

C. POLITICO-MILITARY DECISIONS

While the efforts to encourage a more effective and representative South Vietnamese Government were going forward, the diplomatic arm of the US Government was also deeply involved in decisions concerning the use of military power to attain our national objectives in Viet-Nam. The discussion below does not purport to trace the history of military operations in Viet-Nam or even to discuss the numerous secondary politico-military problems which grew out of the conduct of these operations, e.g., decisions on the use of defoliants and riot control agents. Rather, it attempts to outline briefly the main thrust of our politico-military policy and to lay out some of the factors which bore on the major decisions regarding the conduct of the war and US involvement in it.

1. The Military Situation at the End of 1963

Before moving to this discussion, a brief resume of the military situation in South Viet-Nam as the Johnson

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Administration took up the reins of government would be in order. As noted above, there had been concern that the intense political struggle during the summer and fall of 1963 would have an adverse effect on the conduct of counter-insurgency operations. In the immediate post-Diem period it became apparent that the government's military position had weakened as continuing political instability tended to distract the attention of the South Vietnamese military while at the same time enemy capabilities were growing.

By the end of 1963, Viet Cong Main Force strength had risen to 30 battalions and around 35,000 men. The intelligence estimates on infiltration from North Viet-Nam which in 1963 had totalled 7,906 (confirmed and probable) began to climb in 1964, with native born North Vietnamese making up an increasingly greater percentage of the influx. Estimated total infiltration for 1964 was in excess of 12,000. (While all infiltration figures are refined over a period of time as additional information becomes available, and thus these figures are more exact than those in use at that point, the infiltration figures quoted above correspond quite closely to what were the estimates at that time.) Modern weapons of Communist manufacture began to show up with increasing frequency on the battlefield, and the Communists pressed toward the standardization of weapons in main force Viet Cong units.

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2. The McNamara Mission - March 1964

Early in March 1964 the President despatched Secretary of Defense McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor to Viet-Nam to study the situation and to make appropriate recommendations. Their report to the President dated March 16 asserted "The situation has unquestionably been growing worse, at least since September." They cited several indicators to back up this judgment: (a) In 22 of the 43 provinces the Viet Cong controlled 50 percent or more of the land area; (b) large groups of the population were showing apathy and indifference, and military morale was slipping; (c) the political control structure extending from Saigon down to the hamlets disappeared following the November coup, and power vacuums had developed in some areas; (d) North Vietnamese support, always significant, had been increasing; and (e) the viability of the Khanh Government was an uncertain factor.

Secretary McNamara's report contained twelve recommendations. The main thrust of these recommendations was to make it clear that the US Government was prepared to assist and

support the South Vietnamese for as long as it might take to bring the insurgency under control. Specific measures designed to improve South Viet-Nam's military effort were outlined, including support for an increase of 50,000 men in the Vietnamese armed forces and the provision of newer model aircraft and armored personnel carriers. Certain measures related to border control along the South Viet-Nam/Laos border were authorized (high level US reconnaissance, limited South Vietnamese ground operations across the border), while plans were to be made for more extensive "border control" actions as well as a program of "graduated overt military pressure" and retaliatory actions against North Viet-Nam.

Among the possible actions considered but rejected by the Secretary of Defense were the introduction of a US combat unit to secure the Saigon area and a takeover of military command by the United States. Both were regarded as having adverse psychological consequences which would outweigh their military advantage. Furthermore, they would run counter to our continuing objective of placing primary emphasis on

helping the Vietnamese win their own war.

Ambassador Lodge concurred wholeheartedly with all recommendations, except that he favored immediate action on the full range of Laotian and Cambodian "border control" actions and on reconnaissance over North Viet-Nam rather than simply planning for these operations. He also said, "I continue to believe in pressure and persuasion on North Viet-Nam to cease its aggression in South Viet-Nam by an essentially diplomatic carrot and stick approach backed by covert military means... I reserve judgment on overt US measures against North Viet-Nam (except on a tit for tat basis if Americans are singled out for V.C. attack here again) until covert methods have been fully tried." ^{1/}

The President replied by cable on March 17 stating that he had reviewed the Ambassador's comments with the Secretaries of State and Defense and was delighted to find a high

^{1/} From Saigon, Telegram to White House, Unnumbered, Info SecState 1757, March 15, 1964.

measure of agreement on the proposed actions.^{2/} Most of Ambassador Lodge's points were incorporated in the final report which was approved by the National Security Council on March 17 and promulgated as National Security Council Action Memorandum No. 288.

With regard to reconnaissance over North Viet-Nam the President said:

"On overt high- or low-level reconnaissance over North Vietnam, we are not ready to make a decision now. I have asked that political and diplomatic preparations be made to