men being idle. This time, the Reserve units would be almost wholly filling a gap in home-front reserve strength, and only in bits and pieces could they be actually used in Vietnam.

So ^{EVEN} the military factors on calling up the reserves were mixed. On the one hand, the potential need was for something like 300,000-plus forces in Vietnam in a year's time, which in turn meant that an overall increase of 600,000 men to permit the maintenance of a "pipe line" and "in training" force and of worldwide strategic reserves at previous levels. On the other hand, the orthodox method of calling up the Reserves and National Guard in many ways did not fit the case.

This was the manpower aspect of the action decision the President had now to make. Financially, the clearest fact was that the raising of these additional men would in pay and training costs alone require \$1-2 billion. In addition, there would be ^{THE} cost of ammunition and lost equipment, and the cost of equipping the additional units. However, these latter two were hard to estimate until there was some battle experience, and until there had been a careful study of existing equipment reserves. Hence the options quickly identified themselves: to seek only the identifiable \$1-2 billion and wait until early 1966 to present the remainder

12/10/71

on an estimate grounded in experience, or to present a rounded and much larger figure, perhaps \$8-10 billion, for immediate passage. In the Korean conflict of 1950, it was the latter that had been done. Then, however, the drastic state of shortage throughout the armed services warranted the assumption that a great deal more would be needed no matter what. In mid-1965, because of the great build-up in equipment levels since 1962, the need to do more, for general readiness purposes, was very much less.

Finally, the financial problem wound back into the question of calling up the Reserves and Guard. Their rank-heavy structure and high pay per man meant higher immediate costs than the alternative method of relying entirely on extended tours of duty and enlarged draft calls.

All in all, as McNamara at the President's direction put his staff to work on alternatives to the Reserve call-up, the military and financial arguments for doing the job some other way were significant, though not perhaps in themselves decisive. By the time McNamara met with the President at Camp David, he was prepared to advise him that the 600,000 additional men could be raised without the reserve call-up, and that his senior military advisors thought the drawbacks of the draft method -- confusion, a slower rate of build-up, less experienced men -- were acceptable. This was the crucial "hard" input for the President's decision. If calling the Reserves had been judged a military necessity, then the appeal to Congress and the country would necessarily have had to be in a loud and even strident tone. As it was, McNamara's staffwork between the 21st and 25th gave the President an option to speak loud, softly, or in between, whichever seemed most wise for central reasons of foreign policy and domestic leadership.

12/10/71

Foreign Policy Factors

c. Under the policy decision effectively made on July 21, the President envisaged a determined effort to open channels of communication with Hanoi and to lay a groundwork for eventual negotiations.* George Ball was given the responsibility for this effort; the alternatives considered, and the important actions taken, are discussed in the next chapter. In his presentation to the country, the President all along intended to stress this effort and to break some new ground in defining the conditions for negotiation and a settlement.

Moreover, it was a basic part of the action decision that key friendly countries should be approached in advance, and urged to contribute additional forces, in a few cases, or at least additional forms of humanitarian assistance. This effort was in fact undertaken prior to the Presidential announcement, and consumed much of my own time during this final week. Messages indicating the general nature of the American plan, and urging additional aid to Vietnam, went on July 25th to some ___ countries. More specific and pointed messages went to those closest to the effort.** By the 27th, a large number of responses were in hand, indicating that some help would be forthcoming, but not suggesting any significant change in the pattern of national reactions to the Vietnam problem and American policy there. This was no surprise.

In thus reviewing briefly the intended supporting actions abroad, *THE READER MAY WONDER WHETHER* any consideration was given to a change in the international status of the war. One theoretical possibility, discussed in the next chapter, would have been to seek a United Nations Security Council resolution. More to

* Cite previous page, or drop reference to past. It may not have been said on July 21 but have come in instructions to Ball during the week.

** See Chapter ___ below for more detail and results.

12/10/71

the point, in some hindsight comment, would have been to seek a Declaration of War, ^(THIS STEP IT MAY BE ARGUED, WOULD HAVE) dramatizing for the world as well as for the American people the new depth of American involvement and resolve to see the conflict through to an acceptable conclusion.

✓ Yet, in the whole June-July policy debate, as in the November-February debate before it, this step was never seriously advocated or considered. Here the reasons included the clear legal judgment that such a Declaration was not required under the American Constitution -- that the President's inherent authority, under such precedents as Korea, the supporting SEATO Treaty and 1964 Congressional Resolution, and the several Congressional actions providing material support for Vietnam, all indicated that the President would be acting legally to continue to prosecute the war without a formal Declaration.

All along, however, this constitutional judgment was only part of the picture. Constitutionally required or no, a Declaration might have seemed a wise policy move. That it did not, but was on the contrary decisively rejected all along, almost without internal debate, was as I saw it the result of critical foreign policy judgments. Since these bear in part on the very factors that affected the form and content of President Johnson's July 28 policy statement, it is worth setting them forth with care.

In simple terms, I and others concerned solely with advice on foreign policy thought, and on the rare occasions argued, that a Declaration of War, on the historical precedents from American wars, almost necessarily *Cooper, 286, raises this point.

12/10/71

carried to friend and foe alike the message of possible all-out military action against the territory of the other party. Argue as one might that this should not be the connotation, it seemed inevitable that in the mid-1960's it would be seen in this light -- by North Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union principally, and to a considerable and important extent in Japan and throughout Asia.

It is a little over-simplified to say that, given this interpretation, it was feared that some new treaty obligation would come into force as between North Vietnam, and the two supporting Communist giants. So far as I can recall, American intelligence information never suggested the existence of such a formal undertaking. In substance, however, the result could only be to increase the leverage of Hanoi on Moscow and Peking for more direct military aid, to sharpen the fears of all three, and thus to reduce the chances of any tendency to compromise or abandonment of the use of force in South Vietnam.*

This was the decisive point, concerning a Declaration of War. It would say to our enemies or potential enemies something that would cause them to make peace much more difficult and distant -- and into the bargain it would be something the United States did not in fact mean or intend. To intensify conflict on the basis of a ~~true~~ ^{CEASE} reading of American intent was bad enough: in this case, the reading would not have been ~~true~~ ^{ACCURATE}.

True, a Declaration would have gone far to convince Hanoi and Saigon alike, and the respective populations of North and South Vietnam, that America was firm. It would have been temporarily heartening in most of

* Although President Johnson made the "possible treaty" argument in a TV interview in February 1970, it disappears in his published memoirs. Compare the quotation from the TV interview at Cooper, p. 286, with Johnson, pp. 149-150.

12/15/71

East Asia, with the major minus that it would have increased Japanese fear of a wider war. But all these calculations, as of mid-1965 or any other time when a Declaration might theoretically have been considered, paled into insignificance alongside the central point of Communist reactions. As of mid-1965, perhaps even a shade more than at other times, it seemed crucial to avoid misinterpretation, and to be as precise and limited as possible in the presentation of American purposes.

We come now to the issues that were actually presented in July of 1965. What were the pros and cons, from a foreign policy standpoint, of a "loud and clear" Presidential decision and announcement, accompanied by major Congressional action and a Great Debate, versus a "low key" announcement without such action or Debate?

On this question, there was never a separate debate in the concluding July week between the 21st and 28th. Ambassador Thompson hoped that the presentation would not put the Soviet Union overwhelmingly on the spot to do more, and Assistant Secretary Harlan Cleveland, working on U.N. approaches, that the presentation would play down military force as much as possible in favor of stress on negotiations.

But these were arguments only of atmosphere and degree. In particular, the concrete fear of much stronger Soviet or Chinese military action in Vietnam did not bulk large in the advice given to the President, specifically in the CIA estimate of July 23, which contained a paragraph on this point. The CIA conclusion was that moderating the form of ann-

12/15/71

ouncement and accompanying actions would mitigate any crisis atmosphere, but not change the basic reactions of the key Communist nations.* They would both do more in any case.

Thus, the foreign policy arguments against a "loud and clear" course in July 1965, were of an entirely different force and consequences than those against a Declaration of War. They had at most very modest weight, and might well have been outweighed, had the case been really argued on foreign policy grounds, by the clear advantages of the "loud and clear" course in persuading Hanoi of American firmness, and even in giving the Russians a stronger argument of fear with which to influence Hanoi.

The point in the end, as I saw it, was that the foreign policy arguments concerning the action decision were not of great consequence. The amount of the announced force increase, the reserve call-up, and even a Congressional debate -- all could have been argued both ways from the purely foreign standpoint. In the end, it was judgment of domestic and Congressional factors that was decisive.

*This paragraph is erroneously summarized in the DOD study. Beacon 3-485; _____. Contrary to the study, the CIA estimate was not a "recommendation" in any sense, but solely a judgment on a variant probably suggested from policy circles during the preparation of the paper. Moreover, it was a balanced conclusion, as indicated in the text above.

12/13/71

The American Congress and Public

d. One of the most fascinating files in the Johnson Library in Texas must be the record of the President's conversations with senior members of Congress during the month of July 1965. From general advice on how to respond to the crisis in Vietnam, the discussion must have ranged in the end to the precise and difficult questions with which the President was wrestling in that last week. Above all, the issue before the President was whether to seek from the Congress some large and dramatic form of action that would compel a hard and forthright look at the war, and a specific and affirmative vote to engage large-scale American forces.

Lacking access to that direct evidence, I can give only a rough picture of the kind of factors that may have been taken into account. Even the possible form of Congressional action is not 100% clear: so far as I know, it would have been solely the request for Congressional authority to call to active duty some 150-200,000 men from the Reserves and National Guard. Such authority, as it had been granted in 1961 for the Berlin crisis of that year, would require a bill passed by both Houses of Congress. The possible alternative, or additional measure, might have been a renewed or amended Congressional Resolution as passed in August 1964; however, as noted in the last chapter, this possibility had been aired in the Javits proposal of late June, without sparking strong interest in any quarter. I do not believe it was renewed in late July, although one or two papers referred generally to a "resolution" -- presumably as shorthand to cover the reserve matter.

12/13/71

Assuming that the proposed action would have been the reserve call-up, this would have been quite sufficient to stir up a full response from both Congress and the public. One of the outstanding characteristics of the Reserve system, as practiced in the United States at this time, was that it involved mature men, with a high percentage of settled family situations and personal obligations. Although volunteer in nature and thus appealing to men of patriotic bent, the Reserves have also had a political weight and voice far out of proportion to their numbers. To call any significant number was to invite a political squall; to call, as was here proposed, a very large number indeed was to set off a sure-fire political storm. Which is exactly what was anticipated in the planning papers prepared by myself and others in the period from July 15 onward.

But what kind of a storm? Here it is important to note that the Reserves, and the political figures most subject to their influence, were predominantly, if not overwhelmingly, "hard line" on Vietnam. Except in a few Eastern states, they contained few men from the groups that by this time were questioning ~~to opposed~~ a continued American effort in Vietnam. Grumbling in the best American tradition that they should have to make the sacrifice, they would in the end respond to the call -- but in the process would exert all their political muscle to see that their sacrifice produced some visible gain. In other words, a war worth calling out the reserves for had to be a war worth fighting hard and winning -- just as quickly as possible.

12/13/71

This was one political facet of the problem. Another, of course, was the personal sacrifice and inequity involved in any selective call-up. For all the reforms McNamara had sought, and largely obtained; in the preceding three years, it remained true that the Reserves were a patchwork quilt, totally unlike the integrated reserve forces of other countries as disparate as Russia and Switzerland. Misfits and hardship cases would be legion, and there would be an undercurrent of agitation directed both against the President and against the men in Congress who voted him authority to take the step.

For the men in Congress, it was probably this latter factor that had greatest weight. From the time, on July (13 and 14) when the President and McNamara suggested a reserve call-up, the published speeches from Capitol Hill alone tell a clear story of Congressional anguish.*

They also paint a clear picture of rising Congressional sentiment to use much stronger military measures. In the two debating weeks from the 12th to the 23rd of July, no less than _____ Senators or Congressmen, chiefly Republican, spoke out for stepped-up bombing of North Vietnam. On July ____, the Republican minority leader, Congressman Gerald Ford of Michigan spoke out most strongly, suggesting that a very large number of Republicans ^{WERE} ~~who~~ ^{ING} apply pressure to avoid substantial ground forces and try to defeat Hanoi by bombing.

In short the pressures from the right and from the hard-liners were visibly rising in late July. As the analysis of public opinion in the preceding chapter has shown, Congressional sentiment to hit really hard had a substantial counterpart in the general public. One can only guess how this viewpoint would have fared in a prolonged debate, but it is hard to

* Citations, BM.

12/13/71

imagine any development that would have diminished it. Indeed, the power structure of both Senate and House was weighted in this direction at this time -- in the Senate through such men as Senators Russell, Stennis, and Symington, and in the House through the Republican leadership in particular. It would have taken no effort of the imagination at all to suppose that a great many men would have given their approval for the politically painful call-up of Reserves only on the express or implied condition that the President would concurrently order a marked step-up in the bombing of the North, possibly combined with measures to close the port of Haiphong.

To record the strength of this hard-line feeling in the Congress, as it stood in mid-1965 on all the evidence, is not to raise again the question of long-range prediction of American public reaction. In believing that the hard-liners would be the powerful source of dissent in the future, the President and many others, including myself, were to be proved wrong in the years to come. But for the short-term judgments that had to be made in July of 1965, there could be little doubt that a large share of the outcry would come from the right -- and with a price in the strategy and conduct of the war.

What, then, of the opposite wing of opinion, the skeptical-to-opposed? Here, as the previous chapter has noted, there had been some increase in numbers from the May appropriation vote onward. By mid-July perhaps (10) Senators had expressed themselves in ways that suggested they would vote against an increased American military effort, or at least demand an extensive presentation and thereafter speak at length on the floor. (In the House, the number might have been a little greater, but for parliamentary

12/14/71

purposes would have been insignificant because of the stricter procedural rules and tighter leadership control of that body.) All told, one informed guess which I recall from the discussion of the time was that in the end about 10-12 Senators would vote against the legislation.

It was the "in the end" that was the real hooker. As small a group of opponents as 10-12 would be sufficient to conduct a filibuster, and in the traditions of the Senate on free debate, weeks could pass before the Senate as a whole would feel entitled to apply the remedy of cloture. In the meantime, American policy would be, or at least appear to be, totally frozen and uncertain -- with unpredictable results in Hanoi and Saigon in particular, and to some extent in other key quarters abroad.

Many a reader may exclaim at this point: "But that is the price of democracy!" Yet the many who then ^{FELT} or later came to feel that the opponents of the war ^{WERE} ~~had been~~ right would do well to be honest about their feelings toward the filibuster in other situations. One cannot have it both ways, as no one has known better than the man who would probably have led the filibuster on this occasion, Senator Wayne ^{Morse} Morris.* But let us take up the arguments of democratic principle later, and stick now to the way things appeared in July of 1965, and how this may have affected what was done.

The calculation that the reserve call-up would trigger a debate that would go on for weeks was, I know, made by many of the President's advisors. I have no doubt whatever that he was sure it would happen, for he knew

* As vehement a champion of civil rights as he was an opponent of the Vietnam war, Senator Morse nonetheless repeatedly refused to vote for cloture in civil rights filibusters of this Congressional period. (Check with Bill White for this.) Few could claim so consistent an adherence to principle.

12/14/71

Senator Morse and his probable allies better than any of those advisors. For August and perhaps for most of September, the Senate would be incapable of acting on any other business.

Here we come to what may well have been the truly decisive consideration in the President's mind. The most poignant paragraph in his memoirs is not in any of the chapters relating specifically to Vietnam. It is in the chapter entitled "Quality of Life." ^{After} He ^{was} describes a meeting with his Cabinet on July 27, 1965, to review the domestic legislative program, ^(H&J) And goes on:

"The demanding decisions of those trying days relating to Vietnam were decisions involving our nation's integrity and its security. But they also involved what I considered to be the promise of the American future. In a wondrous time of hope and optimism we had begun the building of a better society for our people. The danger that we might have to slow that building, in order to take care of our obligations abroad, brought added anguish. So on that July 27, 1965, two great streams converged -- the dream of a Great Society at home and the inescapable demands of our obligations halfway around the world. They were to run in confluence until the end of my Administration."

These words, I am positive, come from the core of Lyndon Johnson's being and personality. He could not bear the thought that he would be unable to complete, in the fullest possible measure that Congress would let him, the large domestic design to which he had set himself under the title of the Great Society. If this was error, it was error on a grand scale, and with an element of grandeur in it.

What, precisely, would the price in loss of domestic reform legislation have been? Here one can come to a spurious precision by simply listing the bills that were still only halfway or less through Congress: (list these.) In 1971, when other issues have moved to the fore, these may not seem a serious loss even if all had failed, as would have been unlikely.

12/14/71

In 1965, to the great[#]body of liberal sentiment as to the President himself, the loss would have appeared tragic, in terms of programs not set under way or given a chance.

But, as the President saw it, this would be only half the story. His second fear was that the great projects that had already passed -- seven-tenths by weight, if you will, of his total program -- would be starved for funds in the future. Arithmetically, this may seem absurd, for the projected cost of the war at this stage was perhaps 1-2% of American GNP. Yet Johnson knew his Congress, and knew that the practical majority he held in 1965 was a precarious one. Once the Congress got itself involved in direct responsibility for the Vietnam war, conservatives would move from sufferance to opposition and to harsh cutting of domestic funds, and moderates from unstinting support to sympathy for economy. The result, over time, would be to make the program ineffective.

My liberal reader may again exclaim: "But this is exactly what did happen!" And so it did, from 1967 onward. But the point is that in 1965 and 1966 Lyndon Johnson went to extraordinary lengths that it should not ~~not~~ happen in those formative years. History must judge him on this basis, and the decision not to seek a Great Debate in July 1965 was a crucial part of his actions.

The Last Phase and the Announcement

e. So, at some time in that week, perhaps at Camp David when McNamara finally was clear that the needed manpower could be raised through the draft, the President decided to go the "low-key" way. Quietly, the word was passed that there would be no speech to a joint session of the Congress, no television address to the nation, no need for the sweeping array of

12/14/71

supporting evidence and briefing material that had been visualized in planning the week before, on the theory that Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara would confront a major Congressional task of presentation.

On Tuesday afternoon, the 27th, there was a final meeting, the first of any size since the 21st. It was a full and formal gathering of the National Security Council, and its essence had been fully narrated by the President himself.* What was interesting to a participant in the meeting of July 21st was the similarity and the crucial difference. In both cases, the President wound up the meeting by stating the possible courses as he saw them, making clear as he did so what his own opinion had become. On the 21st, there had been four possibilities: all-out bombing of the North, withdrawal, standing pat, and a full-scale reinforcement with reserve call-up; at the close of the meeting, all those present, polled by the President had opted for the fourth. On the 27th, the procedure was the same, but the fourth possibility was now denigrated and a fifth inserted -- described simply as providing what the commanders in the field needed. The President's summary was not that of a judge, abstractly totting up the pros and cons. It partook rather of advocacy, and as such had all the persuasiveness of which he was capable in such small gatherings. Most of all, however, it was a review of the line of thought that had brought him to his conclusion, simplifying it, making narrow distinctions into large ones for the sake of decisiveness. All of those present accepted his new conclusion, involving the rejection of what virtually the same group had been prepared to accept the week before.

* Johnson, pp. 149-150.

12/14/71

Taken alone, a meeting of this sort -- and I have been at many held by Lyndon Johnson and other Presidents -- is easy to caricature. One knew, however, in this and other cases that one was seeing only the top of the iceberg. Behind the President's conclusion lay hours and hours of pondering and discussion. By the time he (or John Kennedy before him) laid out a course of action as definitely as on July 27th, it had been worked over and planned out with all his top people. The meeting was for the benefit of the supporting cast who now had to execute the policy. It was a ratification and announcement.*

Not so, I think, with the President's meeting that evening with selected leaders of Congress. With the exception of Senator Hickenlooper of Iowa, the ranking minority member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the group was the titular leadership of both Houses - omitting the top men from the foreign policy, defense, and appropriations committees. Although the omission of Senator Fulbright may be thought noteworthy, the fact is that the balance of opinion in a hypothetical larger group that included the committees would not have been significantly different; leadership and committees alike were heavily weighted at this time, like the House as a whole, but more than the Senate, with men who totally supported a firm policy in Vietnam.**

Thus, the President hardly expected basic dissent -- other than the usual candid expression from Senator Mansfield. As at the similar meeting in February, and many times since in private, Mansfield spoke for "a quick stalemate and negotiation," adding that as a Senator and Majority leader he

* Students of other governmental systems, notably the British, will find here distinctions that Americans mostly take for granted. The operation of the Cabinet system, even under the most powerful of contemporary Prime Ministers, is entirely different for this sort of critical situation and decision. Cite Crossman.

** BM. Get the Congressional Directory for that session and give the Chairman and ranking minority members of Senate and House three committees.

12/14/71

would support the President's position.*

Rather the ^{KEY}potential issue was one of procedure, whether Congress should be directly involved in the decision or not. Again, the President himself has provided a summary of the discussion, ~~for history~~. It appears that the Congressional group felt, almost unanimously, that the wiser course was, in the President's opening summary, not "to go the full congressional route now," but "to give the congressional leadership the story now and the bill later."**

I am sure the President expected this advice, and as at the National Security Council meeting tilted his presentation in this direction. But much more is involved here than the persuasiveness of one President, or the possible diffidence of men some of whom, at least, were being asked for advice at a very late stage in the decision process, which tends to inhibit objection. Nor does the general principle of deference to the President, obviously at a high pitch in 1964 and 1965, account for the result.

Rather, the blunt fact is that Congress did not, at any time but especially in July of 1965, wish to be associated directly with a decision to wage limited war and lose substantial American lives. Take away all the supporting arguments that were advanced: effect on the Great Society, divisive arguments on strategy producing a confused effect abroad, delay and unpleasantness for a period of time, even the unpopularity of calling the reserves as such. All these being fully weighed, nonetheless a core remains: Congress did not wish to assume responsibility. This sobering conclusion was later drawn by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee itself.

* Johnson, p. 151.

** Ibid., p. 150.

*** Cite 1967 quote in Pusey book.

12/14/71

Its significance for the American democratic process deserves more objective thought than it has yet received. For purposes of this history, the fact is sufficient. As one top Administration man later put it, the President's decision not to force Congress to act was greeted, from Capitol Hill, with a sigh of relief detectable all over Washington.*

To say this is not to shift the ultimate responsibility for the choice against a Great Debate. The initiative lay with the President, and the opportunity to pick a different avenue of Presidential leadership of Congress and the country. But it is the historical fact that the Congress, far from urging the blunter course, applied its influence heavily against doing so.

Turning back to the account of events, the President's meeting with the Congressional leadership was the last stop in the process of decision that wound back to the second week in June. It remained only to prepare what the President would say.

At this point, or at least not long before it, a significant change was decided, concerning the additional force numbers the President would use in his announcement. Here, McNamara's report of July 20 had said that 34 American combat battalions, in a total of 44 foreign battalions, were needed roughly by October, and that this would bring total American strength to 175,000 men. The publicly announced goal of mid-June had been 70-75,000 men, but in fact the series of July additions had brought the total to the 75,000 level on July __, and the forces ordered but not yet arrived were to bring it to (80,000) by July (31). Hence, in various internal papers

* BM. Check the Congressional record for the days after the decision, for any evidence of objection on this score.

12/14/71.

of the period, the projected increase was summarized as 100,000 men, or as a little more than double the already-decided 80,000-man level. McNamara it appears, even drafted a press release saying the increase would be 100,000

In the staffwork after McNamara's return, however, several refinements emerged. Dropping the reserve call-up meant that somewhat less specialist troops were available for deployment within three months. At the same time, the JCS concluded at the end of July that the overall force, to support adequately the 34-battalion combat force and to plan prudently for possible later increases, should be higher than 175,000, in the neighborhood of 200,000, by the end of 1965. Hence, the troop additions tended to bunch up: roughly to a level of 125,000 within the next month and a half, including particularly the conspicuous 1st Air Cavalry Division, and then, for the rest of 1965, smaller installments mostly of supporting forces.

Hence, without changing the substance or firmness of his decision for 34-battalion force, the President elected to single out the 50,000-man addition that would take place almost immediately, and to omit numbers for the rest of the 1965 forces. As understood by his policy circle, the decision was still definite on the whole of the 1965 forces, although it was made equally clear that any 1966 additions would be the subject of later decision and had not been finally approved.

* Beacon 3-476.

** Cooper, p. 286, misconstrues this point, believing that the announced increase was less than the JCS or Westmoreland expected. In fact, subject only to the minor adjustments resulting from the dropping of the reserve call-up, Westmoreland was getting almost exactly what he had asked for in combat effectiveness, and by the end of the year in total numbers.

12/14/71

On July 28th, the President's actions paragraphs thus read as follows:

"...I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. We will meet his needs.

"I have today ordered to Vietnam the Airmobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested. This will make it necessary to increase our active fighting forces by raising the monthly draft call from 17,000 over a period of time to 35,000 per month, and for us to step up our campaign for voluntary enlistments.

"After this past week of deliberations, I have concluded that it is not essential to order Reserve units into service now. If that necessity should later be indicated, I will give the matter most careful consideration and I will give the country due and adequate notice before taking such action, but only after full preparations."

On this point, President Johnson has been charged with lack of candor. Formally speaking, the President did not yet have from the JCS exactly what the end-1965 figure would be, but the fact is that for internal purposes he had decided to go up to at least 175,000. His announcement chose not to use this figure, in the paragraph which the President must have known would write the lead ^(PARAGRAPH) for almost all immediate comment, and thus set the tone for the national reaction. It was the leading specific element in the low-key or "piecemeal" approach.

At another point in his press conference, the President hit the same note in a way that was at least deliberate understatement. The exchange was:

"Question: Mr. President, does the fact that you are sending additional forces to Vietnam imply any change in the existing policy of relying mainly on the South Vietnamese to carry out offensive operations and using American forces to guard installations and to act as emergency backup?

"The President: It does not imply any change in policy whatever. It does not imply change of objective."

12/14/71

The latter part of this answer was true: neither the American objective nor the basic strategy for achieving it had altered. But it was stretching a point, as the President had done in February, in April, throughout 1965, to say that there was no "change in policy" in the ordinary meaning of these words. Particularly with a distinctly offensive concept for the use of American forces in mind, the role of the United States in the conflict was clearly altered to the point of constituting a "change in policy." The President was correct only in the narrow sense that, as he put it to the Congressional meeting of the 27th, "the enemy was increasing its efforts to take over South Vietnam and . . . we were stepping up our measures to prevent such an outcome. Our fundamental policy was unchanged."*

In the main, however, the announcement made on July 28th spelled out the position and the decision with considerable frankness. The 28 million Americans who listened to their President that Wednesday noon can have been left in no doubt that a new and much larger American involvement was under way. The President's remarks included a full explanation of the reasons for American policy, and made crystal clear that it was his intent to send additional American forces into the future as they were needed. The rhetoric and supporting argument of his remarks was that of a war message:

" . . . Three times in my lifetime, in two world wars and in Korea, Americans have gone to far lands to fight for freedom. We have learned at a terrible and brutal cost that retreat does not bring safety and weakness does not bring peace.

*Johnson, p. 150.

12/15/71

"It is this lesson that has brought us to Viet-Nam. This is a different kind of war. There are no marching armies or solemn declarations. Some citizens of South Viet-Nam, at times with understandable grievances, have joined in the attack on their own government.

"But we must not let this mask the central fact that this is really war. It is guided by North Viet-Nam, and it is spurred by Communist China. Its goal is to conquer the South, to defeat American power, and to extend the Asiatic dominion of communism.

"There are great stakes in the balance.

"Most of the non-Communist nations of Asia cannot, by themselves and alone, resist the growing might and the grasping ambition of Asian communism.

"Our power, therefore, is a very vital shield. If we are driven from the field in Viet-Nam, then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in American promise or in American protection.

"In each land the forces of independence would be considerably weakened and an Asia so threatened by Communist domination would certainly imperil the security of the United States itself.

"We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else.

"Nor would surrender in Viet-Nam bring peace, because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueler conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.

"Moreover, we are in Viet-Nam to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American nation. Three Presidents -- President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President -- over 11 years have committed themselves and have promised to help defend this small and valiant nation.

"Strengthened by that promise, the people of South Viet-Nam have fought for many long years. Thousands of them have died. Thousands more have been crippled and scarred by war. We just cannot now dishonor our word, or abandon our commitment, or leave those who believed us and who trusted us to the terror and repression and murder that would follow.

"This, then, my fellow Americans, is why we are in Viet-Nam."*

There was no understatement here, but rather the full catalogue of reasons for the President's eeloquently stated decision, ^(ELOQUENTLY STATED.) Moreover, the tone was somber throughout, with no prediction of when peace might be achieved or

* BM. This text is from Beacon4-632-3. Check the official version in the Public Papers, but also get the DOD citation. We should give all three, and not any corrections.

12/15/71

even when the upper hand might be gained.*

Thus, the President's remarks were a blend of strong basic language and moderately stated specific proposals. To the public and to the press and commentators, it was the latter that controlled the immediate reaction. In addition, as we shall see in the next chapter, the President made significant new points concerning the search for peace, and dramatized these the same day by a letter to U Thant at the United Nations.

Thus, the reaction to the President's announcement, both in the United States and abroad, was that the new program was less than had been expected, and couched in a more moderate tone. Here there was at work a major phenomenon of modern politics: if advance rumors of an action take an alarmist form, then a revealed reality that is even slightly more moderate becomes regarded as very moderate indeed.

I do not believe the President played for this reaction. Every evidence is that until roughly the 25th he was persuaded that the calling of the Reserves would be required, and was with some candor preparing the public and Congress for this. But there can be little doubt that when he found that the call-up was not absolutely required, he knew what the effect of its omission would be, for the public and particularly for a demonstrably relieved Congress.

* The draft for the President was done at white heat on the night of July 27-28 by Richard Goodwin, who resigned from the White House staff shortly after for reasons not connected with Vietnam policy. His original text, perhaps because of his past association with President Kennedy, contained much stronger references to the Chinese menace and role in Vietnam. These were recommended to be softened, by myself and others, both for accuracy and for policy reasons. The President himself, as always, went over the text carefully and put his own final stamp on it.

12/15/71

So in the end what was a profoundly important and far-reaching decision -- recognized as such by a great many, and by almost all sophisticated observers -- was presented in the most moderate possible form. This had advantages and disadvantages, neatly balanced, in terms of the war itself; its effect on the search for peace we shall explore in the next chapter. But, to repeat, the President's basic reasons for acting as he did were domestic in character, directly related to his reform legislative program. His hope, and gamble, was that by gradual rather than abrupt techniques of leadership the country and the Congress could be brought to support to the full both war and domestic reform -- or that the war would develop in line with the more optimistic predictions given to him, and thus reduce the choice. It was a fateful action decision.

1/4/72

Chapter 31: Following On

a. Despite the low-key form of the President's announcement of July 28, the next three months were visibly the beginning of a whole new phase in the war. By the end of September, the 125,000 level of American forces had been reached and passed, and it was clear that much higher strengths would be needed and, in accordance with the announcement, would be sent.

Militarily, the two months saw a definite downturn in large-scale Viet Cong attacks, and one conspicuous American success by the Marines at Chu Lai. There were balancing Viet Cong successes, however, and a drumfire of local incidents, so that the Viet Cong held onto their gains of the spring and remained formidable. But the feared "monsoon offensive" ran its course without serious further erosions such as ~~HAD BEEN FEARED~~ ~~had excited alarm~~ in June and early July.

For the South Vietnamese, the period was one of slow but discernible recovery from the brink of disaster. On the American side, Lodge with a new and varied civilian staff at once established close working relations with Kv, and there was a serious effort to start up the countryside program again. Action was the order of the day in Saigon.

In Washington and New York, on the other hand, the preoccupation of these two months was with peace moves. These were at three levels. In public, there was a general appeal to the UN Security Council, which predictably came to nothing. In the arena of quiet diplomacy, U Thant launched his most serious personal effort, to which the United States and South Vietnam responded carefully but with some confirming of new

1/4/72

positions. Again, however, the Chinese and North Vietnamese would have no part of the effort.

The important and historically significant move of the period, however, was neither of these. Rather, it was a quiet, ostensibly unofficial approach by a private American to Hanoi's representative in Paris, with the aim of exploring the meaning of Hanoi's four points and whether they could be modified to produce a basis for negotiations. This exploration was accepted by the North Vietnamese, surely with their eyes wide open to its true meaning, and between mid-August and late September, several meetings were held in utmost secrecy. Then, Hanoi broke off, declining to make counter-proposals and refusing to continue. For Washington, the failure to make progress on substance was not surprising; far more serious was the dashing of hopes that a serious and secret channel of communication could be established against the day when it would be needed.

The episode was a clear reading of Hanoi's attitude at this time, but it was much more. In substance, it confirmed that NLF political control of the South was the key issue, and that Hanoi's position was inflexible. Procedurally, moreover, the break-off confirmed the link between bombing and negotiations. Whether or not the character of American bombing contributed to the break-off in this case is a problem to be examined. What is clear is that Hanoi in August enunciated, and by late September had firmed up, a public position that it would never discuss the substance of peace unless the American bombing was totally stopped. Waived secretly in this very period, and at least once at a

1/4/72

later time, this precondition nonetheless became Hanoi's public stance, which for the next ^{2 1/2} ~~three~~ years set the framework of the search for peace.

At the time, however, all this was only dimly seen. It seemed early days both in the new phase and in all that might flow from it, on the ground or in negotiations. In the British cricketing phrase, the US was following on, taking a new initiative from a nearly hopeless position. By mid-October, with the President now in Texas convalescing from an operation, the sense of new hope was matched by clear realization that the job would be a long one.

The New American Civilian Organization

b. On July 8, Henry Cabot Lodge had been announced as the new American Ambassador, returning for a second tour of duty. He ~~then~~ went with McNamara to Saigon, and was thus tied in to the new policy all through its inception. He now assumed what was designed as the crucial role in carrying it out.

Helping Lodge find the right staff was my own principal preoccupation during July and early August. Already, an extremely competent man, Philip C. Habib, had been transferred from Korea to take charge of the Political Section of the Embassy, the No. 3 position. Now the key choice was Lodge's deputy, to replace Alexis Johnson. The search covered the whole of government, and finally settled on a dark horse, William J. Porter, since 1962 (check) Ambassador to Algeria and about to be assigned to another post in his special Middle Eastern and Arab area. Born in England, Porter had been barred from direct entry into the Foreign Service by the restrictive rules of the pre-war Service; after World War II, he had been, in effect, commissioned from the ranks of

1/4/72

the technical staff, and had served in one trouble spot after another in the Middle East. Tough, unflappable, direct, he now showed himself enthusiastic to take on a new challenge in a new area. Those who thought that experience in ^(East)Asia was vital raised an eyebrow; others, including myself, thought that a man who had seen every kind of revolution and violence, mostly in French-affected areas, might have an even more valuable preparation. And so it turned out, for Porter, like Habib, was to be one of the few men whose personal stature gained in the Vietnam experience. They were, and are, two of the best men in the postwar American foreign service.

In addition to Porter and Habib, Lodge in July decided to add an unconventional arm to his staff. Using a Presidential blanket authority, he enlisted Edward Lansdale, who since late 1961 had been kept on the sidelines of the Vietnam effort. Lansdale, in turn, brought together a group comprising at first nearly a dozen men of varied stripe. Never more specifically defined, Lansdale's job essentially was to do what he had done in the Philippines in 1951-54, and in South Vietnam from 1954 to the end of 1956: to encourage (if necessary to find) a group of native leaders who could use methods of revolution and social reform to beat the Communists at their own game.* Once in Vietnam this time, Lansdale focussed his efforts primarily on Ky and the group of younger Northerners around him. For a time in the fall of 1965, the effort seemed promising; later it was dispersed and never came to have the significance his earlier efforts had had.

* Lansdale has described these earlier ventures brilliantly in his (title, publisher, and date). Unfortunately, his second Vietnam mission was never as successful. CITE EARLIER REFS. TO LANSDALE (B.9).

1/4/72

Thus, the civilian side of the American mission in South Vietnam was supplied with considerable new top talent, with emphasis on field experience in difficult political situations. Down the line, in the Embassy, the AID economic organization, and the USIA Information organization, Vietnam candidates were screened and sought, with many new and able men sent out. Altogether, as the Taylor-Johnson takeover had represented an upgrading in American personnel priorities in the field, so the second Lodge takeover was a further step upward. In idealism and dedication, the men serving in Vietnam at this period were surely as fine as any group of Americans in any situation ever. But there were two major limitations: first, that most of the recruiting was done within established organizations, without the outpouring of volunteers that had distinguished such organizations as OSS during World War II; second, that there was no remotely adequate training base for language or knowledge of Vietnam. As of mid-1965, men were sent with little special training, for despite the years since the Kennedy decision of late 1961, and all the talk about "counter-insurgency", the training facilities directed especially for preparing civilians for service in Vietnam were in 1965 providing only a handful of men, a fraction of the needs as they were now perceived. Only over the next two years was an adequate training system built up, in particular to supply men who could speak Vietnamese, and thus get around the countryside with some real hope of communicating with more than the French-speaking elite groups.

1/4/72

Thus, ~~great~~ ^{SUBSTANTIAL} as the effort was to build up the civilian side, the shortcomings were also great. The most perfect team of men at the top could not have exerted wise influence on the Vietnamese without a great deal more local expertise and understanding than was available. The very massiveness of the new American assistance now called for a degree of political knowledge and "feel" that simply could not be supplied down the line.

The point is, of course, of the greatest importance. ^(THE LACK) It affected the civilian-operated parts of the American effort, at every level and location. But it ^{DILUTED} ~~affected~~ most of all the application of effective civilian control of the whole American operation, including military action. In the study of counter-guerrilla warfare, nothing had emerged more clearly than the necessity of civilian control and civilian orientation - guiding the effort, at all times, with a view to its effect on the people of the country, their welfare and their attitudes. As Lodge took command in August of 1965, that principle was asserted on every side, and accepted without question by American military leaders in Washington and from Westmoreland down in the field. But in practice the trained men were not at hand to make it work. At the moment of "surge" in the overall American effort, the military side was much better prepared than the civilian side. The result was a distortion ~~of effort~~ that, with the best will in the world on all sides, persisted virtually throughout the years to come. The top American in South Vietnam was the Ambassador, but in practice the Ambassador did not truly control or command. If, as was the case with Lodge himself, he

1/4/72

had a ~~personal~~ tendency to accept and admire military ways and thought, the difficulty was compounded. But it would have existed in any event, for under three American Presidents since 1954, there simply had been no remotely adequate preparation of Americans for this kind of service, in this country.

Another feature of the infusion was, of course, that it was new. This was the third change of Ambassador in two years, and the turnover not only in senior positions but at all levels was very ~~great~~^{HIGH}. The average civilian tour of duty had in practice been 2 years or more up to February of 1965; then, with the evacuation of wives and families, it was shortened to 18 months for all but the most senior posts. In practice, as time went on, the number of men staying for two tours grew to a respectable percentage, but the rotation was still great. In this one respect, moreover, the civilian practice was better than the military one, which stuck to one-year tours of duty as the normal except for senior officers.

One could make an argument for these rules. For most Americans the heat of Vietnam was a serious trial, and living conditions for civilians were never easy. But there can be little doubt that if the national mood had taken Vietnam as seriously as the Korean War, or nearly as seriously as World War II, much longer tours would have been the practice. This would have been harder on individuals, but would surely have produced a much more effective American effort. In particular, there would have been more balanced evaluation and reporting,

* Check this. It may not be accurate. (No footnote in text)

1/4/72

without the distortion of men trying to prove results in unrealistically short time spans of responsibility.

All of these practices and deficiencies had existed before August of 1965. The point of this discussion, or digression, is that the major decision of July 28 might have provided the occasion to change many of them, to arouse the country to the necessary scale of civilian volunteers, to go all out at least in ways bearing directly on the war. That this was not done was, in part, a failure of imagination among those in senior positions in Washington, including myself. Far more, however, it traced to the national mood and to the muted way in which the President had chosen to depict the new phase. The pervading sense among those in responsible positions was that, the war being a highly selective one, the sacrifice should be spread without inflicting it unduly on those chosen to serve. Brutal as it sounds to say it, this is not the way wars are won.

The Conduct of the War

c. Another question that may arise in the reader's mind is whether, as the United States now assumed greater responsibility for the war, the arrangements for military command might have been changed. Or for that matter, whether the United States might have insisted on powers of direction or veto with respect to the South Vietnamese government as a whole. The short historical answer is that such changes were never seriously considered in this critical period, or, as to civilian power, at any time. On the military side, the question of "joint" or "allied" command had indeed been aired in 1964 and again in the spring of 1965. Both times Westmoreland had been adamant that there would be great drawbacks and that he could influence South Vietnamese military actions as

1/5/72

much without explicit command ties.

In practice, however, there was a significant change in the degree of American influence at this time. On the military side, Westmoreland's tactical advice had played a considerable part in rallying the South Vietnamese in the disastrous June. His advice on the South Vietnamese force level now became virtually law, and his influence on deployments very great indeed. This was done with tact and sensitivity to personal feelings, at least at top levels. Yet the South Vietnamese military establishment from henceforth felt no doubt that the Americans were in charge.

The civilian relationships were much more subtle, both in theory and practice. From the first, Ky's decisive and colorful personality appealed to Lodge, and the two men got on easily and well. Instinctively, Lodge talked with Ky the language that politically minded men use with each other, hard advice on needed action garnished with how to make a program appealing and an asset to the other man's political position -- "what to do" mixed with "What's in it for you," with a dollop of flattery to boot. Only those who have never worked in practical politics will belittle such ways of communication. In this case, they worked, bringing out the best in Ky and, at least for a time, minimizing his faults of flamboyance, superficiality, and egotism.

Unfortunately, however, too much of the American advice went through this one top channel. Lodge was a virtuoso soloist, not the leader of an orchestra. In the numerous cases where Americans were trying to advise, learn from, and work with Vietnamese counterparts, there was

1/5/72

too little coordination. Confusion and the inevitable cases of conflicting approach and interest were not ironed out rapidly. In a nutshell, Lodge's second mission was infinitely superior to his first, in quality of personnel and coherence of philosophy. It was not as effective as it should have been, however, because the Ambassador would neither coordinate matters himself, nor give his deputies the latitude to do so.

But again we have jumped ahead of our story. Actually, in the first months after July 1965, relations between Vietnamese and Americans were at a high point. As many observers noted, not only articulate Vietnamese but the man on the street or village welcomed the massive American presence.* A sense of disaster barely averted, and of danger still present, brought men together and caused a virtual moratorium in internal political squabbling within South Vietnam. Whereas Ky had appeared in July to have only a moderate chance of surviving, by October he seemed firmly in the saddle. Even the emerging opposition of Tri Quang seemed offset by the attitude of the other key Buddhist leader, Tam Chau, who said flatly that Ky should be given every opportunity and support. Minor student outbursts in Hue and Da Nang suggested that these might be trouble spots in the future, but on the whole the political atmosphere was cauterized by crisis.

Militarily, moreover, the war at least levelled out in the three months after the end of July. The chief worry areas were still in the highlands, and along the north-central coast. In the highlands, another Viet Cong success at Duc Co was matched against a South Vietnamese triumph at _____, but the situation remained critical. The fear was

* Citations here are vital.

1/5/72

that the Viet Cong would succeed in taking over a province capital there, either Pleiku or Kontum, and would then proclaim a provisional government -- a tremendous prestige and psychological gain for the National Liberation Front, which at this stage had no known base and little visibility.* Hence, part of the July decision was that the most important new American unit, the 1st Air Cavalry Division, should use its great mobility to operate in the highlands, but from a base at An Khe, _____ miles from the coast on the critical Route 19 to Pleiku. This division arrived in September (date), and thenceforth exerted a great ^(STABILIZING) effect on the highlands situation.

The north-central coastal area, meanwhile, was the scene of a dramatic military action in late August. American marines in the Chu Lai area, near Da Nang, trapped a large Viet Cong unit near the coast, fought an ~~intensive~~ and almost classic battle, and in the end killed nearly 1000 Viet Cong against the loss of 50 Americans killed. It seemed almost too good to be true, and indeed it was, for the Viet Cong never repeated the mistake. But at least it showed that American forces could be effective, and gave a lift to morale.

By September, Bernard Fall, experienced student of war in Vietnam, onetime advocate of an ultimatum to Hanoi to desist, by now a critic of American policy, gave a report on the effect of the new American presence that may have been read carefully in Paris and Hanoi as well as in Washington. Finding American methods crude and often witless, Fall nonetheless left the feeling that by sheer mass the American effort

* The failure of the NLF to convert itself into a provisional government was, for me, one of the mysteries of the war. No doubt it related to the constant battle for total control between Hanoi and the Front. But I am inclined to think that the lack of a provincial capital was a major factor and that in this respect the 1965 fears were well founded.

1/5/72

could not fail in the end.*

As Fall noted, the most conspicuous change in the war, at this early point in its new phase, was in the use of American tactical aircraft. From a total of ___ tactical American sorties in the South in the whole of the first quarter of 1965, the use of air had swelled by September to _____ sorties in that one month. Briefly, Washington became concerned, and a civilian watchdog group was suggested, to look at the guidelines and results, ^{AS} ~~in the manner that~~ so-called "operations research" civilians-in-uniform had done so effectively for the U.S. Air Force in its World War II operations. But Westmoreland demurred, and his alternative proposal for senior military review on the spot was accepted. The rules for the use of air were on their face strict, being limited at this stage to combat situations and specific Vietnamese requests, which were supposed to take account of civilian casualties measured against military need. The institution of so called "free fire zones," that is, zones where the enemy military forces and auxiliaries were believed to be virtually the sole persons present and thus no specific South Vietnamese request was required, had not yet been made, and did not follow until _____. Nonetheless, the critical expansion in the application of tactical air power took place at this time, alongside progressively greater use of B-52's against areas believed to contain enemy bases and major installations. These latter, for a long time, were reviewed individually in Washington against air photographs, and

*Compare the Newsweek quotes of Fall with his New Republic article. I talked at length to him at the time, and got the impression that at least his previous total pessimism had given way to a hedging of bets.

1/5/72

not approved if there was any significant habitation in the vicinity. Over time, their accuracy seemed to become established, and Washington specific review was made routine. We shall return to the questions of policy and civilian control involved in these operations.* As of the fall of 1965, air power on a large scale was a major new element in the war in the South, and seemed to be effective, if crude, both militarily and psychologically.

At most, however, all this new scale of effort only prevented further deterioration of the situation. Large-scale Vietcong actions did indeed level off in August, and turned downward in September. The theorists speculated that Hanoi had decided to fall back from the classic "Phase Three" of conventional warfare, in General Giap's categories, and to revert to "Phase Two," enlarged guerrilla operations, and for a time events fitted this hypothesis. More likely, however, the Viet Cong had been operating in June and early July at peak capacity, and would have had to let up a bit in any event.

So, as the monsoon offensive ran its course, and the rains eased in the South in October, the worst fears of June and July had not been realized. Undoubtedly the psychological impact of the firm American stand had played a part in checking the decline, and in the key highland and coastal areas even the limited American military actions may have made all the difference. Perhaps the pace of future decline, and the imminence of total collapse, were a shade over-emphasized in July, but nothing in the summer and fall of 1965, or later, suggests that South

* Chapter _____ below.

1/6/72

Vietnamese forces unaided would have stood up to the Hanoi Viet Cong onslaught for more than a few months at most.

As it was, and despite their slowed-down military activity in early fall, Viet Cong power in the countryside was not only not reduced, but seen as deeply entrenched in many areas. Contemporary estimates of control-by-area were extremely unreliable, and recognized as such at the time. What the men in the field knew, and communicated to Washington, was that the Viet Cong had made major gains since May, on top of other gains throughout 1964 and back into 1963, and that they would not soon be dislodged from either controlling, or being able to disrupt, perhaps a half of the South Vietnamese countryside outside the major cities (which at this stage held ___ % of the population.)

Nonetheless, under strong urging by Lodge, and with the advice of Lansdale in particular, the Ky government did make a start at getting a serious countryside program going. A brilliant and energetic officer, General _____ Thang, was put in charge of what was now called "rural reconstruction," and began at least to take realistic stock of the situation province-by-province. A start was also made in the training of local so-called "cadre," all-purpose groups designed to return to their native villages and areas and take charge of reconstruction, while helping on security at the same time. It was the beginning

* Check that Bung Tau did start at this time; I'm quite sure it did. Thang was an example of both the latent strengths and problems of South Vietnam. A mathematics teacher by profession, his articulate and clear mind appealed especially to Americans, while he seemed to combine with it a warm and deeply patriotic spirit. However, he lacked political connections or astuteness, and was seriously handicapped by his Northern birth, perhaps also by being regarded as an American protege. In the end, he quarreled with others, acted temperamentally on one or two occasions (perhaps under provocation), and left the picture.

1/6/72

of a more balanced effort, that would truly get at the interlocked problems of control, welfare, fair administration, and sense of respect for the government. All the programs of 1961-63 had come apart in 1964, and only in the fall of 1965 did it again become possible to think seriously of the essential civilian side of the war. Yet the effort was still a step-child, far outranked in priority by military plans and needs, insufficiently meshed with these, and not yet clear either in organization or concept. ~~To jump ahead just once more,~~ these defects were to take a long time to iron out.*

All in all, the picture in South Vietnam in the early fall of 1965 was of a good start, but no more. We shall see at the end of this chapter how planning for 1966 began to take shape, with its implications. The mood of the time was that there was now hope, but that the job would still be long and taxing.

Peace Moves Visible and Invisible

d. A major part of the President's announcement of July 28 was that the United States would press even harder in the search for peace.** As an earnest of American intentions, a message was delivered that same day to U Thant, calling on the members of the Security Council to consider the Vietnam issue and to contribute to a peaceful solution.*** Based on these actions and what flowed visibly from them, the New York Times index speaks of Washington's unsuccessful "peace offensive" as a key event for

* Check PP

** Get quotes.

*** Again quotes and NYT citation.

1/6/72

the period from August to October. So it was, but in ways never revealed until the publication of President Johnson's memoirs in 1971, and then only in cryptic form. The United States did make serious efforts to move toward peace at this time, but the appeal to the UN Security Council was a minor part of a carefully worked out plan of action. The real move was private, totally secret, and ostensibly unofficial.

For both sets of moves, the planning dated back to July 1st, when the President had directed McNamara to firm up plans for stronger action, and George Ball to work out detailed plans for negotiation. All through early July, Ball's informal working party included Harlan Cleveland and Joseph Sisco for UN approaches, and a separate group working with me to come up with new ideas.

All of us supposed from the outset that it would be extraordinarily difficult to make early concrete progress. As Senator Fulbright had said in his speech of June 15th defending the Administration's conduct of peace feelers, it could hardly be expected that Hanoi would be prepared to talk about peace at least until it saw the outcome of the monsoon offensive. The abrupt North Vietnamese rejection of the British Commonwealth initiative in late June, recounted earlier, seemed to sum up the situation at that time, and all experience since February suggested that Hanoi was both tough and confident.

At the same time, the cries to make use of the UN were becoming louder and more insistent, especially from Senator Morse in public and from Arthur Larson and Paul Hoffman among the senior advisory group that

1/6/72

had met privately with the President on July 8. Hence this was the first avenue examined, with Messrs. Cleveland and Sisco concluding that in the face of Hanoi's refusal to attend the Security Council meeting the previous year, and the specific rejection of UN competence in April by both Hanoi and Peking, there was little prospect that Hanoi would cooperate with anything done at the UN.

This, of course, still left the question of resort to the Security Council in order to get some even-handed appeal for negotiations. Even if Hanoi did not respond, as there was no reason to suppose it would, such an appeal would, in theory, buttress the South Vietnamese and American position. The difficulty was that, in practice, the Soviet Union would surely veto any appeal not heavily weighted against the US. Then, the issue might move to the General Assembly, where the voting balance and ~~virtual~~ tradition would have meant a resolution of a "cease-fire and withdrawal" character, perhaps following the formula of the British Commonwealth meeting, that the initial steps should be an end to American bombing of the North and to North Vietnamese infiltration of men to the South. Whether or not this might have been an equitable trade if enforced (as to which my own view at the time was negative, I find), the practical fact was that there would be no conceivable means of monitoring or enforcing the North Vietnamese end of the bargain. The United States would be placed under great pressure to comply while North Vietnam was not doing so, and so the situation would drag on, perhaps for some time, with North Vietnam having even less incentive than before to negotiate, ^{THE} ~~at any price that would rectify a situation~~ ^(BEING) to its clear military advantage.

1/6/72

I set forth these blunt calculations with precision, partly because they had some lasting importance in the American handling of the issue at the UN, and partly because they illustrate one difficulty of UN intervention that has applied in many situations: ~~namely that~~ those whose actions are open and avowed can be placed at a marked disadvantage when ranged against those who are able to act secretly.*

But the anticipated outcome in the Security Council or General Assembly was only one part of the calculation. Equities and military advantage aside, it would have sufficed that resort to the UN seemed to offer no hope for serious progress, even for the initiation of negotiations or discussions. Against this prognosis of no useful gain, the foremost fact to be set -- in July as earlier in February -- was that an open confrontation in the United Nations would compel the Soviet Union to toughen its position. As the lawyer for the Communist side, Hanoi and Peking keeping absent, Moscow would have to take positions that would not only be harsh for the atmosphere of Soviet-American relations, but that would compromise Soviet ability to act in a constructive way through private channels.

Hence, the July examination, completed just before the ~~tragic~~ death of Adlai Stevenson in London on July __, reached the same conclusion as in the past -- that at most there should be a report to the United Nations and a highly generalized appeal such as the President had included in his June 25 speech at the 20th anniversary of the UN. Stevenson himself had come reluctantly to accept this same conclusion

* As I write this, UN actions concerning India and Pakistan have again illustrated the point. By refusing to permit UN investigation of its actions in arming and training East Pakistan guerrillas, India has in effect flouted the UN without penalty, while Pakistan has taken a full blast of criticism for its actions.

1/6/72

in February, fortified by U Thant's own private recommendation against formal UN action.* He remained unhappy that U Thant's private mediatory efforts of the fall of 1964 had not been followed up, and in the last week of his life unburdened himself privately on this subject to an old friend, the television commentator, Eric Sevareid, with results published, as we shall see, the following November.** However, I know of no evidence that Stevenson disagreed with any of the positions his President and government took on the substance of a peace settlement, or for that matter on terms for stopping the bombing. Hoping and wishing that somehow the issue could be brought into the negotiating arena, and doing all he would to that end, Stevenson in the last week of his life strongly defended basic American policy in Vietnam both publicly and in a privately drafted response to a group of personal friends who were harsh critics of the President and the policy.*** His part in the framing of American policy concerning Vietnam was, so far as I could tell, from 1961 onwards, very slight; ^(YET) his expressed agreement with ^{SUCCESSIVE} ~~the~~ ^{DECISIONS} ~~the attempt~~ to hold on ^(AND DO MORE) was, I think, genuine and not merely an act of loyalty.

President Johnson moved rapidly to fill Stevenson's place, and persuaded Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg to leave the bench for this purpose. Among the inducements, I believe, was an undertaking that Goldberg would have special responsibilities in the attempt to find a peaceful Vietnam settlement through negotiation. Accordingly, Goldberg plunged into the subject with vigor, studying it in some detail

* See Chapter above.

** See Chapter 33 below.

*** Citations and quotes from last AES TV broadcast in London (check NYT under AES) and from Stevenson letter to Paul Goodman, published by AES Jr. in December 1965.

1/6/72

agreeing finally that there should be no formal recourse to the Security Council, but working hard both to use the more general appeal to stir up useful diplomatic actions somehow, and to establish close and warm working relations with U Thant.

He was successful on the second aim, but not the first. His colleagues in the Security Council showed no visible response to the American effort, and there was even some reported resentment that the UN was being used to offload American responsibilities.* As this became clear in the first two weeks of August, U Thant decided to make a move, acting in a tradition established in _____ by his predecessor, Dag Hammerskjold, that the Secretary-General of the UN might undertake certain exploratory acts solely in his personal capacity and not his official one. It seemed the only possible way to get around the rejection of UN competence by Hanoi and Peking.

U Thant's approach, in the form of a long letter, was an attempt to see if the parties could reach at least verbal agreement on the essential elements of a settlement. His springboard was that both Hanoi and Washington now spoke expressly of return to the Geneva Agreements, while even the Saigon position laid out in June was consistent with this. Thus avoiding the thorny issues of the composition of a conference or preparatory group, and also the question of stopping the bombing ~~etc~~, U Thant ^{SOUGHT} ~~did seek~~ to establish first that agreement was reachable on the basis of the Geneva Accords, and second that the negotiation should include the National Liberation Front as a party. On the latter point,

* NYT citations.

1/6/72

he had adopted the Hanoi position, developed only since February, that the NLF was the real fighting party; he also believed genuinely that the NLF was, if not independent, at least as much under Peking's influence as Hanoi's, a part of his strong and continuing view that Peking had a much greater direct share in the whole war than we in the American Administration thought.

Whatever such differences of analysis, the United States had no serious difficulty with U Thant's approach or message. On the contrary the latter provided the opportunity for useful consultation with the new Saigon government, where the sophisticated veteran of 1954, Tran Van Do, had remained as Foreign Minister under Ky. The American reply to U Thant was in parallel to that of South Vietnam, spelling out with some care the American view of the Geneva accords and their key provisions. On the question of NLF representation, the reply reiterated the ~~more~~ ~~forthcoming~~ position that President Johnson had laid down at his July 28 announcement press conference -- that if Hanoi was ready to talk seriously, there should be no difficulty in finding ways for the NLF to be "represented, or have its views presented." This position, more forthcoming than Secretary Rusk's earlier position that the NLF could be present as part of the Hanoi delegation, was flexible while still keeping Hanoi to the forefront. In effect, it foreshadowed the deliberately ambiguous participation arrangements finally reached in Paris in October of 1968. Although acceptance of the NLF as a formal or "principal" party flitted in and out of Hanoi statements for years, sometimes as an apparent additional precondition for negotiations,* the issue seemed to the American government essentially subsidiary, as the President now

* Citations. See especially Ho in Le Monde for August 14, picked up in

1/6/72

well conveyed. At the same time, it was no mere procedural quibble, and there was no doubt that it had serious practical and psychological importance in Saigon, particularly in the harassed summer of 1965. It was one thing to envisage that the political framework of the South might in the end be worked out in quiet contacts involving the NLF either explicitly or through individual members. For the United States to accept NLF claims, or appear to do so, was entirely different, both factually wrong and psychologically damaging, perhaps even fatal. It was a position well understood by other governments, and accepted by most; even the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies never sought seriously to press the US.**² Formal recognition of any rebel group, whatever its legal significance, has come in practice to signify surrender to their principal aims; it cannot be a neutral or merely procedural act. On this point, the serious governments of the world were never in doubt.

The American response to U Thant was not made public, nor is it today of lasting importance. In responding, the United States had shared U Thant's own hopes that at least a channel could be opened up. It proved, once again, a vain hope, for neither Peking nor Hanoi responded. Not, apparently, for them the useful fiction of the Secretary General acting in a personal capacity. For them, anything to do with the United Nations was by definition incompetent.

So ^{ANOTHER} ~~the foremost~~ quiet diplomatic effort ~~of the period~~ failed, as (to complete the picture) did the soundings of President Nkrumah of Ghana.

* See if there is some international lawyers' note on the point, later written. Revolt situations.

1/6/72

His venture, which included a trip to Hanoi, stressed most heavily the stopping of the bombing. Again, Hanoi gave no response, and the effort died as had the Commonwealth effort before it. It was, as it turned out, the end of serious efforts by any country or group of countries not directly involved in the Geneva Conferences of 1954 and 1962. From now on, it was the insiders who counted -- the Soviet Union, Britain, on occasion Canada and Poland. Others such as France and the Scandinavian countries continued to play useful roles in reporting comments deliberately made in Hanoi or Washington, and there were, as we shall see, private efforts of varying importance. But from August of 1965 onward, international public effort ceased to have any importance.

To the American government, this merely confirmed conclusions reached in June or earlier.* Thus, the July planning effort focussed not on the public arena at all, but on what could be done with real secrecy -- to probe Soviet views, above all to open direct communication with Hanoi.

Harriman's mission to Moscow did the first, with rather more success than had been anticipated. Disdaining any direct Soviet role, Kosygin nevertheless conveyed the impression that Hanoi might be open to exploratory discussions, even on its cherished four-point program. It seemed a lead.

Every possible diplomatic or non-diplomatic method of achieving communication was looked at hard during July. The result was to rule out an official approach, as least likely to succeed and also most likely to be misunderstood in Saigon. Instead, my group proposed in outline, and

* this paragraph with Chapter 27 or so on this subject.

1/6/72

George Ball worked out, a plan to send a private American to see the North Vietnamese representative in Paris, Mai Van Bo, ~~who~~ had since January shown himself articulate and informed, and since late June had seen quite a few private Americans, sometimes with interesting talks resulting.

There seemed little doubt that the North Vietnamese would recognize ~~that~~ *WHAT WAS PROPOSED, AND SOME GROUNDS FOR BELIEVING THAT* they too would wish to keep up the private facade, ~~to~~ to protect against China and perhaps their own people as well. Either side could disavow the talks if they became known; at the same time, if they showed progress, they could be progressively more authoritative and official.

The technique was no great novelty in diplomacy; indeed there was some reason to suppose that the French had used it in 1953-54 for the preliminary discussions that led finally to the Geneva Conference and to the final Accords. Perhaps this very parallel would intrigue Hanoi.

So, in a truly secret way, an experienced American was sounded out and brought to Washington, late in July, just before the President's announcement. Traveling to Europe on valid private business, he then established contact with Bo, who at once accepted the first appointment. The message which the American delivered was in writing; in essence, it was what Ball had worked out as far back as April, a minimum amendment of Hanoi's four points, taking out only the reference to the program of the NLF being controlling in the handling of the political affairs of the South. Could the new formulation, the American asked, be made the agreed public basis for the initiation of official discussions or negotiations?

1/6/72

As it happened, this first contact almost coincided with the publication by the Paris paper, Le Monde, on August 14th, of a long interview directly with Ho Chi Minh. The interview, obviously Hanoi's most detailed public response to the new American decisions, seemed to show a hardening of Hanoi's stand on negotiations. Ho himself now flatly confirmed the position that other broadcasts had by then suggested: before there could be serious discussions of a settlement, not only must the four points be accepted or recognized, but the NLF must be accepted as the "sole authentic voice" of the Vietnamese people, and the American sincerity proved by "concrete deeds" -- the euphemism Hanoi now used for stopping the bombing completely.* Stop the bombing, agree to deal with the NLF (and exclude Saigon, if one read it literally), and accept the four points in principle -- it was a position that did not suggest any willingness whatever to talk without advance concessions.

Yet it was at once clear that Hanoi was taking the Paris contact seriously, and that Bo was carefully instructed. After the opening meeting had established the nature of the approach, the second was stiff and cold; the third, however, produced a long conversation seeking to clarify the intended meaning of the American formulation. In all this there were propaganda-type complaints about the bombing, but no suggestion that it could affect either these talks or possible later ones. And there was no mention at all of the NLF. As he had done with private Americans in July, Bo left no doubt that Hanoi was the decisive party.

* Citations. As to the four points, the words "accepted" or "recognized" were by this time Hanoi's own interchangeable English translations of a single Vietnamese term, carrying a connotation closer to affirmative acceptance than mere recognition in the American use of English.

1/7/72

As all this was conveyed to Washington, by methods restricted to a literal handful of people, it seemed clear that instructions were needed for a second possible phase in the talks. Accordingly, the American came back to Washington, and for ten days at the end of August the contact was recessed. During this interval, Secretary Rusk, ~~in~~ ~~effect~~ ~~and~~ by design, authenticated the American by using a unique key phrase from his proposal as part of a TV broadcast on August 24.* Meanwhile, the emissary was given contingent instructions on how to pursue the talks if they opened up, as they looked like doing, into a general exploration of the main points of a settlement.

I would give a great deal to know what happened in those same ten days in Hanoi. For reasons of secrecy, those involved in the operation could not ask for any special watches or advice ^(FROM THE HANOI-WATCHERS.) But two events stuck out. First, on August __, it was announced that a senior member of the North Vietnamese _____, Le Duc Tho, was going to Paris, ostensibly to speak at the North Vietnamese Embassy there on the occasion of the September 2 anniversary of the 1945 creation of a Vietnamese state. As events in 1968 were to demonstrate, Tho was not only one of the top men, but also the one most trusted for important negotiations; it was he who worked out the 1968 arrangements for stopping the bombing, and whose arrival in Paris, from 1968 on, signalled possible North Vietnamese changes of position or important moves.

Second, North Vietnamese propaganda in this period vehemently attacked the United States for the bombing of a dam on August __.**

* Citation of the broadcast.

** Citations and specifics.

1/7/72

The charge was accurate in that a single hydroelectric power plant, located away from any populated area and directly associated with a military complex, had been hit, and with it an adjacent dam, serving the power plant though with a small flooded area resulting. In itself, the addition of these targets had seemed only a slight change in the bombing; since July 28, the policy had been not to extend specific targets significantly, but to increase somewhat the weight of attack on communications routes.* Perhaps the increase in total sorties had an impact; perhaps, ²as the anguished Hanoi reaction implied, ²the hitting of the dam suggested to some in North Vietnam that the bombing would now hit the irrigation dike system. This last was known to be a major fear of the North Vietnamese, for if done at the peak of the rainy season a systematic attack on the dikes could well have flooded wide areas and destroyed a high proportion of the North Vietnamese rice crop, in addition to causing widespread drowning and dislocation. But August was not the rainy season in the North ²as it was in the South ² (the two being subject to opposite monsoons), and hitting the dike system had not been, and was not then or thereafter, considered as part of the bombing program, precisely because of its overwhelmingly civilian impact.

Thus, those of us involved in the Paris contact watched anxiously, fearful that a misunderstanding of American bombing intent could affect Hanoi's reaction. If there had been a mistake, it had been inadvertent, and the American emissary was armed with a full explanation.

* Beacon ed., Vol. 4, pp. 28-32, deals thoroughly with bombing policy at this period. DOD Papers citation.

1/7/72

In fact, he returned to Paris to meet with a cold reception. The next contact was postponed, and when held was fruitless. Nothing said by Bo suggested that the August bombing was the cause of the new coldness, but it was apparent that Hanoi for some reason had had a change of heart. Possibly Le Duc Tho had gone to Paris to get a fuller report than could be sent by cable, for there were indications that Bo had ~~actually~~ recorded the talks electronically. And possibly, having arrived and examined the full record, Tho concluded that there had been no American concession, and that this was not the hoped-for sign that the United States was looking for an easy way out, as the French had ^(BEGUN) ~~done by similar methods~~ in 1953-54. This, it seems to me, is the most likely explanation of a fascinating and mystifying episode. After one more fruitless talk the contact was now broken off by Bo -- and never thereafter renewed, although careful arrangements were made to place a second American, appropriately introduced to Bo's staff, within easy reach.

I suppose there is always a tendency to exaggerate the importance of a secret and somewhat dramatic episode in which one has participated. Fighting this human tendency, I still believe this contact was extremely revealing and important. That it could have achieved early results was hardly to be hoped: in late July, the President told one group of senior officials that George Ball should try to get peace by Christmas, but this was ^(HYPERBOLIC AND) ~~never~~ in the cards. What was hoped, however, was that a dialogue could be started, through which both sides could make clear their positions and see what the prospects were. That Hanoi was unwilling to

1/7/72

go even this far, even in conditions of secrecy they must have seen were being honored on the American side, reveals -- what? Certainly, that the Hanoi position was inflexible. Probably, that they did not wish to compromise their public insistence that the bombing had to stop before any talks. Perhaps, that there were divisions in the top Hanoi command, that they were unable to decide how to proceed, and hence decided to drop it.

Certainly, the episode confirmed one central point, already judged to be true in American thinking, now nailed down beyond doubt. The reference, in Hanoi's third point, to the program of the NLF as controlling, meant just what we had thought it meant -- the Liberation Front must come out on top, with none of the margins of error of the 1946 and 1954 agreements. Any negotiations on a settlement would be long and frustrating, probably hopeless for some time to come.

Second, ~~that~~ henceforth Hanoi would ^(PROBABLY) emphasize the stopping of the bombing for all it was worth. Perhaps, as it had done this time, Hanoi would talk anyway, knowing of course that full secrecy could only thus be obtained from prying Chinese eyes. But the public position would henceforth be more controlling.

Thirdly, however, why had the talks run even as long as they had unless some element in the Hanoi leadership was interested? Perhaps, perhaps, there was a glimmer here, for the future.

In the small circle of the American government that was aware of the probe, these conclusions were mulled over. In the years to come, what ~~had been~~ ^(WAS) christened by Ball the "XYZ Affair" was to be the only

1/7/72

significant peace move whose secrecy was protected.* It was the kind of move that might at some point have worked, if there had been any will to compromise in Hanoi, and it was made possible by an American initiative. Even to hint at the episode might, I suppose, have helped at times when the United States sincerity in seeking realistic negotiations was questioned. But there was never a thought of breaking security for such a gain. Had the war taken a different turn, it seems quite likely that it would have been through this sort of contact that Hanoi would have indicated the chance for peace.

Quite a lot then, lies beyond the laconic note in President Johnson's appendix to his memoirs, listing peace efforts:

"1965 August, September, November, and January, 1966	A US representative met with the North Vietnamese in Paris to see if there was any flexibility in inter- preting Hanoi's four-point program.	Hanoi was unresponsive.**
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It was a resourceful try, due largely to George Ball, and it at least brought about face-to-face discussion for the only time until May 1968. Even this, it appeared, was in 1965 too much for Hanoi, unless the United States was prepared to give in on the central issue of control of South Vietnam.

* "XYZ" was, of course, a crib from the title given to secret French envoys to the United States in 1795. In writing their book, The Secret Search for Peace (publisher and date) David Kraslow and Stuart Loory learned somehow of the label, and confronted me and others with it. They learned nothing, however, of the timing, nature, or substance of the affair.

** LBJ, p. 582. The reference to further contacts in November and January is to the staff-level approaches made to authenticate the second American, and to one fruitless attempt by him to establish contact during the December-January bombing pause.

1/7/72

Looking Ahead to New Decisions

e. By late September, the 125,000-man American force level specifically mentioned in the President's July 28 speech had been reached and passed, with one division (the 1st) still to come. Part of the added expansion consisted of Marines for the harassed coastal area, another part of logistic forces to build up the base structure against the further expansion foreseen for 1966. The planning for the end of 1965 stood at a little over 200,000 men; in fact, because of shipping delays, the whole of this number was not in Vietnam until shortly after the turn of the year.

Momentarily, the lowered level of fighting produced a twinge of optimism in Washington toward the end of September, that perhaps the added needs beyond 1965 would not be great. Quite possibly, this sense of confidence, to which the generally buoyant tone of Lodge's cables may have contributed, was in the President's mind as he retired for a time from day-to-day leadership. A fairly serious gall bladder condition had been detected, and on October 5th the President had the ^(ORGAN) ~~gall bladder~~ removed, in an operation always painful and for some time debilitating. From mid-October until early in December, he was convalescing in Texas, his contact with his senior advisors restricted to memoranda, cables, and a very few visits with heavy lists of topics for decision.

In this semi-hiatus of Presidential leadership, work went forward on 1966 force needs, called Phase II. In early October, a sobering picture was presented in Washington by Brigadier General William Depuy, then Westmoreland's chief planner, and one of the most realistic officers

1/7/72

throughout.* Instead of a situation brought back into balance by the end of 1965, with significant gains possible early in 1966, as Westmoreland has seemed to predict in June and July, Depuy now thought that it would take most of 1966 to get slowly on top of the situation, with gains only commencing thereafter. This, assuming a 1966 further increase of roughly 100,000 men, or a total of about 300,000. Into this slow-paced picture several factors entered: the return to lie-low tactics by the Viet Cong, the sense of the vast areas to be covered, the limited recovery of the South Vietnamese forces. The fact was, the June and July estimates had apparently been a shade too optimistic. If things were a shade better the improvement had started from a lower point than had been realized. It was a familiar and hardly surprising ^{CHANGE.} picture.

As Depuy gave his views, a separate report was completed by Llewellyn Thompson and Maxwell Taylor on the program for bombing the North. Assessing the pace and results to that point, the report, delivered in mid-October, concluded that since early July the level of bombing, measured in total sorties, had gone up somewhat faster than was wise, and should now be levelled off. As McNamara had concluded in July, Thompson, the report's main author, argued that any early effect on Hanoi's will to continue was out of the question. Thompson, from his Soviet experience, also came out strongly against any method of closing the port of Haiphong, noting, as he had done orally in July, that this could only force the Russians to depend totally on Chinese routes, and thus increase Chinese leverage and negative influence. Conversely, the report favored

* Depuy was one of those who participated in the briefing of the Senior advisory group in March of 1968, in a much-reported episode. Citations.

1/7/72

an active effort to hit the rail and road lines from Hanoi to China; this was already being done and was now somewhat intensified, while still keeping substantial distances from the Chinese border. As before, the first rule in the program was to avoid action that could lead China to conclude that it was the American objective to destroy North Vietnam or undermine its regime. In Thompson's view, now generally accepted, a second point should be to do nothing that could impair Soviet leverage in Hanoi. The ~~quiet~~ hope that at some point this leverage would be exerted to ease the situation persisted as a central point in American policy.

Finally, the Thompson report -- along the same policy line -- focussed heavily on the possibility of a long pause in the bombing. That this should be done after a few months had been a strong recommendation in McNamara's July report. Now, with Hanoi's ^(PUBLIC) position publicly clear (and ~~privately supported by~~ the Paris experience), the argument seemed overwhelming that only if the bombing were stopped would there be a chance that Hanoi would start serious talks. Perhaps, one could surmise, they would use the Paris channel if they decided truly to give in, but any chance of talks short of surrender now seemed to hang on some action to stop the bombing.

At the same time, Thompson noted the obvious problem: if, after an adequate time of waiting, Hanoi did not respond, then it would be necessary to resume the bombing. Basically, to Thompson and Taylor, as throughout the senior ranks of the Administration, the continuation of a properly paced bombing program seemed both militarily ^{USEFUL} ~~essential~~ and the indispensable added factor that could bring Hanoi to negotiate or desist

1/7/72

from its use of force in the South. Probably, with the large US ^(GROUND) forces now in South Vietnam, the bombing program's ^(MILITARY) effect in reducing the enemy force against them would now have seemed more important in any event; ~~certainly, it was an unstated factor tending to reinforce the case, and~~ one can speculate that if the ^(GROUND) forces had gone in without a prior bombing program, the public clamor for one would in any case have been irresistible. But in the roots of American policy thinking, bombing remained ^(ABOVE ALL) the "added persuader," without which even a decisive change in the South would only cause Hanoi to make tactical adjustments while continuing its basic military ^{ACTION} effort.

While no formal action was taken on the Thompson/Taylor report, its conclusions were in effect carried out for the remaining months of the year, somewhat to the annoyance of the Joint Chiefs. The program was levelled out at about 700 sorties a week, and only a few specific targets were approved week by week. In September, a much stronger recommendation from the Joint Chiefs had been specifically rejected by McNamara.* Now, despite the military view and some rumblings from the Congressional right, the course was set and held to. And serious thinking was set under way on ^(A) the long pause in the bombing, probably toward the end of the year.

So the first three months of the new phase passed. The concealed highlight had been the Paris probe. For the rest, it was a time of pulling together and defining the new and much larger effort, and beginning to plan for the longer term.

* Beacon Ed., Vol. 4, p. 2; DOD Papers, _____.

1/14/72

Chapter 32: Dark Days for China

a. It is high time to lift the microscope from American policy in Vietnam, broaden the lens, and look at what happened in South and Southeast Asia in the three months from August 1st 1965, through the end of October. Perhaps, as we shall examine in the concluding section of this book, the events of this period were a great turning point in Asian history, for the decade of the Sixties or even longer. If one sticks merely to what was seen at the time, as this account tried to do, they were dramatic enough.

First, beginning in early August, came the outbreak of a major war between Pakistan and India in Kashmir and along the western borders of the two nations. In crucial battles, the Indians came out on top, and Pakistan was forced to accept a cease-fire with nothing to show for its efforts. China blustered on Pakistan's side and lost prestige. The United States stayed neutral, but in so doing offended both sides. India gained, and so did the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, the two-year old composite state of Malaysia broke apart in August, with a shaky Singapore becoming independent.* For the moment, it seemed another serious weakening in the fabric of Southeast Asia. However, the pressure from Indonesia was suddenly eased, and the whole status of Indonesia altered, when a Communist-backed coup attempt failed narrowly, leading to the half-ousting of Sukarno, and the emergence in October of a new leader in General Suharto. Instead of drifting rapidly to Peking-oriented Communist control, Indonesia was all at once in the hands of independent nationalists, anti-Chinese, but basically

* MATERIAL TO BE INSERTED.

1/14/72

neutral. Racked with strife and bloodshed, economically flat on its back, the largest country in Southeast Asia had, it appeared, virtually reversed its course.

It would be a mistake to view either the India-Pakistan war or the Indonesian denouement primarily in the Chinese context, still less in that of Sino-American confrontation. In both cases, the local reasons for what happened were powerful and predominant, and treated in that way by American policy. Nonetheless, the Chinese were deeply engaged in both situations, and the outcomes were setbacks for China, from which it recovered in Pakistan, but not in Indonesia.

Even more clear, though of less consequence or surprise, was the Chinese defeat in the brief October attempt to revive the Algiers Conference. China had lost out, not only in two of its key foreign policy efforts, but in the wider sphere of the developing Afro-Asian world.

Yet the Chinese kept up a bold front as these reverses mounted. In early September, Chinese policy was proclaimed in a robust and apparently threatening major pronouncement by Field Marshal Lin Piao. This was at first seen by the American government largely as a declaration of militancy and blueprint for subversion. As events unfolded, it came to seem more of a general exhortation, with heavy anti-Soviet content. For in mid-November, the Chinese turned abruptly on the Soviets, and in a blistering series of disclosures tore apart the facade of civility that had existed through most of the year. When Moscow replied in kind, the world learned a lot of what had gone on during 1965 behind the scenes of the two Communist giants, and it became apparent that Vietnam had been a major aggravating element in a relationship that had now become one of

1/14/72

total hostility.

Thus, by the end of 1965, one could see fairly clearly that the year had been a climactic one for China. A few, but only a few, observers sensed that China might now be about to turn inward, and to concentrate on its domestic problems. In Asia, as seen at the time, the Chinese threat had been checked, but still seemed very great indeed.

Pakistan's War with India

b. We last saw Pakistan and India as the twin objects of President Johnson's April change of mind about receiving foreign visitors whose nations were not strongly in support of American policy in Vietnam. Postponement of the visits by President Ayub and Prime Minister Shastri hit hard in both countries. Through the coming months the chill and resulting decline in American influence may have had a marginal effect of its own on what took place.

Less obviously, the United States was taking steps to impress on both countries its concern and disapproval for different aspects of their respective policies. In the case of India, the President approved full American participation in the economic aid plans worked out through a ten-nation consortium led by the World Bank, and, the US pledge of \$435 million, out of a total of \$1,027 million for the next year, was announced at the scheduled meeting of the consortium on _____. (BM)

At the same time, after a vigorous struggle within the government, the President decreed that henceforth the separate American contributions of food aid (called "PL 480" after the number of the public law that authorized such aid) should be given only for short periods, and made

1/14/72

contingent on big improvements in India's own agricultural programs. The beginning of a policy that may in the end have had rich returns for both countries, this change was bitterly controversial at the time.* Its adoption came in tense top-level meetings in June which alternated for a time with the first meetings devoted to the question of large force increases for Vietnam. The mood at the time was certainly of the President taking control in a new and much firmer way of the reins of foreign policy, including some lines of action which had gone on for years with only general Presidential intervention.** In the treatment of India, however, apart from the decision on the Shastri visit, Indian attitudes on Vietnam played, as I saw it, only a marginal role. Through the spring and summer, Indian proposals concerning Vietnam were notably even-handed, despite the largely critical tone of Indian comment on the bombing aspect of the war.***

Not so with Pakistan. Despite the President's high personal regard for President Ayub, dating back to 1961, there could be no doubt in the spring of 1965 that Johnson was deeply annoyed by anti-US and pro-Chinese comment from Karachi, centered mostly on the Vietnam war. So were many key members of Congress; the record confirms the President's frequent references to fear that the Congress at this stage would have approved

* For a later favorable view, see J.K. Galbraith, Saturday Review, (fall of 1971, review of LBJ.)

** See LBJ, pp. 224-225, including especially the footnote to p. 225.

*** Cite earlier pages on the non-aligned, Rhadakrishnan, and Commonwealth initiatives. Certainly the policy on food aid had little to do with Vietnam, despite Ambassador Bowles' later claims to the contrary. Bowles, p. _____. On the contrary, in American bureaucratic terms, the advocates for the pressure approach were overwhelmingly food experts from the Department of Agriculture, who were with some justice irate at Indian lack of effort and growing dependence on America. As I saw him, the President bought their arguments on their merits, and needed no others.

1/14/72

large aid programs for Pakistan only with great difficulty, and at possible wider cost to the overall aid program.*

For these reasons, the President decided to be very tough on aid to Pakistan, which as it happened was at a break-point. A new five-year program was scheduled for approval by the Pakistan consortium, also led by the World Bank, meeting in late July of 1965, and the United States ^(SHARE) was, as usual, far the largest. Quietly, the US prepared to sign up at the meeting. The step did not affect the current aid flow, and there would have been time for negotiations and a coming around by the U.S.. However, it was a deliberate pressure move, largely dictated by Congressional realities but still meant to affect Pakistani behavior. Inevitably, its immediate impact was to further freeze relations.

In Pakistani eyes, however, the tentative American aid suspension was probably only a subordinate factor. What had really driven Pakistan and the US apart was of much longer standing and deeper nature. From 1954 to 1962 the US had been the outside friend that Pakistani policy craved to give it some sense of balance against India. Yet, in 1962, the US had given military help to India against the Chinese threat, and it had become clear to Pakistani leaders, notably the young Foreign Minister, Zulfikar A. Bhutto, that the US would not in fact help Pakistan against India.** It sank in, finally, that the US really meant what it had said formally since 1954, that its aid was only against the Soviet (or Chinese) threat. With the US now truly even-handed in its policy toward Pakistan and India, neither was satisfied. The Indians turned t

* This point was made over and over by the President at the time, in meetings I attended for other subjects. A random look at the Congress Record amply confirms the mood, well established before the outbreak of the war. BM -- peel your eyes, as Michael once said.
of Independence.

1/14/72

the USSR, and got more and more Soviet help, including new and sophisticated aircraft and other arms that the US refused to furnish in its program.* And the Pakistani, feeling isolated, responded with alacrity to the overtures extended by a China newly exuberant and active in the sub-continent.

Just how deep the ties between China and Pakistan became in the 1963-65 period, and especially in the spring and summer of 1965, one can only guess. The outward indications were multiple. Visits were exchanged at a steadily rising pace: in 1965, _____ came to Pakistan in _____, and _____ in _____, while Ayub visited China at length in March. Chinese weapons appeared in Pakistan, including _____, _____, and _____. What really lay behind all this activity has never been made public. Especially the question remains to what degree the Chinese egged on the Pakistani to fight India now, once and for all, before the combination of Soviet and American aid brought the Indian military establishment to the point where Pakistan could no longer hope either to fight successfully or to negotiate the Kashmir question from a status of some strength.

That this is what Ayub in fact decided, with Bhutto on the one hand and his generals on the other urging him forward, there can be no doubt. For after the April Rann of Cutch encounter had finally been cooled off by British mediation in June, there was only a momentary easing of tensions in South Asia. From August 5th onward, several thousand armed Pakistani, including members of the regular armed forces,

* Briefly, in late 1962 and through 1963, I was directly responsible for American military aid to both Pakistan and India. The program with Pakistan was by this time on a levelled-off basis; that to India was directed overwhelmingly to types of light equipment suited to the eastern mountain area opposite China. A military assistance group of American officers, in fact, was sent to India to see that only designated units deplor

1/14/72

the US went to great lengths of ^{PLAN}~~offer~~ US combat help in case of another Chinese attack, to forestall Indian demands for sophisticated aircraft. Instead, these were supplied by the Soviet Union.

1/14/72

infiltrated into Indian held areas of Kashmir. The Indians retaliated by sending their own forces across the dividing line to close the passes, and by the beginning of September, the two sides were acting with regular units, tanks, and aircraft -- in the case of Pakistan largely those supplied over the years by the US.* The Pakistani major offensive into Kashmir was matched by an Indian invasion of Pakistan aimed at Lahore, technically the first crossing of the international boundary.** It was full-scale war.

On September 4th, the US through Ambassador Goldberg took the initiative to convene the UN Security Council, which called for a cease-fire on that day and again on September 6th. A UN Observer Group was sent in, and U Thant himself went out to the scene for ten days.

To no immediate effect, for both sides continued to press, and the outcome seemed in doubt. For Pakistan, it was vital to succeed early, and to bite off a real chunk of Kashmir or India itself from which to negotiate the deal it wanted on Kashmir. Yet the Pakistani forces were ineffective and their supplies running short -- again a reflection of the limited nature of American military aid.

Perhaps for this very reason the Pakistani forces were drawn into reckless moves. On September __, a ~~Pakistani~~ armored division supposed to be the elite cutting edge of the army, with American-supplied tanks

* Stebbins, 1965, pp. 217-218. Neither tanks nor aircraft had been in the American military aid program for India, however, contrary to the implication in Stebbins' otherwise excellent account.

** Wilson Memoirs, (part about United Kingdom condemnation of India).

1/14/72

more modern than the old British ones used by India, attacked Indian forces across an area of sugar cane fields. Thinking somehow that they could not be seen in these fields, which in fact showed their movements as waving corn shows little boys, the Pakistani forces advanced to the best possible range for Indian tanks dug in behind low hills, and in a short half-hour of action were blasted and almost totally destroyed. It was an incredibly inept performance, and completely undid what most observers of the two armies would have thought was a slight Pakistani superiority along the western front. India was now on top beyond doubt.*

For some reason, this battle and its full significance were not reported in the press at the time. (Check). The accounts that shortly reached Washington came from an enterprising American military attache in Pakistan, whose information came from disgusted Pakistani officers. Why the Indians never publicized the battle I have never known, unless they failed momentarily to realize the full force of what they had done.

Immediately, the outcome of this battle, with lesser Indian gains and a standoff situation in other areas, was reflected, ~~in~~ India readily, and Pakistan reluctantly, ^{ed} accepting by September 22nd a third UN cease-fire appeal, passed by the UN Security Council on the 20th with Ambassador Goldberg taking the lead again.

Such was the ^{COURSE} framework of the brief war. The United States, condemning neither side (in contrast to 1971!), had worked hard to bring

* I say this with feeling, because in my days of responsibility for American military aid to both countries, I had discussed their comparative capabilities bluntly with each on occasion. Once, I vividly recall, I told a senior Pakistani civilian that each side would be mad ever to engage the other: from a military standpoint alone, I argued, India could take over East Pakistan at will, while Pakistan would surely make territorial gains on the western, or Punjab, front. Especially after the 1962 debacle, Indian forces were rated very low. Their armored equipment in particular was considered slow, though well-gunned.

1/14/72

the hostilities to an end, in the process stopping military aid to both as well as new economic aid. The Soviet Union, heavily engaged in India and at this stage having also tried to keep up ties with Pakistan, joined in the peace effort, voting for all the UN cease-fire resolutions. The possibility that the US and USSR could act in parallel on a major area was demonstrated -- with important impact on American thinking in many quarters.

China's behavior was another matter entirely. As we have just noted, there is a large and tantalizing gap in Western knowledge of the relations between Pakistan and China in the months before Ayub went to war. Did the Chinese urge Ayub on? It seems likely; at the very least, they must have been well-informed of his plans, and indicated approval. Did they go further and offer to threaten their own attack on India at whatever seemed a critical juncture?

Here one cannot be so sure of the advance planning. Perhaps both parties reacted to apparent opportunity. But it is the fact that China did exactly that. Having in August moved its forces forward in the Chumbi Pass area most threatening to central India, on September 16th, at the height of the fighting, China suddenly delivered to New Delhi an ultimatum demanding that India evacuate certain disputed areas and dismantle frontier fortifications in the Sakkim area within the next three days.** The specific charges included the ridiculous claim that India had transgressed by permitting (57) yaks to cross the border and disturb the Chinese side.

* Should it be "we" or "I" throughout, or perhaps "we" for narrative interjections, and "I" for actions actually personal.

** Stebbins, 1965, p. 220, drawing on Peking Review, Sept. 24.

1/14/72

Largely, I believe, because of the military turn in the Punjab, the timing of the Chinese move turned out to be a complete boomerang. With Pakistan forced to accept a cease-fire, China was left in an absurd position, from which it retreated on September 24th by saying that India had carried out what was demanded, specifically that the yaks had now returned to India. The intervening week had been one of great anxiety and high tension, seeming to present to the American government (and the Soviet Union) the possibility that it would be asked to assist India against China, and in effect to treat the situation as two separate wars. Happily, the cease-fire of the 22nd removed the looming dilemma, and in the end China had ^(CAUSED ITSELF) ~~been made~~ to look both aggressive and ridiculous in the space of a week. In the annals of the Middle Kingdom, few episodes can have been more thoroughly humiliating.

However, the setback by no means ended China's activity or influence in South Asia. On the contrary, it could readily be foreseen that a wounded Pakistan would turn all the more eagerly to the only friend that had stuck by her in the pinch; and only Ayub and Bhutto could know how much of the Chinese timing was their own fault. Moreover, if China's prestige had suffered, the US quickly found that the lot of the even-handed mediator and aid-giver can be an exceedingly hard one. In the aftermath a newly cocky India and a stunned Pakistan both took out their feelings on the United States, which for months refused to resume aid to either, pending serious talks on Kashmir, and in the case of India kept on with the "short tether" approach to food aid. Partly, this was the double standard that South Asia, in particular, always applied to American behavior as compared to its judgments of Soviet or Chinese ac-

1/14/72

tions; partly, it was the inherent difficulty of ever persuading two rival nations that one is in fact being even-handed. More than ever after this war, India felt the American posture to be absurd, and that it should come first by far. And Pakistan felt deserted. So the gap between intended balance and actual expectations, already significant, grew to impossible proportions after 1965, and American influence suffered greatly. One by-product was that India was thenceforth far more critical of American policy in Vietnam although the tune sung in private was often something else again.

The gainer, on the other hand, was the Soviet Union, which in November came forward with a proposal that the two parties should meet on Soviet soil in Tashkent, to discuss the key underlying issue of Kashmir -- now, alas, more than ever insoluble. This Soviet action seemed to give the Soviet Union a special new position in the subcontinent. Nonetheless, the Tashkent meeting was applauded by Washington and American public opinion, which found relief in the confirmation that American and Soviet policy could be close together. The thought that a similar parallelism, in lesser degree perhaps, might apply to South Vietnam, most definitely entered into this feeling.

The India-Pakistan War of 1965 ^{WAS} ~~is~~ by any standard a fateful event in world history. Up to that time, and indeed at intervals in the next five years, an observer of the subcontinent of South Asia might well have thought that India was less likely than Pakistan to ~~collapse~~ ^{SURVIVE} as a single nation-state. Progressively, however, the defeat undermined Pakistan and led the way, by steps with almost the inevitability of Greek tragedy,

1/14/72

to the utter human disaster of 1971. Certainly in the narrow terms of the balance of power in the area, 1965 was the decisive turning point. Pakistan, afraid that India was becoming impregnable to pressure, tried by desperate moves to get what it had always thought was just in Kashmir, failed; and paid in the following years the bitter penalties of failure. In the process, the Soviet Union became more committed to India, the United States withdrew from important military help to either country, and China hugged Pakistan all the tighter. New postures were created, with results to be looked at later in the story.

Indonesian Upheaval*

c. In the India-Pakistan war, China's behavior was publicly ridiculous, privately enigmatic but almost certainly influential. Almost the same combination of adjectives could be used for the Chinese role in the Indonesian events that came to a head just after the hostilities in South Asia had been stopped. Each case was also a setback to Chinese hopes, but the Indonesian outcome in a far more important and lasting way.

The story has been told many times and from many standpoints.** In this chapter, we shall look at it comparatively briefly largely from the Washington viewpoint, and from what was known at the time. In a later section of the book, we shall return for a more leisurely appraisal, using the masses of evidence that have come to light in the intervening years.

* The title for this section is taken, with his permission, from the book of that name written immediately after the events by John Hughes of the Christian Science Monitor (City, Publisher, date). Hughes' account won the Pulitzer Prize for 1966 for (category). In balance and vividness, it is a remarkable example of eyewitness reporting turned

1/19/72

We have already seen that by July of 1965, Indonesia was bending far toward China and internal communist control.* Once again, on the August 17th anniversary, Sukarno engaged in a bitterly anti-American tirade, and spoke for the first time of a "Peking-Djakarta-Hanoi-Phnom Penh" axis, a reference probably welcome in China and North Vietnam, but hardly to Prince Sihanouk in Cambodia.** The tone of his speech was closer than ever to a Communist line on every subject, from external "imperialism" to internal _____. The new American Ambassador, Marshall Green, debated hard whether to walk out at some of the more outright insults, but wisely held his ground -- as he also did in two private conversations with the President-for-life.

As in 1964, the anniversary speech aroused the State Department. In the last week of August, George Ball, with his usual sense of the big picture, poked and probed about Indonesia. What was the point, he asked, of massive forces in Vietnam, if Southeast Asia was about to be taken over from the rear by a Chinese-oriented Indonesia? Was there nothing the United States could do to prevent this? To the first question there was no answer; it merely emphasized the dogged holding character of the Vietnam decision. To the second, the answer was categorical: nothing was ~~even~~ possible for the United States to do, or remotely a good gamble even to attempt. Ever since the ill-starred 1958 adventure, the US had both stayed and been kept at arm's length from all political forces in Indonesia. Many Americans had personal friendships, and there

* Bibliography of key books. Cover treatment of Chinese and PKI roles.

** Brackman, chapter 28, pp. 10-13.

1/20/72

was still a trace of good will among civilians and especially military men who had gone to the United States for education and training. But no American dared, either in wisdom or common humanity, to impose on these relationships even for frank discussion of the political situation. By this time, it would have meant likely imprisonment for any Indonesian to receive an American in his home on any but the most open occasions. At formal receptions, the talk was stilted, and Indonesians drew back from their old American contacts, with at most a nod of the head to show that the old feeling might persist.

As a group of us discussed this picture with Ball, I recall reflecting in late summer of 1965 that Djakarta sounded very like Berlin in 1932 and 1933: totalitarianism not yet fully established, but its shadow already cast before it. It was hopeless for the United States to think of trying to influence the situation. Yet Green urged that the skeleton Embassy staff be maintained without further reduction, a little on the chance that somehow things would get better, a little to show Sukarno that the United States could not be driven out by harassment, a little to show dissenting Indonesians, by mere presence, that the United States still cared. ^(Rusk and Ball) ~~This Ball and Rusk~~ reluctantly approved, with the proviso that evacuation plans be kept ready for instant use.

Into September, Green and his staff reported a brooding sense that something had to give soon, with the expectation that the next move would be another gradual slicing off of the standing of the Indonesian Army, another helping for the PKI, in the "salami" process of the previous two years. They were right on the source and direction of the next move,

1/20/72

totally wrong on its gradualness.

Sukarno's health was probably the primary reason for what happened. For years, political Indonesians and foreigners had followed the course of his kidney ailments, trying to figure out whether and when they might end his career and set off a struggle for the succession. In August and September of 1965, Americans picked up rumors that he had turned for the worse, but no more than at other times in the past. However, the Chinese had for some time been treating the patient with acupuncture techniques, and it seems clear that in August their doctors predicted, and the Chinese leaders reported to the PKI, that the President's life might end in a month or two.*

Almost certainly, the Chinese and the PKI leaders then consulted on what should be done.** The PKI plan had been to work through Sukarno as long as possible, hoping to create an impregnable position while he was still alive, and to reduce the Army's standing to impotence (in part by raising the standing of the Air Force, whose leaders were close to the PKI, notably Air Marshal Dani). Up to August of 1965, the plan had worked beautifully, part of it being the supply of Chinese weapons to the new "citizens Army" which Sukarno had approved in the spring; a by-product was that some of these arms went direct to the fighting auxiliaries of the PKI itself. To American eyes at least, the Army appeared almost on the run. On the one hand, it was loyally supporting and carrying out the confrontation policy against Malaysia, which incidentally provided the occasion for moving key anti-Communist officers and units to the Borneo front. On the other hand, its leaders were closely watched, and appar-

* Citations.

** Aidet's long talks on August 4 and 5 in Peking are usually identified as teh likely dates. Alternatively, it may have been later in the month. Brackman. p. -----.

1/20/72

ently incapable of doing anything in the political arena. But to the PKI, the job was not yet in hand: if Sukarno died soon, the Army might still have enough cohesion to prevent the PKI from taking over power, which they probably planned to do at first through Foreign Minister Subandrio, who had moved closer and closer to them. Thus, the PKI concluded that they must act soon, deal the Army a decisive blow, and be in the clear when Sukarno passed away.

The tactical plan, concocted in early September, involved the use of a willing officer, Lt. Col. Untung, of the Palace Guard, whose men would act to capture all the top generals. With the Army thus beheaded, the rest could be handled as circumstances might dictate. It would be announced that the Army had been caught in a plot against Sukarno, a new slate of leaders would be put forward, and Sukarno would readily accept. The plan came to include telling Sukarno a few days before the roundup of generals, so that while he was not in on the actual planning, he was fully aware what was about to happen and had given it his general blessing, perhaps in the belief that the generals were about to make a move of their own.*

Of this whole line of PKI thought and action, no American knew anything. Nor, it appears, did any of the generals, for in September several of these shrugged off the general warnings of friends, continuing to live openly in their homes with only minimum guards, and to go about their business. The Army's anniversary was scheduled for October 5, and

* This paragraph hits on a number of points that were violently disputed in the aftermath of the coup. However, I believe they reflect the consensus of the best evidence and most responsible scholars. Citations.

1/20/72

was customarily the occasion for a major parade in Djakarta. It was also the time when, Sukarno must have been told, the generals would use the gathering to act. There is, however, no impartial or convincing evidence that this was in fact the case.* If the Army had intended to move, there would surely have been a movement into Djakarta of large units loyal to the Army top command. This did not happen, but rather the opposite to a limited extent, for the units for the October 5 review were from a division that was commanded by a man more identified with personal loyalty to Sukarno than with the Army leadership.

With all the fuses thus laid, the match may well have been Sukarno's having a sudden seizure after a speech on September (26). He recovered promptly, but the prognosis of the Chinese doctors must have seemed imminent. Perhaps the plotters meant to wait until the eve of the 5th, and acted with some preparations incomplete. On the night of the 30th, Untung's men went in the small hours to the houses of virtually the entire top command of the Army. (Seven) generals were either killed on the spot or taken off to the Halim airbase just outside town. One key general, Haris Abdul Nution, escaped after his aide had been captured courageously pretending to be the general himself -- and after his daughter had been shot and seriously wounded. And another senior general, not part of the top central command but in charge of the Djakarta garrison, simply was not included in the target list. This was General Suharto.

The errors and omission were fatal. The following day, October 1st, it appeared briefly that the coup had succeeded. A new list of Ministers was put out on the captured radio station, and Subandrio, who headed it,

* On other occasions, perhaps on this, Subandrio's secret service fabricated evidence, which Sukarno may have actually believed.

1/20/72

was reported to be hastening back from Sumatra. The Communists showed their hand, their newspaper coming out full blast in praise of the coup when others could hardly tell what had happened. By afternoon, however, Suharto had military control of Djakarta, the borderline military units had been won over to his side, and Untung was in custody. As for Sukarno, he had first joined the coup leaders at the Halim Air Base, and then, as the outcome became clear, been flown to his palace at Bogor, _____ miles from Djakarta. It was a pattern of action and circumstance which alone linked him to the plot irrevocably in the popular mind.

In Washington, in those first days, there was nothing to do but read, study, and keep silent. The first morning, it was generally assumed that the Coup ~~plot~~ would succeed; and the SUBSEQUENT ^{change} seemed almost incredible. In the next tense week, it seemed briefly that Sukarno might use all his personal prestige and magnetism to talk his way back into full control. However, the discovery of the ravaged bodies of the captured generals, in a corner of the Halim base, the death and public funeral of Nasution's daughter, and finally the October 5 celebration -- all these brought a massive wave of anti-Communist feeling supporting the new rule of Suharto. Almost at once, he brought into the controlling group a number of the best civilians, such as Adam Malik and the liberal Sultan of Djogjakarta. Potentially, the change began by mid-October to seem immensely hopeful for the future of Indonesia, its people, and its neighbors.

Quickly, however, three things became clear. First, the new regime was far from solidly established. Sukarno's mystique still reached Indonesian hearts, including many of the new leadership group itself. They could not bear to deal roughly with him, nor would the people have accepted such action, despite the widespread belief that he had been more than

1/20/72

passively involved in the September 30, or "Gestapu" affair, as it now came to be called. Thus, Sukarno was still free to maneuver, although not to speak publicly.

Second, the new leaders wanted no part of any dealing with foreign nations, Americans especially. They knew, of course, that no American word or act had made the slightest contribution to their coming to power. But they also knew that Subandrio was entirely capable of making the charge of collusion with Americans, and of repeating his past fabrication of evidence to this effect. Hence it was vitally important that Americans be kept at a distance until not only the power but the independence of the new regime was established beyond cavil.

Happily, Ambassador Green was experienced enough to see this at once. He and the members of the Embassy, steeled and disciplined in the months and years of being frozen out, kept now to a strictly neutral and aloof posture. Private Indonesian contacts, nurtured through the years and then turned off in the previous months, now came on like a faucet when the water supply is freed. A flood of information flowed to Washington, enabling its avid readers to form a remarkably accurate picture of what had really happened on the first days of action, and of the plot before that. Night after night, I would relax before the evening time of signing cables, by spending a half-hour with all the "raw" intelligence from Indonesia in the past 24 hours. Its consensus almost exactly matched what the laborious researches of scholars later turned up as the best view, which I have summarized two pages back. But all this was from private or low-level people; with members of the new government, the talk was formal and limited. Quietly and tersely, a few were told that the

1/20/72

American government would be ready to talk about financial and economic assistance whenever the Indonesian leaders reached that point -- but that not a word would be said before that time.

This hands-off policy was fully supported in Washington. Although it could hardly be concealed that the change was a relief, nobody from the President down said anything that smacked of glee, gloating, or taking credit ^(EVEN) for having hung on in the face of insult. Similarly, members of Congress who had been bitterly critical of Sukarno were quickly persuaded to restrain their comment, some by the White House, others by the State Department.* For this tone, the President was basically responsible, for the climax came just a few days before his gall bladder operation of October 5th. But there was never a formal directive, or the slightest doubt in any quarter about what should be said and done. Sometimes governments work by osmosis, and this was such a time and case.

A year later a then-friendly lady reporter looking for something good to say about the Administration was tipped off by George Ball to do a story on how the American government had responded to the Indonesian reversal. She came to me for help ^{ON} and details, and I suppose a few words on how wise it had all been. I obliged with a few ^{FACTS} details, but as for the wisdom, I said it seemed to me of the order of the man described by Justice Louis Brandeis, ^{WHO} ~~that~~ "he" had sense enough not to lie down on the railroad track when the train was coming.** It was, alas, easier to discern this simple form of wisdom in this case than in some others -- or perhaps we were learning when we had a chance to think from scratch.

* Cite any hearings by me at the time. I recall plenty of phone calls.

** Citation.

1/20/72

The American posture was set in the very first days, before there became evident the third element in the situation. At first, the worry about the Indonesian people had been that there might be a total economic collapse; as often in a subsistence economy, this did not happen, although the economic situation was obviously desperate in the wider sense. What did happen was, tragically, a bloodbath in the countryside. In Djakarta itself in the early days, the roundup of Communists and their presumed allies had been thorough but not bloody. However, when the Communists attempted to rally a serious military and guerrilla force in their central Java stronghold area, the Army went in to kill, and in the process either incited, or more often condoned, widespread killing by religious and other groups with scores to settle.

To this day, the estimates of total dead vary widely -- from about 100,000 up to as high as a million, with the mean guess in the order of 300,000. Less bloody than what happened in China after 1949, where a sober mean guess is that 6 million were killed in the process of Communist consolidation, ^{***} it was still a ghastly event in human history.

At the time, what was going on was known only in fragments, largely assembled by newsmen.* Washington, through its Embassy, knew no more of the facts than any reader of the world press. When pressed then and thereafter, American spokesmen expressed "regret" at any such killing, regardless of cause, and this was the posture in later years after the full horror was better known. For this restrained comment, the American government has on occasion been criticized, while the new Suharto government has been attacked, almost always from the left, for its role.

In a way, the two charges go together. If the killings had been a considered policy act by the Suharto government, without provocation or ~~any~~ ^{any} need what the Times ran in that fall.

1/20/72

excuse, then the United States government could well be sharply taken to task for failure both to condemn in much stronger terms what happened, and to govern its posture toward Suharto accordingly.

But, to anyone who knew Indonesia at all, the idea that the killings were either considered or unprovoked seemed wide of the mark. On the contrary, the picture that emerged after October 1st was that there had been a state of quiet terror, extending throughout the country, in which men and women feared to speak and feared for their lives, when (as seemed inevitable) the Communists came to power. The parallel to Germany in 1932 and 1933, which had occurred to me by September, was abundantly confirmed by all that could now be learned from the Indonesian man-in-the-street. For him, this sense of incipient violence was confirmed on October 1st by the revelation of the atrocities perpetrated on the general by trained Communist squads, and women at that. Old Indonesian hands like Ambassador Jones kept pointing out that the dominant Indonesian tradition was to spare the lives of one's adversaries, and that Sukarno himself had lived by this rule even for men who had tried to take his own life. Now, the Communists had broken through this tradition, and almost every anti-Communist Indonesian could be excused for ^{SUPPOSING}~~imagining~~ that as the Communist script unfolded, he too ^{MIGHT}~~would~~ have wound up lacerated in a ditch.

Thus, when the Communists did try to organize a guerrilla stand -- at a stage when the government had arrested but not killed -- it was probably almost inevitable that the pot should boil over, and that there should be not only official excesses, but unofficial actions as well. There was undoubtedly much of both, and this could be sensed at the time. The course of the killing could be traced after a fashion, with one of

1/20/72

the main factors being Sukarno's stubborn refusal to renounce the PKI. Inevitably, the fact that he might sponsor its return led both the Army and private groups to keep on with the slaughter, to the end that the PKI should have no strength to rise again.

In sum, horrible as it all was, I still believe what I repeatedly said in the ensuing years, that the Communist side had created the original atmosphere of terror, so that what happened was understandable and not to be held against the top Indonesian authorities. At times when the American government might have expressed itself more strongly about what was done, it would almost inevitably have been taken as a slap at those top leaders. Yet successively, as we shall see in a moment, they were engaged in a life-and-death political struggle with Sukarno's forces, and then setting out to lift their country out of economic chaos, with American aid. Denunciation from Washington was neither fairly warranted on the facts, nor would it have helped American or world understanding of these events or of the need for outside help in the economic task. Of such is the balance that governments must strike when they consider the always easy option of wringing their hands ^(IN PUBLIC) over tragic loss of life.

So much for the initial views and reactions of the United States. What of the Chinese role and response? Here again one must be careful to separate what was known at the time from what can later be put together. At the time, it was known that the head of the PKI, Aidit, had been in Peking in August, and there was a public visit by a top Chinese, _____, to Djakarta in early September. But by this time such visits back and forth were almost a commonplace, and the PKI leaders in particular had come to spend much time in Peking. Circumstantially, one could sense

1/20/72

the possible closeness of the connection and advice, but nothing was known of the prediction of the Chinese doctors, and only vague reports had been received of the Chinese supply of arms to the PKI auxiliaries, sent in the picturesque guise of crates of building supplies for a magnificent new sports stadium being constructed in Djakarta with Chinese aid.

In short, to whatever extent the Chinese were directly involved in the Aidit-Untung plot, their hand might only have been inferred, but for their own public behavior.

In Peking, the denouement coincided with the Chinese anniversary on October 1, celebrating the founding of the Peoples Republic in 1949. It was a gala occasion, for which guests were invited from all over the world and from non-Communist as well as Communist circles. One of the former was the distinguished British historian, H.R. Trevor-Roper, who later described the Chinese reaction as follows:

"My own visit to China happened to coincide with the Indonesian fiasco and it was clear to me, at the time, that the effect of that failure might be serious. The Chinese may or may not have provoked the attempted Communist coup in Indonesia (on this the evidence is unclear), but they certainly took credit for it as soon as it had happened, and until it was known to have failed. I well remember how solemnly the coup was reported to us. It was the only piece of news which we visitors were ever told, and we were told it in circumstances which clearly indicated a deliberate policy, determined on high; for the news of the coup was not released to the Chinese people."* (Italics added.)

The least one can say, from this and other evidence well assembled by Arnold Brackman, is that the Chinese were fully alert to what might take place and expected it to be a tremendous victory for them. So great was their confidence that they dared to show it to observers like Trevor-Roper who were bound to report in time what they had seen and heard.

* H.R. Trevor-Roper, "Understanding Mao; or, Look Back to Stalin," New York Times, 10/10/67, p. 140-50

1/20/72

It was in Djakarta, however, that the Chinese really tipped their hand, so that everyone could see. In the first days of October, the Chinese lay low, and broadcasts from Peking were limited to expressions of good will for Sukarno.* However, when the mass funeral for the dead generals was held on October 16,** a popular day of mourning that touched every chord of emotion and bitterness, the Chinese Embassy was the only one in Djakarta that did not put its flag at half-mast. In light of the pattern of restraint and bafflement from Peking itself, this can only have been a local decision, of sheer bravado and defiance. To masses of Indonesians, it was the ultimate signal of Chinese attitudes and outright complicity, and from that time on the outpouring of hatred, and progressively of killing, extended widely into Indonesia's Chinese community of 3 million.

Most of this outpouring against China would surely have taken place anyway, but it was compounded by Chinese arrogance, in this and other episodes over a long period of time. Later political events in China may suggest that wiser heads in Peking were afraid to be flexible, that there was almost a competition throughout 1965 among Chinese leaders to see who could be toughest and most adamant, and that this foreshadowed the Cultural Revolution that broke out in 1966. At the time, one could only marvel that the Chinese had chosen, as in a lesser way in India, to make themselves ridiculous and to provide evidence of direct implication which could only make the outcome more serious for them.

* Brackman, pp. 150-1.

** Griffith, p. 120.

1/20/72

Sukarno's Return from Elba

d. After October of 1965, one could see little evidence, public or private, of a Chinese role in Indonesia. Sukarno's attempt to fight back must surely have had Chinese encouragement, but the forces he used did not, of course, include the PKI, even though he likewise refused to repudiate it and declare it illegal. (This step, many distressed Indonesians thought, could have gone far to put out the flames of passion that kept the killings going.) If Act I of the drama had been the coup, and Act II its defeat, Act III, running from November through the middle of March, 1966, was a desperate political struggle waged by Sukarno and Subandrio to claw their way back to power.

Since it is impossible to separate this Act III from its predecessors, it must be told at this point, even though it means jumping somewhat ahead of other threads in the narrative. In essence, the myth of Sukarno refused to die. Although most Indonesians believed him to have been aware and approving of the Gestapu coup, there were many to condone this on the ground that he might have been misled. Above all, he was a symbol of the very nationhood of a country that lived more than most by such symbols. Hence, though his public appearances were now controlled, scarce, and ineffective -- without anything like the charisma of old -- he was still able to command men face to face, and there were by this time a great many whose only future lay in sticking to him.

The result, by December, was that he had almost immobilized Suharto in a series of maneuvers, not especially brilliant but against which the new leaders appeared almost to be hypnotized into impotence. The process

1/20/72

went on into January, and by early February of 1966, Ambassador Green reflected the consensus of Djakarta observers when he reported that Sukarno had an even, or 50-50 chance of bringing off his comeback.

Finally, in late February two things happened. First, in appointing a new government, again headed by the ubiquitous Subandrio, Sukarno moved from step-by-step infighting to the open arena. And second, a new political force manifested itself, the students of Indonesia. Young, little affected by the Sukarno myth and past, idealistic, and impatient with their elders, the so-called KAMI movement of students took to the streets in late February as the Subandrio appointment was announced. Quickly, they proved to be much stronger than the remaining pro-Communist bands, and just as tough in their tactics, burning the Chinese Embassy and other key targets on the left. In reply, the pro-Communist mobs attacked the American Embassy and threatened the residence of Ambassador Green on one dramatic morning in early March. Most important, the students stiffened the Suharto-Malik group and gave it heart, and confidence that the people would support a firm and final decision.

With Suharto finally aroused, the end came rapidly on March ____.

The Army and the students once again took complete control in Djakarta, and Suharto spoke on the radio to announce tersely that Sukarno was being retired to the honorary status of (title), and that there would now be full investigations into the Gestapu coup and trial for those implicated, including Subandrio. It was the final ousting of Sukarno, and the nailing down of change, although the drama ^{STILL HAD ONE} ~~required a final~~ ^{TO GO, NAMELY} Act, Sukarno's gradual discrediting and final total removal from office in March of 1967.

1/20/72

After March of 1966, there was no doubt that Suharto, Malik, and their cohorts had come out on top.

The Significance of the Indonesian Change

e. One scholar with long experience in Southeast Asia has written:

"In perspective, what transpired in Indonesia that night (of September 30) -- not the massive United States intervention in Vietnam earlier in the year -- was perhaps the most epochal event in Asia since Mao's rise to power on the Chinese mainland in 1949."*

The verdict may be only a shade overdrawn, for the period up to the Cultural Revolution in China. Certainly, in drama and unexpectedness of outcome, the Indonesian events rank second to none. In lasting importance, moreover, history may in time find that the events so changed the face of Southeast Asia as to tone down the contests of great powers there for the indefinite future.** At the very least, the emergence of a nationalist and independent, but passionately anti-Chinese government in Djakarta was a tremendous and lasting defeat for China, a disaster where the India-Pakistan war was only a setback.

We shall see in a later chapter that by the spring of 1966 one man at least, George Kennan, was prepared not only (as many did) to assess the Indonesian events in roughly these terms, but to draw from this intermediate conclusion the larger one that the stakes for which the United States was acting in Vietnam had thus been much reduced. It is an extension that I rejected at the time, but it will be one of the might-have-beens to explore when it comes to a later section of speculation.***

* Brackman, p. 11.

** I have expressed essentially this thesis in an article, "New Tides in Southeast Asia," Foreign Affairs, January 1971, pp. _____.

1/20/72

However, during the fall and winter of 1965-66, no such long-term conclusions could even be attempted. For Act III, as I have noted, was -- as the Duke of Wellington said of Waterloo -- "a damned close-run thing." All through these months, it still seemed entirely possible that the Indonesian change would be undone. Even though it might have been a chastened Sukarno who then assumed power, with a sharply weakened PKI, the defeat could have ended the hope of new and moderate leadership, and drawn Indonesia once more toward the Chinese embrace.* Only in March was it possible to see the end of Sukarno, and even then the new regime had to face such staggering problems that it was by no means clear that it could hold its head above water, against a prospect close to chaos and disintegration.

Hence, the immediate significance of Indonesia was not great, nor was it ever argued in Washington discussions that the possible fall of Sukarno made a difference that reached into American policy discussions concerning Vietnam. Short-sighted or not, this was the historic fact. For the time being, all that could be seen was that China's calculations had gone astray, but not that she had suffered what was necessarily a lasting or serious defeat.

* Contemporary judgment, even where it assumed the Indonesian military were on top, was cautious about the impact. For example, William E. Briffith, writing in March 1966, thought the army remained expansionist and would continue the confrontation with Malaysia, also that the new leaders were so "radical" and "xenophobic" they would not turn toward the West, presumably even to the extent of wishing economic aid. Griffith: p. 121.

1/20/72

The Fate of the Second Algiers Conference

f. China during the summer of 1965 continued to work hard to get the Afro-Asian conference held with the Soviet Union excluded. In June it might well have achieved this goal, but for the accident of the Boumedienne coup. By September, however, the going was much harder. The Soviet Union had found new support, notably from Nasser of Egypt, who had been weakened by the Algerian coup and had also had to make a tentative peace agreement with Saudi Arabia over their quarrel in the Yemen. Thus needing Soviet help, Nasser switched to endorsing Soviet participation on September 2, on the occasion of a visit to Moscow. Meanwhile the Chinese Foreign Minister, Ch'en Yi, toured Africa pressing for anti-Soviet votes, but apparently got little for his pains. By early September, even before the India-Pakistan war ended and before the Indonesian coup, Chinese diplomacy was in trouble.

As elsewhere, the Chinese chose to meet the problem by bluster, threatening not to attend if the Soviets were invited, and finally in desperation switching to strong advocacy of postponement. By this time only China's hard-core friends were prepared to support such a negative position, which in effect doomed the conference.* Put in an impossible position, the majority, led by Algeria as host, finally yielded, and voted to postpone, giving the Chinese a Pyrrhic victory at the cost of many scars for the future. Chinese arrogance would not soon be forgotten.

* The roster of supporters is of interest as showing the high-water mark of Chinese world impact in this period. It included North Korea, ~~significantly,~~ North Vietnam (a measure of relative Chinese and Soviet influence that was to prove all too correct), Cambodia, Pakistan, Tanzania, Guinea, Mali, and Congo (Brazzaville). By mid-October, Indonesia refused to endorse postponement. Griffith, p. 128.

1/20/72

--And of Chinese Representation at the UN

g. In New York, however, the Chinese did better, notwithstanding their mishaps of the fall. The question of Chinese membership in the UN came up, in effect, after a two-year lapse, since the 1964 General Assembly had been hamstrung by the issue of financial contributions and Article 19 of the Charter, and had never considered the usual motions to seat Peking. In 1961, a majority had voted that the question was an "important" one under the Charter, and thus required a 2/3 vote for approval of any solution. In 1962, the vote might have been reversed but for the general belief that China had been the aggressor in the war with India that fall. The votes in 1963 were closer, but still substantially against China both on the important question and on the merits.*

Before the 1965 vote in mid-November not only had all the events described in this chapter taken place, but also Chinese leaders had taken a very harsh position toward the UN itself. Although no longer talking of a rival organization, as it had done earlier in the year, China now insisted on a total overhaul of the UN including the repeal of the 1951 resolution condemning Chinese aggression in Korea.** One might have thought these tough actions and tactics would have hurt China in the votes. However, although the important question was narrowly voted by 56-49, the vote on the subsequent "one-China" resolution to seat Peking and expel Taipei, was a tie, 47-47 with 20 abstentions. It was a major gain for China over the 1963 result, and seemed to foreshadow further changes that could produce her admission in the fall of

* BM. Check 1962 and 1963 votes on IQ and Albanian Resolution.

** Stebbins, p. 257, also the Washington Post, September 30, 1965.

1/20/72

1966.* Whatever UN members thought of Chinese behavior internationally, it was apparent that dominant sentiment was moving to the view that she must be in the world forum, and soon.

Freezing Point in Sino-Soviet Relations

h. All through the events of the summer and fall, it was apparent to Washington and all observers that relations between China and the Soviet Union were bad and getting worse. During the India-Pakistan war in particular, the two pursued different and opposed policies, with sharp mutual recriminations.** Moreover, the Soviet reaction to the Indonesian reversal was a mixture of regret for the fate of a Communist party, and scarcely concealed satisfaction that China had come a cropper. It may have been apocryphal, but one report reaching Washington had a Soviet diplomat remarking that the Chinese bungled their attempt at a revolutionary takeover thoroughly, and did not understand how to make real revolutions.

Whether or not uttered, the remark would have fitted the central point in the increasing attacks between Peking and Moscow. There were many specific issues -- Vietnam, India and Pakistan, Indonesia, North Korea, Cuba, the Afro-Asian countries -- but one central and over-riding one: which had the right approach to world revolution.

On this subject, the Chinese spoke hard and long during the fall. The most important pronouncement by far, and the most sweeping Chinese policy statement for a long time, was delivered on September 2 by Marshal Lin Piao, the Defense Minister. Expounding the thesis of "people's war," the speech called for the banding together of the "rural areas of the

* Stebbins, p. 257, also the Washington Post, September 30, 1965.

** Griffith pp 114-8.

1/20/72

world" to take over the "cities," that is of the less-developed countries to take over the prosperous and capitalist west, (North America and Western Europe), through the progressive application of militant local revolutions. In Vietnam, Lin Piao ridiculed the new American forces and said that the classic struggle of the Vietnamese people must win and bring ignominious defeat to an over-extended US. If the Americans dared to spread the war to China, they would be further and totally defeated. And finally, in a long section, the speech denounced the "Khrushchev revisionists" in Russia as "betrayers of People's War," - reliant on nuclear weapons and rockets instead of the basic strength of the people, unable to realize that wars, and especially revolutionary wars, "can temper the people and push history forward."*

The speech could be read in many ways. Perhaps inevitably, its military world policy and bellicose tone were at first the primary focus of attention, obscuring the balancing references to "self-reliance" by local revolutionary forces. In much comment, the speech was regarded as a "near-Hitlerite pronouncement", and the comparison to "Mein Kampf" was made by several private commentators and on one occasion by Averell Harriman.** On reflection, this was not Harriman's or the American government's considered view, but the speech did seem to paint a vivid picture of an aggressively minded China looking for any ~~local~~ opportunity and ready to nourish "local" forces to the utmost, and to give them a helping push when the crucial time came. My own conclusion was that the

* A useful excerpt of key passages in the Lin Piao speech is at Griffith pp. 424-442. Quotations in this paragraph are from page 432 and 439, also from Griffith's own summary, at pp. 112-14.

** ~~EM~~ - get Harriman cite, which I think was in DSB. Also see if anyone kept contemporary comment, for other citations along these lines to show WAH was far from alone. Griffith, p. 114.

1/21/72

speech was:

"... a clear and comprehensive indication that there has not taken place any moderating, but if anything a solidifying at least at this stage, of this virulent revolutionary policy that is central to our discussion of Communist China."*

Second, the speech was obviously Peking's response to President Johnson's decision of July 28, exhorting the North Vietnamese to continue and warning the Americans that China would act hard if threatened. Both points were regarded in Washington simply as confirming what was already clear about the Chinese attitude. Perhaps, later reflection suggested, there was in the emphasis on "self-reliance" a rejection of some higher degree of Chinese help which Hanoi had requested, but it had never been supposed likely that China would send forces to fight in the South, or Hanoi ask for them unless in extremis. In the warnings that the U.S. would be defeated if it came to war with China, there was another note not highlighted at the time, that China must in any event rely on popular resistance and not on sophisticated weapons from the Russians. This passage foreshadowed a struggle not yet visible to outside observers, which lead to the removal of the Chinese Chief of Staff, Lo Jui-ch'ing, for advocating, in opposition to Mao and others, rapprochement with Moscow in order to get the weapons to meet the expected American assault on China. Since the firing of Lo Jui-Ch'ing, on November __ is usually regarded as the first clear act of the Cultural Revolution, one can see -- in hindsight -- the first signs of that cataclysm ^{LIN BIAO} ~~increasingly as the months passed~~ in the speech.

* Speech at Pomona College, February 12, 1966, reproduced in DSB (BM -- get cite), also in Hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Policy with Respect to Mainland China, March 8-30, 1966, pp. 641-9, at p. 643.

(INCREASINGLY AS THE MONTHS PASSED,)

1/21/72

However, the Lin Piao speech could be seen less as a manifesto of a new Chinese policy or degree of militancy, than as a vehement anti-Soviet pronunciamiento -- militance vs. "cowardly coexistence"; urging Hanoi to hold on while Moscow might want negotiations, and avoiding any easing of relations with Moscow even for the sake of military modernization. As I recall a few wise heads saying by late September, the most important way to read the speech was in the context of the Sino-Soviet dispute, ^(AS SHOWING) ~~that~~ things were now very bad indeed.

In November, the big guns -- silent or relatively muted for a year -- opened up again. A mammoth Peking article accused the Soviet Union of a long catalogue of crimes and misdemeanors, many directly related to Vietnam. Indignantly, the Chinese now accused the Russian "new leaders" of following directly in Khrushchev's path of collaboration with the United States -- carrying American messages to Hanoi, (January) proposing a conference without prior conditions (February), stirring up the non-aligned peace initiative (March), slanderously claiming Chinese interference with Soviet shipments to Hanoi (April) -- and so on, right up to the presence of a Soviet observer at an October meeting in Bangkok on the formation of the Asian Development Bank. Other areas of collaboration, of more familiar hue, were India and nuclear non-proliferation. In sum, the article concluded that: "The antagonisms between Marxism-Leninism (meaning Chinese interpretations and policy) and Khrushchev revisionism . . . is an irreconcilable antagonism." Moreover, although there had been "a certain unevenness in the degree of people's understanding of the struggle," obviously an indirect reference to the reverses of the fall, temporary losses were simply all the more reason

1/21/72

to "carry the struggle against Khrushchev revisionism through to the end!"*

To which, quite naturally, the Soviets replied at once that the article was "saturated ... with fabrications." In late November a long Pravda editorial, in a dignified tone, reaffirmed the Soviet thesis of joint action and accusing the Chinese of splitting the world Communist movement. It was comparatively restrained, but there could be no doubt that the temperature of Sino-Soviet relations had reached zero. We shall see in the next chapter how this affected Soviet behavior concerning Vietnam.

How China Was Seen by Americans After All This

i. In retrospect, it is no great trick to see in the events of 1965 an extraordinary set of foreign policy defeats and lessons for the leaders of the Chinese People's Republic. A year that had started in a high tide of confidence and optimism, and with foreign policy predominant and the leadership apparently solid and united, ended on a note of gloom and, as we now know, of deep discord among the Chinese top command. From foreign adventures, China turned in mid-1966 to domestic purification, and virtually retired from an active role in the wider Asian or world scene.

If changes of remotely similar magnitude had taken place in the United States or any Western country -- as, it may be argued, they did in the United States itself after 1968, in lesser degree -- the world would surely have seen the symptoms well in advance of the event, and

* Griffith, pp. 138-141, with substantial excerpts from the original Peking Review Text, at pp. 455-470.

1/21/72

followed the course of change step by step. In the case of China and its convulsion of 1965-66, no such observation was possible, and in default of visible evidence prediction failed almost completely.

I say this with confidence because there is, in late 1965 and especially in early 1966, a remarkably full catalogue of the views of American specialists on China, as well as revealing speeches and comments from the government, all pulled together in hearings held, in two series, by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Senator Fulbright. The first of these series of hearings, conducted with great publicity and often television coverage, dealt with Vietnam policy and courses of action. The second, much less noticed, came shortly after, in March of 1966, and dealt specifically with American policy toward Communist China. Together the two, but especially the second, provide an immense amount of material on what Americans in and out of government thought of China in this crucial period.*

In addition, the material provides an opportunity to compare the official Administration view with the consensus of leading China specialists. The high degree of agreement is striking, and cannot be ascribed to any extensive interchange of views at this stage.** The willingness of China hands to endorse a policy of containing China, and the American

* BM - get official citations for the Fulbright first series, and then we will repeat the citation of the second series.

** Beginning in January of 1967, and continuing for two years, many of the leading China and Asia specialists were members of Advisory Panels that met from time to time with myself and with members of my staff and others in the government. It was, I believe, a frank and successful series of discussions, from which certainly we in the government profitted substantially. Incidentally, the very first discussion, in its first ten minutes, produced unanimous agreement that no one, a year before, had remotely foreseen the Cultural Revolution on the scale that it had then assumed in China.

1/21/72

stand in Vietnam (at least in principle) as a part of that policy, appeared at the time less noteworthy to the press than it may have been disappointing to Senator Fulbright. The hearings are thus not only vivid evidence of the atmosphere at the time, but of the view of specialist opinion in particular.

What they, and other evidence, show can be summarized in a single sentence: China continued to be seen as presenting a serious threat in Asia, as well as a more amorphous one in other areas of the world. By early 1966 the question of somehow establishing contact and communication with China was much to the fore, stimulated in part by the close UN vote on admission, and many of these same experts urged what one, A. Doak Barnett, called "containment without isolation," including an offer of admission to Peking on some "two Chinas" basis.* But such new government actions and attitudes were put forward as supplements rather than alterations to existing American policy.

Thus, in speaking of Chinese policy, the following were representative statements:

(quotations to be found)

Moreover, as these suggest, the fact that China had suffered reverses in 1965 was not seen as changing the basic judgment that she was militant and threatening. One scholar wrote at the time that in the face of external disappointments and internal problems unattended to, China might now "turn inward," and another, testifying after the completion of the Indonesian change in March of 1966, thought that China's subversive capacity could now be seen to have been over-rated, and that "the heyday of

* See Chapter __ below (on the 1966 UN dealings.)

1/21/72

communism in the underdeveloped areas has passed."* These were prescient views; they were also isolated and definitely a minority in either expert or general comment on China in the United States in this period. Setbacks or no, China still loomed powerful in Asia.

Especially, the sense that China might intervene in the Vietnam war grew very great toward the end of 1965 and the beginning of 1966, outside of government and, as we shall see more fully in the next chapter, for a few individuals within it as well. Traveling to Asia in the fall of 1965, Senator Mansfield reported his acute fear, and spoke fervently on the subject in early 1966.** Fear that the war might spread related to specific trends in American bombing of North Vietnam, to be sure, but it also reflected the strong belief that China was strong and would act. This belief and fear need not, of course, have been logically inconsistent with a view that China's offensive designs and capacity had been reduced; the two were not the same thing. Yet in practice the fear of China intervening in a defensive way tended to merge with the fear of China pressuring and subverting in an offensive one. Certainly this was true in the popular mind, which by early 1966 rated China far ahead of the Soviet Union as a threat to world peace and American interests.***

Within the government, the fear of Chinese intervention was on the whole less, but the belief in Chinese militancy was undiminished, as the year 1965 came to an end. Although we in government had followed the Chinese setbacks in far greater detail than the public, or most observers, we had also seen more closely the extraordinary stiffness and

* Citations of Halperin and Zagoria. (latter is Hearings, p. 374.)

** Citations.

*** Citations, to Tad's polls, I hope.

1/21/72

arrogance of Chinese handling of each situation. As the UN vote showed, moreover, it was not at all clear that nations put off by Chinese tactics were not more than compensatingly impressed by Chinese toughness and bravado. Speaking in February 1966 in a major assessment of Chinese policy, I described China's designs, especially in Asia, in much the same terms that I had used in September of 1964.* Although my language and tone were harsher than most of the specialists, and harsher too, as I recall, than my own staff wished, nonetheless this view of China was not broadly challenged in the March hearings. If China had not ^(WHY?) alienated nations in the world by her behavior in 1964 and 1965, she had certainly made it virtually impossible for Asian experts in America to explain her policy without using strong and menacing adjectives.

Conclusion

j. In the end this chapter frames important questions without answering them. Was China all along less threatening than she appeared in 1964 and 1965? Were her successive ^(CAUSED BY) ~~debacles~~ ^(OR) ~~maladroitness~~ ^(OR) ~~sheer~~ bad luck, ^(WERE THEY) or the result of limitations of power that could have been foreseen? Was her very arrogance less a sign of toughness than of insecurity? Were the Chinese leaders in fact already obsessed with their internal struggles, which meant that none could show weakness or flexibility in external dealings? Or was it the reverse, that the external reverses helped to bring on the internal struggle of the Cultural Revolution? Above all, in the light of what had visibly happened by early 1966, might a different American assessment of China have been made by that time, with a resulting different sense of the importance of seeing the Vietnam struggle through at great cost?

1/21/72

Without China's Pentagon Papers, the evidence to answer these questions is far too thin. In a later section of this book, we shall return to them in the wider context of an account of the Cultural Revolution. For purposes of completing the narrative of the key American decisions on Vietnam, the historic ground is solid, that in late 1965 and early 1966 American eyes continued to see China in the same light as for the past two years.

2/10/72

Chapter 33: Deciding the Conduct of the War

a. ~~In my own preoccupations,~~ The period from November through Christmas of 1965 was the time of the "great pause debate." Bombing policy and the question of a pause, ~~however,~~ remained the close concern of both the State and Defense Departments, and the idea of a long and truly testing suspension of bombing came alike from Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson and Secretary McNamara. From October on, it was the most specific action issue being put to the President -- who during this time remained almost entirely in Texas convalescing from his operation.

To McNamara in particular, the question of a pause was imbedded in wider questions of strategy and the conduct of the war. By late November, it was evident that Hanoi had stepped up its flow of forces to the South, and that the local Viet Cong were much more numerous than earlier estimates had assumed. Thus, when McNamara visited Vietnam late that month, he returned with a prognosis that 400,000 Americans would be needed by the end of 1966, and perhaps another 200,000 during 1967. Even then, the chances of the tide turning strongly by early 1967 were only 50-50. Every time the possible duration of intense hostilities was measured, it went up. Before calling for this scale of effort, and to prepare the way for ending the war by negotiation as early as possible, McNamara thought a pause essential.

Two other key factors were, of course, whether a pause offered serious immediate promise of leading toward peace, and whether one was needed to meet visible doubts of American sincerity. On both counts, the reading moved from "no" to "maybe" during November. First, there was a wave of criticism arising from the disclosure of Adlai Stevenson's version of the

2/10/72

U Thant affair of the year before. Second, and much more important, the Soviet Ambassador in Washington conveyed what seemed a firm promise of Soviet efforts to persuade Hanoi to respond in some fashion to a 2-3 week pause. The glimmer of hope combined with the felt pressures of American public opinion and foreign doubts, to produce by early December a change of mind in Secretary Rusk. From this point on, the President's appointed civilian advisors were unanimous, although a negative view was still held by his unofficial advisors, by Ambassador Lodge, and by the military commands at all levels.

Thus, a parallelogram of pressures converged on the President in December, as it had in July. In accepting McNamara's force recommendations moreover, he was now brought hard up against critical decisions on budget and economic policy. Added military costs estimated at (\$10) billion per year were to be superimposed on an overheating economy; key advisors separately urged the classic remedies of increased interest rates and higher taxes. The first was anathema to the President's populist streak, the second political dynamite, both for the 1966 Congressional elections and for Congressional willingness to fund the Great Society. In the end, the President was forced to accept the decision of the independent Federal Reserve Board ^(RAISING) ~~on~~ interest rates. On taxes he stood pat, and planned to present the military budget increases in the lowest possible key when Congress convened in January. Partly by action, partly by default, fateful decisions on the conduct of the war were made at this time.

Only the President can know how these various elements combined to produce his final decision in favor of the pause. Perhaps the sense of sacrifice and uncertainty ahead tipped the scales; perhaps timing in relation to the reconvening of Congress played a part; perhaps new hopeful

2/10/72

hints from Soviet and East European sources contributed. All one can say is that on the weekend after Christmas, after most of his advisors had thought the issue dead, he cast the die for what was to become the most vivid peace effort of 1965. It was, as we shall see in the next chapter, an important move and a serious one.

First Discussions of a Pause

b. As we noted in Chapter ____, the October report on the bombing program, principally by Llewellyn Thompson of State, strongly recommended a pause at an early time. Even prior to that, as part of his July 20 memorandum to the President, Secretary McNamara had suggested that, after the 44-battalion force program had been completed (i.e., toward the end of 1965) and after the bombing program had been somewhat stepped up, a pause of 6-8 weeks could be considered.*

Following the Thompson memorandum, George Ball and McNamara took up the proposal with zeal. Within two days, at Ball's direction, I had drafted a first outline of the steps that would be necessary to carry out a pause. Like Ambassador Thompson's proposal, my memorandum assumed that the interruption of the bombing would not be permanent; as I put it, "We would expect to resume at the end of the agreed period unless we were satisfied that the DRV had made a response that gave really serious and continuing promise of leading toward a peaceful solution."** At the same time, my initial view, like that of others, was that we would not "settle merely for a willingness to negotiate,"*** but would look for some responsive military reduction on the other side.

* PP, 4-32, Also in Volume 3.

** Chron, October 22, 1965, "Elements of a Second Pause Scenario," p. 17.

*** Ibid, 14 A.

2/10/72

At this stage, I made no recommendation whether we should proceed with such a pause. A separate memorandum of October 23 to the policy circle (Messrs. Rusk, McNamara, Ball, McGeorge Bundy, and Thompson) outlined various possible courses, including even the possibility of deferring decision ^(FOR SOME MONTHS) on the Phase II deployments that were now being recommended from Saigon. ~~110,000 additional US forces in 1966.~~

At this stage, it should be emphasized, the expectation was that the military need in 1966 would not be more than ^(THE) 110,000 suggested by Depuy. Moreover, the levelled-off bombing program suggested by Thompson was generally accepted, at least in this policy circle, and the expectation was that any marked acceleration of the bombing, or extension to the major North Vietnamese cities of Hanoi and Haiphong, would not be undertaken except as an intended "added persuader" once the tide had turned in the South. This view was held strongly by both Rusk and McNamara.

On November 3, McNamara brought the matter to the Presidential level, by a draft memorandum that outlined the tentative Phase II figure of 110,000 additional men in 1966, and the prognosis that even this number of men would turn the tide only slowly. Racking up the factors for and against a bombing pause, McNamara came out in favor. He noted the danger of being trapped in fruitless negotiations which would make it politically costly to terminate the pause, but was ~~nevertheless~~ optimistic that this would be avoided.* His major arguments were that:

* PP, 4-33

2/10/72

"(a) it would offer Hanoi and the Viet Cong a chance to move toward a solution if they should be so inclined, removing the psychological barrier of continued bombing and permitting the Soviets and others to bring moderating arguments to bear;

(b) it would demonstrate to domestic and international critics that we had indeed made every effort for a peaceful settlement before proceeding to intensified actions. . . ;"*

In other words, McNamara saw a glimmer of hope that the pause would at least bring movement in the situation, and thought that it was a necessary demonstration that the American Government had exhausted the possibilities of peace.

The McNamara memorandum of November 3 became the basis of a meeting with the President, in Washington, on November 6 -- when he returned briefly to the capital for the first time since his operation just a month before. At this meeting, my notes show, Clark Clifford, Admiral Raborn of CIA, and General Wheeler of the JCS were present -- so that the policy circle concerned with the pause was expanded at this time. The President confined himself to listening, in a discussion in which Wheeler argued fervently against the pause, on the military ground that Hanoi could take advantage of it greatly to increase its infiltration, and on the broader ground that Hanoi would draw the conclusion that American will was not firm. Clifford argued the points in both directions, but likewise concluded on a strongly negative note, arguing particularly that what appeared to be American pleading for negotiations must surely be read as a sign of weakness to Hanoi, and that to stop the bombing also conveyed the impression that we considered it somehow wrong as opposed to other military actions.

* The McNamara arguments were summarized in these terms in the State

2/10/72

Clifford proposed, in lieu of a pause, a simple Presidential speech that would outline fully the American position toward a peaceful settlement, and urge Hanoi to respond.

Others, particularly McGeorge Bundy, thought that the proposed speech would not be convincing without a pause, in view of the over-riding importance that Hanoi and the Soviet group of Communist countries had now come to attach to the stopping of the bombing. Thus, the meeting broke up on an inconclusive and divided note -- and without the participation or views of Secretary Rusk, who was taking a brief rest at this period prior to departing for a long Latin American conference between November 13 and November 25. However, immediately thereafter, Rusk reviewed the issue and concluded that for the time being he was opposed to any pause. His arguments, incorporated in a memorandum written by Alexis Johnson, were that the hope of a real response from Hanoi should be "significantly greater" than it then appeared, and, further

" . . . from the standpoint of international and domestic opinion, a pause might become an over-riding requirement only if we were about to reach the advanced stages of an extrapolated Rolling Thunder program involving extensive air operations in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. Since the Secretary of State believes that such advanced stages are not in themselves desirable until the tide in the South is more favorable, he does not feel that, even accepting the point of view of the Secretary of Defense, there is now any international requirement to consider a 'pause'."*

There the matter stood, as Rusk departed for Latin America, and the President remained in Texas. In the ensuing three weeks there came, in quick succession, dramatic changes in the military prognosis, an outburst

2/10/72

of criticism of the American negotiating posture, and a message from the Soviet Union that very much increased the "glimmer of hope." To these developments, which changed the balance of advice to the President by early December, we now turn.

A Much More Forbidding and Costly Forecast

c. As late as October 28, a comprehensive review of infiltration from North Vietnam to the South concluded that the 1965 total of infiltrators, through September 20, was only about 3400 "probables", or 5700 at the outside. ^(-- 400 to 650 men a month) At this stage, intelligence held to the same view as in June, that only three North Vietnamese regular regiments, or roughly a division, were in the South.

In early November, largely as a result of the first extensive American operations in the Highlands area, evidence rapidly accumulated that the North Vietnamese had begun to send much greater forces. By November 17, both Lodge and Westmoreland highlighted this development in cables, with Westmoreland estimating that there were now six definite, two "probable", and one "possible" North Vietnamese regular regiments, a total of nine as opposed to the previous three. Concurrently, and more gradually, the estimate of Viet Cong regiment-sized units had risen from five in July, to twelve.* All told, there were now thought to be 27 North Vietnamese infantry battalions and a total of 110 in the whole enemy force.** In short, it became apparent at this point that North Vietnam, beginning at some time in the summer, was sending down its own regular forces about as

* PP, 4-303. The same source contains over-all strength in "combat units", "combat support units," and "militia" in the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces. However, the changes in the definition of these categories make these over-all totals almost impossible to set usefully against those of previous periods. What was significant was the apparent dramatic increase in effective battalions.

2/10/72

rapidly as it could logistically do so.*

Much of the new intelligence was the direct result of intense fighting, which broke out at just this time in the Highlands area. Beginning in late October, and in earnest on the 14th of November, units of the American First Air Cavalry Division engaged North Vietnamese regular units in the area of the Ia Drang Valley, near the Cambodian border at its northernmost touching of South Vietnam. In this battle, American units were able to use

* This conclusion was fully accepted at the time and later confirmed. In July 1966, a comprehensive NIE concluded that infiltration in the months of September and October, 1965, alone, amounted to 10,000 men, as compared to a revised estimate of 11,000 for the preceding eight months. (PP - 4-308) The latter figure, of course, also indicates that the infiltration prior to September was grossly underestimated by the intelligence community. In terms of units, however, it appears, from full later roundups, that the number of regiments in South Vietnam was indeed only 3-4 until September-October, and that five additional regiments arrived in September and October, having left North Vietnam approximately in July.

The final and most considered estimate of infiltration in this period is contained in the tables submitted by the Department of State in late 1967 to Congressman Evans of Colorado. These will be found in the Congressional Record, and in Falk, Vol. II. pp _____. It is an academic question whether these additional regiments were ordered south before or after July 28; almost certainly the noises from Washington had persuaded Hanoi by early July that a major American reinforcement was likely.

2/10/72

their helicopter mobility to striking effect, and even to turn against the North Vietnamese their own technique of ambushing relief forces. This action, by far the largest true "battle" up to that point, occupied the headlines in the American press for several days. It appeared as an American victory and ^{PROBABLY} almost was, in the sense that enemy casualties were far greater and that the enemy units in the end were forced to retreat, probably back into Cambodia. Yet it was also clear that the North Vietnamese had stood and fought, and American casualties were substantial. From the previous high point of 70 men killed in the week of November 6-13, the total jumped in the following week to 240, largely from the Ia Drang action. Suddenly, both to the American public and to the government, the potential scale and intensity of the war became vivid.

The Ia Drang battle was a milestone in other respects. It appeared to confirm the importance of the actions described as "search and destroy" -- that is, those designed to locate and bring to battle enemy main force units. And it appeared to confirm that American forces were especially effective in this role -- a contrast that became more vivid when on November 28 a large South Vietnamese unit was ambushed and cut to pieces in the area of the Michelin plantation northwest of Saigon. Almost inevitably, Westmoreland and his staff were drawing the conclusion that the other side would be substantially more numerous than had been estimated, that only American forces could deal with the North Vietnamese formations, and that Americans had to move into the predominant fighting role, at least against the main force units.

2/10/72

Westmoreland cabled on the 23rd his judgment that the increased infiltration meant a substantial change upward in the requirement for forces in 1966. Talking again the language of force ratios, he estimated that the now-estimated 150 enemy battalions that would be in action by the end of 1966 would require, in addition to South Vietnamese reinforcement, a total of 97 US and other allied battalions, instead of the previously estimated 72. In terms of American forces, Westmoreland was now asking an increase in 1966 of 200,000 men rather than the previously contemplated 110,000. It was a drastic step-up, shattering at one blow the scale and force planning that had entered into the President's final decision of July, ^(EVEN PUTTING IN DSOAT) ~~including~~ the decision not to call the Reserves. McNamara at once decided that he himself must visit Saigon to assess the changed situation, going on from a meeting of NATO Defense Ministers in Paris to do so.

Returning to Washington on November 30, McNamara had accepted all the essential elements in the new Westmoreland assessment. Moreover, even with a total of 400,000 American forces by the end of 1966, and a possible further need exceeding 200,000 in 1967, he concluded with a somber long-term evaluation:

"We should be aware that deployment of the kind I have recommended will not guarantee success. US killed-in-action can be expected to reach 1000 a month, and the odds are even that we will be faced in early 1967 with a 'no decision' at an even higher level. My overall evaluation, nevertheless, is that the best chance of achieving our stated objectives lies in a pause followed, if it fails, by the deployments mentioned above."*

2/10/72

Prior to this final evaluation, McNamara had included another pregnant paragraph, which alone amongst the papers of this period suggested any possible alternative to the basic course of carrying on with the war. It ran as follows:

"Military Options and Recommendations. We have but two options, it seems to me. One is to go now for a compromise solution (something substantially less than the 'favorable outcome' I described in my memorandum of November 3)* and hold further deployments to a minimum. The other is to stick with our stated objectives and with the war, and provide what it takes in men and material. If it is decided not to move now toward a compromise, I recommend that the United States both send a substantial number of additional troops and very gradually intensify the bombing of North Vietnam. Ambassador Lodge, General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland concur in this two-pronged course of action, although General Wheeler and Admiral Sharp would intensify the bombing of the North more quickly."**

The basic choice this paragraph presented, of pursuing the alternative course of standing pat and accepting a compromise, was, so far as I can tell, never seriously considered. Even the nature of a possible compromise was not seriously discussed, although the assumption that McNaughton and I had made in the previous year -- that it would have to concern political arrangements in the South with a significant risk of Communist takeover -- was surely that McNamara had in mind. Although the results of the Paris effort hardly suggested that Hanoi had any current interest in ^(See A) ~~the~~ compromise.

* This had been defined, as far as I can recall, as a South Vietnamese government in effective control, without direct Communist or NLF participation. (Check).

2/10/72

none of us at this stage had given up the thought that Ho might, in a pinch, accept a solution that gave the VC a chance but not a sure thing.

Nonetheless, it is the fact that the possibility was not pursued. Similarly, the idea of hanging on to territory already controlled was rejected. In effect, what later came to be called the "enclave" strategy was dismissed, almost without debate, at this time, whereas in June it had been given a much more thoughtful hearing.

Why were political compromise and a military holding action so summarily rejected? Partly, no doubt, in the sheer momentum of a war after it once reaches a major point. However, there were also compelling practical arguments, especially the state of the countryside in South Vietnam at this stage. McNamara reported that General Ky's own estimate was that the government controlled only 25% of the population outside the cities.* It must have seemed to the civilians in the American government, as it certainly did to the military men on the spot, that to try to stick to these areas and to "defend" them was an effort surely doomed to failure and progressive erosion. Similarly, the political structure seemed far too weak to stand up to the Communist side in a showdown.**

Thus, McNamara's central affirmative recommendation, for a major force increase in 1966 and an accompanying gradual increase in the bombing program of the North, was readily accepted by the President, and in the following week came to be understood as the basis for all discussion.

In this light, McNamara's renewed recommendation for a pause took on a new weight. As he put it,

* Citation

** CITE TAYLOR'S LATER REBUTTAL TO GAVIN.

2/10/72

"It is my belief that there should be a 3 or 4 week pause in the program of bombing the North before we either greatly increase our troop deployments to Vietnam or intensify our strikes against the North. (My recommendation for a 'pause' is not concurred in by Ambassador Lodge, General Wheeler or Admiral Sharp.) The reasons for this belief are, first that we must lay a foundation in the mind of the American public and in world opinion for such an enlarged phase of the war and, second, we should give North Vietnam a face-saving chance to stop the aggression. I am not seriously concerned about the risk of alienating the South Vietnamese, misleading Hanoi, or being 'trapped' in a pause, if we take reasonable precautions, we can avoid these pitfalls. I am seriously concerned about embarking on a markedly higher level of the war in Vietnam without having tried, through a pause, to end the war or at least having made it clear to our people that we did our best to end it."*

The reader will note that the balance of ^(McNamara's) arguments had shifted. ~~in McNamara's~~ ~~mind~~. Proving that the government had exhausted every possibility for peace had now moved to the very top, as a result of his sharply increased estimate of the forces and accompanying costs that would be required to carry on the war. It seemed a simple and straightforward argument, and in keeping with many of the urgings for a pause that were being made at this same period in liberal and critical quarters of public opinion. In essence, even if the credit of the United States for past peace efforts had been secure, McNamara would doubtless have argued that a doubling or tripling in the scale of the war, as he now thought potentially necessary,

2/10/72

called for a demonstration to the American people that would meet any test that reasonable men could ask.

Damage to the Administration's Peace Posture

d. In fact, the Administration's peace posture by the end of November was much less strong than it had appeared to Rusk at the beginning of the month.

The damage came from the revelation, reaching the public on November 15, of Adlai Stevenson's account of the U Thant affair in the fall of 1964 and the beginning of 1965. In the week before his death, Stevenson had talked privately with Eric Sevareid, the noted television and radio commentator and his old personal friend. Indulging, as he sometimes did, in what he wished had been, Stevenson gave Sevareid what appeared to be an account of serious government neglect of constructive possibilities from the U Thant matter.*

In an earlier chapter, we have reviewed at length what actually happened in ^(T+E)that U Thant affair, so far as it can be reconstructed from an inadequate record. Had that record been made public in early 1965, contemporaneously with the events, my own judgment is that the American position would have been regarded as stiff but not essentially unreasonable. By the fall of 1965, however, the theme that America was prepared for "unconditional discussions" -- and had always been so prepared -- had become the cornerstone of the Administration's peace posture and of its

* As related by Sevareid, Stevenson's version of events was in error on several points, as compared to the internal record based largely on his own oral accounts. In particular, Stevenson asserted that McNamara had played a decisive part. Actually, the Secretary of Defense had never been consulted by Secretary Rusk, who handled the matter personally. See Chapter ____ above.

2/10/72

accompanying credibility in the area of negotiations. This unwise oversimplification of a position which had in fact changed in April, for sound reasons, now came home to roost.

All over the country, and with ^(PARTICULAR) specific force in Britain abroad, the fact that the US had not pursued U Thant's apparently genuine offer for direct talks became at once exceedingly damning. Over a period of two weeks, the Administration explained in various ways what had happened, culminating in a press conference of November 27 by Rusk, following his return from Latin America. The core of ^(THE) defense was that the approach had been at most procedural, and that other indications, notably from the Canadians, had suggested at the time that Hanoi merely expected American concessions or surrender, and had no wish of its own to compromise. While a few voices, including that of Richard Nixon, were heard in full support of these points, liberal and articulate segments of opinion were sharply alienated. Not only the rejection but the fact that the episode had been kept secret -- and apparently handled with some confusion within the Administration -- tended to undermine the picture that the United States had been truly concerned with peace at this period, or even that it might have been since that time.

In all this outcry, Hanoi took no part. On the contrary, the official North Vietnamese comment was categorically to the effect that there had never been any proposal or North Vietnamese acceptance, such as U Thant claimed. (Citation and quotations.) However, even this denial, coming some ten days after the furor had arisen, was discounted by many on the ground that it reflected Hanoi's present view and concern that its people might misunderstand, but did not negate that ^(IT) they might have been prepared for talks in the previous year.

2/29/72

This was the public picture. Criticism was sharp, and by the end of the month a chorus of comment urged that the United States truly prove its interest in peace.

The agitated mood at this time was shown, a little later, by what happened to an unusual report from North Vietnam. On November 20, the Italian Foreign Minister, Amintore Fanfani, who was also serving as President of the General Assembly during its 1965 session, delivered to Ambassador Goldberg a personal letter to President Johnson in which he described information conveyed to him by two private Italians who had just visited Hanoi. The principal one of these was Giovanni La Pira, former Mayor of Florence, and a colorful Italian political figure of the left.

The precise specifications of the La Pira report need not detain us, nor the probing response worked out within the American government and delivered to Fanfani on December 4 -- having been slightly delayed by Rusk's absence and by careful Presidential review. In essence, the American response, which it was expected La Pira would convey back to Hanoi, reiterated well-known elements of the American position, but sought to do so in as conciliatory a tone as possible. At this stage, it was far from clear either that La Pira had any special standing in Hanoi or that Ho Chi Minh had indeed intended any significance in the points he made to La Pira. The message was designed to elicit whether Hanoi wished to use the channel, and whether it had anything serious to say.

However, as a harsh reply from Hanoi was in fact on its way, the whole La Pira episode was surfaced, on December 17. It was known that

33-16A

2/29/72

La Pira had told his story to several Americans, and through one of these another American was made aware of what had happened, in such a way as to ...

2/10/72

gain the impression that "once again" the Administration had "muffed a chance for peace." Hence, this American leaked the story to Richard Dudman of the St. Louis Post Dispatch, who printed a sharply critical and misleading account of the episode. Almost at once, it was decided that the Administration had no alternative to making public the entire correspondence, which was done (with advance notice to Fanfani) on the afternoon of December 17. ^{TP} Whether or not the ^(La Pira!) episode added to the distrust of the Administration caused by the Stevenson-Sevareid disclosure, it symptomized the state of feeling that existed in the most prominent newspapers and other comment during the period that the President was trying to decide on the pause.

A Serious Hint from the Soviet Union

e. The heightening of the military situation became generally known to the public in late November.* Moreover, the outcry over the Sevareid episode, and later the La Pira one, was totally a public matter.

As significant as either, in its effect on Administration thinking, was a third totally private development. This was a message from the Soviet Union.

Ever since the Harriman-Kosygin talks in July, the Soviet posture had been stiff and chilly on Vietnam. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Soviet and American positions turned out to be closely similar on the India-Pakistan war, and throughout the ^(FALL) ~~period~~ one could readily discern the ever-deepening rift between the Soviet Union and China. Nonetheless, repeated statements by Brezhnev and Kosygin, and Gromyko's conduct at the opening of the UN General Assembly in September, gave no hint that the Soviet Union was prepared to move in any way to ease the

* Citations to newspaper reports of force requirements and infiltration increases.

2/10/72

situation in Vietnam.* In fact, Gromyko's UN remarks were so harsh that Ambassador Goldberg was impelled to take the unusual step of an on-the-spot rebuttal. Similarly, as the Soviet Union kept pressing for the US to stop the bombing, both publicly and in private, repeated inquiries as to what the Soviets then thought Hanoi might do -- particularly by Rusk to Gromyko in New York -- elicited no helpful reply. In his UN round of conversations Rusk likewise explored the question with the Polish and Hungarian Foreign Ministers, getting from both the assertion that something useful would happen if the US stopped the bombing, but without any specifics or supporting arguments to lend this hopeful prediction serious weight.

However, a dramatic change came on November 24 -- about ten days, be it noted, after the public eruption of the charges from Peking about Soviet behavior on the Vietnam issue.* In a quiet luncheon discussion between McGeorge Bundy and Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin, Bundy used public speculation concerning a pause to inquire whether the Soviet Union had any useful thoughts on the matter. Dobrynin, in an obviously rehearsed reply, said that if the United States were to stop the bombing for "12-20 days," the Soviet Union would exert its influence to bring about some constructive action by Hanoi. The manner of the reply was that of an earnest plea that the United States take such action. At the same time, Dobrynin made it clear that his country could give no assurance as to what the Hanoi response would be. All ⁴⁴⁶they could say was that the Soviet Union would try.

* Chapter _____, p. _____.

2/10/72

It was a sober and measured conversation, in keeping with the accuracy that Americans had now come to expect from the Soviet Union, and from Dobrynin in particular. On other readings of the period, it could not be supposed that Russian influence with Hanoi was necessarily greater than that of China, or that either could in fact affect North Vietnamese decisions.* Nonetheless, the apparent promise of a serious Soviet effort was in itself of great value, coming as it did after an unbroken stretch of months of Soviet silence or obduracy, going back at least to late February-early March, the ^(VERY) period on which the Chinese were now particularly strongly accusatory of Soviet actions. In a way, the Soviet approach seemed to be saying: "Now that the Chinese have accused us of doing this once, we can do it again without adding anything to their grievances against us."

For all these reasons, the Dobrynin message became one of the critical factors in the final stages of debate and action.

Pulling It All Together

f. Following McNamara's return from Saigon on November 30, there ensued the familiar pattern of intense high-level discussions, seeking to refine the possible issues for presentation to the President. On December 3, I submitted a memorandum to the senior group analyzing the pros and cons of the pause, with a time table under which it might have been initiated at once. In this memorandum, I specifically referred to the Dobrynin approach, the U Thant/Stevenson controversy, and the increased estimates of additional military forces in 1966. At the same time, I noted that the difficulties of a pause might have been somewhat increased by a conversation between Senator Mansfield and Gromyko in Moscow, in

* As noted in Chapter , during October the North Vietnamese had

2/11/72

which Mansfield had apparently suggested that we would keep the bombing stopped if negotiations were merely begun and irrespective of how they developed or what military steps Hanoi was taking. I also noted that the possibility of Hanoi reading the pause as a sign of weakness might be somewhat increased by the several hostile demonstrations that had taken place in October and November, culminating in a Washington demonstration by 25,000-35,000 people at the end of November. Balancing all these factors, and also noting the continued opposition of Messrs. Lodge, Wheeler, and Sharp, the memorandum avoided any recommendation, but the weight of argument was ^{MUCH} ~~sharply~~ more favorable to a pause than the earlier paper of November 9.*

On December 4, the senior policy group met without the President, and the discussion, my notes show, dealt intensively with what North Vietnamese responses might be judged satisfactory, or, conversely, under what conditions the US would expect to resume the bombing. In this discussion, there was a substantial modification in the "hard-line" position that previous discussions had taken. In essence, it was generally agreed that if Hanoi expressed willingness to negotiate, the US would be virtually compelled to continue the pause. However, if North Vietnamese military actions ^(THEY) continued virulent, the US would probably at some point have to declare that it must be free to resume the necessary reciprocal

* The Pentagon Papers, Volume 4, p. 2, mistakenly state that a ~~1~~ December draft of this memorandum (~~superseded on December 3~~) concluded against the pause. I have checked the original and this statement is in error. As pg. 36 of the same volume says, that draft contained no recommendations. I myself had favored a pause with increasing conviction from early November onward, although I also took pains to try to state the case fairly and objectively.

2/11/72

action, through the bombing. In other words, not only should the messages to Hanoi in any new pause not specifically require military reductions, but it should be recognized that we could get into a situation where the acceptance of negotiations in fact caused a substantial extension of the pause. It was a reasonable and useful discussion, and served among this senior group to substantially modify the interpretation to be placed on the so-called "hard line" position.*

Secretary Rusk participated in the meeting of December 4. By the following Monday, December 6, he had switched to an affirmative recommendation on the pause. This was conveyed to the President in a final and comprehensive version of the much-worked pause memorandum dating from November 9. At this time, the President remained in Texas, and the matter was presented to him there by Rusk, McNamara and McGeorge Bundy on December 7.**

Through these early days of December the President had indicated to his senior advisors that he was very leery of the pause proposal. Nor was ~~the President~~ ^{HE, NOW} persuaded, on ~~December 7~~. However, he did direct Rusk and McNamara to take urgent soundings among senior members of Congress, on the related questions of the pause, a major force increase, increased bombing, and possible Congressional action, either to approve specific new steps or to reaffirm the basic policy set forth in the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. These soundings, conducted in the balance of this week, must have

* This December 4 discussion, recorded in my notes, and clearly reflected in accompanying memoranda for the President written by me on December 4, puts into ~~quite different~~ focus the memorandum by John McNaughton, of December 3, discussed at some length in the Pentagon Papers, 4-37-38.

McNAUGHTON'S PAPER (NOT SHOWN TO THE POLICY CIRCLE) CALLED FOR TOUGH MILITARY

** NYT citations for the visit.

CONDITIONS ~~WAS~~ ⁴ ~~IF~~ ^{THE} PAUSE
WAS TO CONTINUE. IT WAS
ENTIRELY SUPERSEDED BY THE

2/11/72

been of substantial importance to the President. Senator Mansfield, in particular, responded at length from Manila, which he was visiting as part of a world tour. He opposed a bombing pause, but because he wanted more, not less. Specifically, Mansfield urged that there be a Christmas truce (as the Pope had proposed on December ____, NYT), and that every effort be made to extend this into a general cease-fire throughout Vietnam, North and South, to extend all the way from Christmas through the Vietnamese New Year beginning on January 21.

Of the 15-odd Senators and Congressmen consulted by McNamara or Rusk in this canvass, the majority favored some form of Congressional action, and there were substantial affirmative majorities for expanding the bombing, additional American forces, and to a lesser extent, for the pause. A minority of the group, at this stage, were concerned about the degree or duration of US specific support for the war as a whole. There was no marked identification by Party, although it was noteworthy that the Republican votes for expanded bombing were particularly strong. Perhaps for the same reason, some of the liberal Democrats consulted were skeptical of Congressional action.

Thus, by mid-December when the President came to Washington for successive visits by President Ayub of Pakistan, Prime Minister Wilson of Britain, and Premier Erhard of Germany, the issues on the conduct of the war were multiple, and his soundings far from clear.

The Looming Financial Pinch

g. Meanwhile, the President had to deal at this stage with the most vital questions of budget and financial policy. All through the fall, he had been kept aware that the economy was showing signs of inflation, for which the orthodox response would have been an increase in interest rates,

2/11/72

probably accompanied by fiscal measures to narrow the budget deficit. Over and over, he had urged the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, William McChesney Martin, not to increase interest rates, and had argued, at least in the early fall, that the war would not be that great a drain or last more than a year or two at an intensive rate. By early December, however, Martin ^{WAS STRONGLY INCLINED TO} ~~had made it clear that he was not persuaded, and that~~ ^(HIS BOARD) ~~he thought that he must~~ go ahead, which under the law he had the right and power to do notwithstanding any opposition by the President.

At this point, ~~in the debate~~, I inadvertently may have played a role. On December 2, I appeared at Mr. Martin's request at a private meeting of the Governors of the Federal Reserve System to give a frank presentation of the state of the war. At the time, I had no inkling of the issue dividing the President and Chairman Martin, nor did I attach particular importance to the occasion. Rather, speaking from notes, I presented a picture of a difficult and tough war, on the lines that McNamara had just summarized in his November 30 memorandum, and gave a general estimate that there would be a significant increase in hostilities in 1966 and that no levelling off or reduction could be foreseen in less than 18 months. This, I thought, was as far ahead as one could well see. I do not know whether this presentation had any effect on the decision, but the fact is that on December (5) the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, under Mr. Martin's leadership, announced a sharp increase from _____ to _____ in the basic discount rate. At once, the President protested sharply, and Martin went to Texas for a conference ^{WHICH} ~~while~~ failed to budge his position.*

* NYT citations. LBJ, p. 445, says the President's objection was to timing not to the increase as such. This was not the impression Mr. Martin gained at the time.

2/11/72

The other part of the economic policy, with which the President must then have been wrestling, concerned the budget. McNamara's increased force requirements for 1966 meant that the additional expenditures in the fiscal year from July 1966 through June 1967 (Fiscal Year 1967, or FY 67 as it was called within government) would come to ^(AN ESTIMATE) \$10 - 11 billion.* Orthodox financial practice in these circumstances would have called for a tax increase, and it appears that such a recommendation was indeed put forward in mid-December by at least one of the President's economic advisors, Gardiner Ackley of the Council of Economic Advisors.**

What followed has never been fully told, although President Johnson's memoirs throw ^{some} much light.*** By the end of the month, he relates, the Director of the Budget, Charles Schultze, was urging that tax increases were a practical necessity in time, although neither he nor Treasury Secretary Fowler were then recommending that they be proposed immediately. The President sent Fowler to see ^(WILSON) Mills, ^(THE ALL-PARTISAN HOUSE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN) who predictably was very negative on taking action in 1966.

From this, the President concluded ^{AGAINST} that any effort to get higher taxes ~~would be "futile."~~ His reasoning is best put in his own words:

"No estimate relating to war costs can ever be considered firm or precise, but all the indicators suggested strongly that in terms of its effect on the economy the cost of a limited war in Vietnam could, for the time being, be kept manageable. These indicators

^(REV) * In fact, it developed that the added expenditures attributable to South-east Asia in the final 1967 returns were \$20 billion rather than \$10.11. However, the figures \$10-11 billion are the ones that recur throughout the papers of December, and I believe represented the best and most honest estimate then in existence.

** Check, and give source if possible.

*** LBJ, pp. 325-6, contains all the material in this paragraph as well as the summary of the President's reasons.

^(1969 Budget Act)

2/11/72

led us to hope and believe late in 1965 that through a combination of restraint, reason, and responsibility, as well as our ability to use the tools of fiscal and monetary management, we could meet our commitments without seeking a tax increase that we had no chance of winning, and without denying our cities, our poor, our aged, our sick, our children, and our minorities the assistance they sorely needed. I pointed out on several occasions, however -- to the Congress and the nation -- that we did not know how long the war would last, that we had no accurate predictions on how much it would cost, and that I would not hesitate to ask Congress for additional taxes if the facts warranted."

Almost every sentence of this paragraph shrieks for elaboration. Did the men who estimated that the economic impact of the war could be kept "manageable" know the much higher 1966 and possible 1967 force needs that McNamara had now put forward? (~~In fact the \$10-11 billion of added costs estimated for FY 1967 in December papers and in the January budget message to Congress turned out, in the end, to be a little over \$20 billion for that fiscal year alone.~~)* Was there really no chance of winning a tax increase if the facts had been honestly presented -- or was it rather the second point, that Congress was judged likely to vote the tax increase, but only at the price of a drastic slash in domestic programs? (This is, of course, exactly what the Congress did in 1968, but from a level of domestic spending that had in the meantime risen very greatly.) Did the President so emphasize his uncertainty on the war's cost as to conceal what he did know?

* ~~Cite 1969 Budget Analysis.~~

2/11/72

I cannot answer these questions. The answers, when they become known, may go to the root not only of President Johnson's conduct of the war, but to the most basic questions of the democratic process in relation to war. It is easy to criticise the President's gradualism of February through July of 1965, and to see that it verged progressively over into a pronounced lack of candor to Congress and the public. But any critic should also be able to see the depth of the President's dilemma. It could be argued that he was trying to do the will of the American public on both counts, the conduct of the war and the setting up of the Great Society Programs. Both, at this stage, surely commanded substantial majorities in the country and in the Congress alike. The problem of practical government was that they were not the same majorities, and that the men who held practical power in the Congress were men prepared to sacrifice the Great Society for the war. *MOREOVER, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAD BEEN HEAVILY*
CONDITIONED AGAINST TAX INCREASES.

The budget ^{ISSUE} debate had a direct bearing on the question of inviting a Great Debate in Congress at this stage -- which the President must have been deliberating at this same time. (The fact that he instructed Rusk and McNamara to ask about "Congressional action" is proof enough of this.) Yet, if any man contemplated a Great Debate at the turn of 1965-66, he could almost at once have come to two conclusions: (1) as in July, the President would in the end have got overwhelming approval, whether through a new Tonkin Gulf Resolution or a specific test action; (2) in the process, the true depth of the financial problem must inescapably have been revealed and in practical politics this would have meant serious damage to the Great Society. In December and January, the line of policy of all of 1965 came

2/11/72

to its final and greatest test. In sticking to it, the President took his greatest gamble.

History, I suspect, will judge the late 1965 decisions to reject a tax increase and not to seek specific Congressional approval of the war as second in importance to the decision of February and July, to stand and fight. Only the President, and perhaps Robert McNamara, can know just how those decisions came out as they did. They were fateful, and, in hindsight, much more important than the decision on a bombing pause.

Yet, all the points came together, and it is impossible to suppose that a President who saw in any situation more angles and interactions than other mortals should have ignored them. It seems to me very likely that what the President finally did on the pause fitted directly into the wider pattern of his plans for dealing with the Congress and the public. With this surmise, let us turn back to the pause story as such.

The Making of the Pause Decision

1. Between December 7th, when the President got the unanimous recommendation of his civilian official advisors for a long pause, and December 27th, when he finally acted on it, the confusion in outward events was almost total. Day by day the pressures built up in public comment -- ^(FOR EXAMPLE,) the New York Times had been urging a pause since November 1st, now its voice roared, and was joined on December ___ by an overwhelming resolution from the influential National Council of Churches.* On all sides, the subject was in the air, a fact which in itself drove the President to several outbursts that his staff were leaking. Quite surely, this was not so; the planning papers were narrowly held, and the advocates

* Cite others.

2/15/72

of a pause, above all, knew that leaks in friendly quarters would affect the President in a harshly negative direction. Perhaps, as sometimes seemed to be the case, Lyndon Johnson could not take in that people outside the government could see the policy possibilities about as well as those inside it. More likely, in this instance, he lashed out at his subordinate because he could not hit at the wider sources of the pressures beating on him. The problem was "fencing him in," and he hated being fenced in.

Apart from public pressures, the air was full of indications, or claimed indications, of North Vietnamese attitudes. The perennial Mai Van Bo in Paris kept talking to visitors, with one report suggesting that North Vietnam would talk if the bombing stopped and the United States suspended its activity in the South as well.* And on December 10 and 11, Hanoi put out broadcasts that seemed almost to reject a pause in advance; one of these was the publication, in its original English, of the note delivered (but allegedly returned unread) in May at the time of the abortive pause then. Was this designed to show to the world that America would simply use a pause as an ultimatum before stronger action?** Could it be designed to suggest that Hanoi would reject any express or implied demand for action -- but might conceivably listen and deliberate if no such demand were made? On the latter hopeful interpretation, Rusk and others of us had already resolved that notice of a pause should be in the blandest and most general terms, whatever else was done.

* Citations, including report from Devillers.

** For the wording of the note, and comment ~~on~~ its unnecessarily abrupt and blunt tone, see Chapter ____.

2/15/72

If tone had been decisive, Hanoi's broadcasts would ^(PROBABLY) have led to the conclusion that a pause was hopeless, no matter how open-ended or free of explicit ultimatum. But, as always, there were those to suggest that bombast from Hanoi would mean just the reverse of confidence, and might be a screen behind which the ruling group ^(CONCEALED) ~~conceded~~ some move. Of more direct evidence there was none: Hanoi was not receiving visitors, and diplomats on the spot could report nothing either of government activity or of remarks with any authority.

Yet, the Dobrynin conversation remained. Perhaps it meant only what it said, that the Soviet Union would try to get something started. Conceivably, it meant that the Russians knew something from Hanoi itself. On the 16th, I lunched with Dobrynin's second man, Alexander Zinchuck, at his suggestion -- after we had met casually at a party. Zinchuck at once struck me as frank and direct. A total professional and servant of his country, he was at the same time easy in conversation, and exceptionally precise and sophisticated in his use of English. In our talk, he declined to interpret Hanoi's broadcasts of the previous days, but did volunteer that Hanoi would not respond to a "mere interruption" in the bombing, that there had to be something more, related to US actions in the south. I did not respond, for throughout the planning for a pause it had been assumed that to interrupt the troop flow during a pause was neither possible nor reasonable. The practical difficulties of turning men around at sea were themselves immense, and the suggestion that the US was abandoning the war would be damaging in South Vietnam. Moreover, there seemed no equity in it, with the heavy flow of forces now moving from the North. In October

2/15/72

and November, it had seemed possible to have a neat pause to come between the arrival of the Phase I (1965) forces and the Phase II (1966) add-ons; after November 15, this was out of the question, as preparatory moves for Phase II were already under way, while some units included in Phase I had not arrived. One new American division, the 25th, was by this time just completing its special training in Hawaii and was scheduled to start arriving in Vietnam the week after Christmas. Thus, if Zinchuck was suggesting a suspension of reinforcements, this was out of the question as the cards lay.

What was possible, however, was to propose a more substantial cease-fire in the South, and to see if this could be extended alongside a suspension of the bombing. This had been urged by Senator Mansfield from Manila, in response to the President's cabled request for his views on a bombing pause. Moreover, by this time the Pope in Rome had published a strong appeal for a Christmas cease-fire,* while the Viet Cong themselves had proclaimed a 12-hour cease-fire, albeit with heavily propagandistic overtones.** ^(ALTHOUGH) American military officers were skeptical that even this period would be observed, and opposed to the concept of a temporary halt in guerrilla fighting with no defined lines between the two sides,***

* Date and terms from NYT.

** The proclamation said that the purpose was to permit Catholics in South Vietnamese Army to attend Church services, provided they did so without the weapons. It was both a demeaning and a divisive proposal, aimed of course at the friction between the Buddhists and Catholics.

*** The obvious problem was that of patrolling and surveillance. Unless these were constant, the other side could readily move undetected into ambush or attack positions. Yet if patrols continued, clashes were inevitable.

2/15/72

But the political pressure was great.

On the (18th), the President decided to chance it. On that Saturday, he talked for hours with his senior advisors about the pause, in a session fully told in the President's memoirs.* As on December 7th, Rusk, McNamara, Ball, McGeorge Bundy, and Alexis Johnson were in favor; Abe Fortas and Clark Clifford were against. The President showed his own perplexity, but did agree that there should be a Christmas cease-fire, including a suspension of the bombing of the North, if the South Vietnamese government agreed. After discussions over the weekend between Lodge and Ky, the two governments announced on the (22nd) that their forces would observe a 30-hour cease-fire from Christmas Eve through the whole of Christmas Day. Furthermore, even after this time, there would be no resumption of hostilities unless the other side compelled it.** The proposal came late, and it could hardly be supposed that the other side would be able to get the word to all outlying units. But it was a gesture, and possibly a first step.

After his round of state visits from December (16) to December (21), the President returned to Texas, leaving his subordinates feeling that he

* LBJ, pp. 235-237. The account is, however, misleading in suggesting that the cease-fire idea had already been agreed with the South Vietnamese. In fact, it was not put to them until the (19th), on the basis of an instruction to Lodge on the (18th). Full agreement for the 30-hour time period was reached on the (21st). Only on the 25th, as the cease-fire came to an end, did the President decide to extend the bombing suspension, with Lodge then informing Ky of this added decision, expressed then as covering "a day or two more" only. (Check cables for cite. This is what S. told R. on the 25th.)

**Citation to NYT.

2/15/72

had either decided against a serious bombing pause, or was waiting to see whether something came of the cease-fire. On the latter possibility, most of us, myself included, saw little hope. It seemed that the idea was, for practical purposes, dead.

Yet Dean Rusk continued to poke and probe. On the 22nd, Ambassador Kohler saw Gromyko in Moscow, but got nothing -- not even a repetition of the Dobrynin message. Between the lines, it could be sensed that the Russians felt themselves unable to move further or act as direct intermediaries. Hence, on the 23rd, Rusk decided to work through Hungary, the Eastern European nation which, in October, had seemed strongest in urging a pause. In this way, Rusk calculated, he could convey the clearest possible picture of the American position, avoid putting the Russians on the spot, and at the same time get whatever the combined resources of the Soviet Union and its close satellites, (almost certainly acting in full concert) had to offer in the way of help or information.

The ensuing meetings with the Hungarian Charge, Janos Radvanyi, were in the classic tradition of secret high-level diplomacy. Rusk himself handled the first one personally, not informing me or any of his staff until the following day, and writing out his own message. Almost certainly this procedure reflected the President's instructions; only he, Rusk, and probably McNamara knew at this stage what was being done. Although I was involved from the 24th on, I still did not know the purpose of the channel. My hunch was -- and is -- that Rusk and McNamara both wanted to test, and hoped that the response would encourage the President to go ahead on the

2/15/72

serious pause. But perhaps not even they knew whether or how his mind might change. Only in late July 1965 and again in March of 1968 did the President hold the cards so close to his chest, and conceal his intentions - if indeed he had made his mind up.

At his first talk with Radvanyi, on the 23rd, Rusk recalled his talk with Foreign Minister Peter in October, in which Rusk had asked Peter (as he has others) what would happen if the United States stopped the bombing of the North. Now, Rusk said, he was renewing the inquiry, urgently. Moreover, Rusk gave Radvanyi a full 12-point summary of the American position -- which with subsequent editing was to become the published American "Fourteen Points for Peace."*

The response was almost immediate. On the 24th, Radvanyi called to ask American intentions concerning the Christmas truce. The Secretary's response indicated the US was at least considering extension -- and again asked what the other side would do. The Hungarians had not yet come up with anything, but it seemed that the channels in Eastern Europe, perhaps to Hanoi, were at peak alert.

Perhaps this message contributed to the President's slow shift of mind. On Christmas Day the military reports were disappointing, but hardly surprising. Two hours after their own 12-hour truce period had expired, the Viet Cong had launched a series of small incidents, and the cease-fire had been cancelled, on General Westmoreland's orders, after the 30 hours expired. On Christmas morning in Texas, the President nonetheless decided

* LBJ, p. 582, says these were published on Jan 3. Get NYT cite and full text, for possible use. COOPER, p. 536, HAS SUMMARY TEXT FROM DSB, 2/14/65, AND WP, 12/29/65. CHECK BOTH.

2/15/72

that the bombing of the North should remain suspended for another day or two. Still, there was no final decision, and on Monday, the 27th, Rusk jogged Radvanyi hard. At six that night, the Hungarian called back to say that he had a message.

Again, he came to the Department by private means and out of sight. As had now become our custom, I met him and took him to the Secretary's office. His message was short and explicit: was the United States prepared to enter into negotiations, on its "platform" (the 12 points, later 14), with the National Liberation Front?

Without saying so in so many words, Radvanyi implied unmistakably that the inquiry came either from Hanoi or from the NLF itself, which had just opened an office in Budapest.* It was a return to an old theme, one which Hanoi had not stressed in recent weeks, and which Soviet representatives had never mentioned. Carefully, the Secretary explained that there were all sorts of ways for the NLF to talk with Saigon,** and that in any formal negotiations the US, as the President had said in July, could see no difficulty in finding ways for the NLF to be represented. However, he went on, US forces were in South Vietnam only because of actions by North Vietnam against the South, so that the American problem lay with Hanoi, not with the NLF. It was the standard answer, but given as gently and fully as possible. Radvanyi expressed his disagreement bluntly.

* As we shall see in the next chapter, this implication was false. The message was solely a Hungarian idea.

** In fact, through November and December, Lodge in Saigon was dealing with a purported NLF approach, expecting to pass it on to the Ky government if it had substance. It petered out in January.

2/15/72

The conversation was at once reported to the President in Texas. (Check this.) Mysterious on any reading, it could be a stall by the Hungarians, or a test whether the Americans were prepared for a major concession at the outset. Or it could, just conceivably, be the beginning of a serious feeling out process, through a trusted third party. At any rate, something was happening, and it could hardly be let go.

Because the Radvanyi message was the last act before the President made known his decision, there may be a tendency on my part to give it weight to which it is not entitled. No one that I know of can say what the true factors were in the President's mind. As often, he was a complete mystery to subordinates at my level, absorbed in a particular key problem, and so far as I could tell as much of a mystery to his Secretaries of State and Defense.

What happened is ^{thus} ~~somewhat~~ clearer than why it did. Chester Cooper's account would suggest that ^{as} of the afternoon of the 27th, the President ^{APPARENTLY} expected that the bombing would resume. McGeorge Bundy and McNamara told him, however, that no time had been set, and suggested extending the suspension till the New Year.* Finally, late that night, the President gave the signal to go ahead, telling Saigon (not consulting them in any true sense) and mounting a major diplomatic effort -- to which we shall come in the next chapter.

Cui Bono?

i. Why dwell at such length on the pause decision? Was it really all that important?

The answer is threefold. First, (and least), the making of this decision illustrates the President's developing methods for deciding on

* Cooper, pp. 291-2.

2/15/72

next steps. His style had become more and more personal throughout 1965; his illness in the fall of 1965 raised this element to new heights, from which it was never thereafter to descend. One can track with some clarity his decisions of February and July. By December, it was almost impossible to tell how he was reacting and how he might decide to act. The war, it is not unfair to say, was beginning to get to him. His innate preference for keeping his subordinates both guessing and familiar only with a part of the picture was at its height in these months of semi-isolation in Texas. My own hunch is that he came to prefer to operate this way, and thenceforth did it even when the machinery of government was ready to his hand in Washington.

Second, the decision, I am sure, brought together all the strands in the conduct of the war. Without a prolonged pause, it was the judgment of ^(THE PRESIDENT) his advisors that he would face serious criticism at home and abroad as he inevitably moved to further military steps. But this in itself would not have moved Lyndon Johnson especially. What did affect him was twofold. At one level there was a passionate desire for peace, warring always with fear of being played for a sucker, but still strong if any hope was offered. After the decision, I was told by a reliable witness that Christmas spent in part with younger people who might be called to war had a real effect on his attitudes.

But at another level, the President was the practical man trying to figure out a way to meet his twin objectives of carrying the war through successfully and of launching the Great Society. Here, the over-riding practical calculation was whether a frontal confrontation with Congress, laying all the cards face up, would be helpful, or the reverse. I am sure

2/15/72

he concluded that such a confrontation would be a disaster, more likely for the Great Society than for the war, and was looking for any way to avoid having the pressures build up for it. From this, it is only a short speculative step to the conclusion that a key factor on the bombing pause may have been its impact in pre-empting attention through the January period, when Congress and the country ^(WILL AGAIN BE) really focussed on the new war on which the country was embarked. With the pause to the fore, the President must surely have thought, there would be enough uncertainty to forestall the demands so clearly latent in December, that Congress take a hard look at the war and take some new authorizing action.

In drawing this inference, I am not by any means suggesting that the President viewed the pause as a smokescreen pure and simple. The foreign policy arguments came before him in their own right, and were very closely balanced. In the realities of policy-making, it is no derogation whatever to say that a complex domestic political calculation may have been the decisive factor. Of such is the Presidency, in war or peace, and perhaps especially when both flow together.

This speculation aside, the pause decision was part of a wider series of decisions that in effect laid out the conduct of the war. In strategy, a last chance for Hanoi to cool things off, then a step up of American forces and a gradual bombing increase. On the home front, minimum disruption and every effort to have the Great Society too. The sum total of these decisions gave the essentially final form to the whole war effort. For that reason alone, the period of late 1965 is integral to the study of the basic Vietnam decisions, and not a digression into tactics.

2/15/72

THIRD AND LAST,

~~Partly a response to political pressures and to practical needs in the conduct of the war,~~ the pause and the peace offensive that went with it had important reasons in the great power context of the war. In particular, they produced a test of Soviet ability to influence the situation, and a last chance for Hanoi to arrest the military spiral. This was serious business. We shall see in the next chapter how ~~seriously~~ it was conducted, and whether it might have come close to success.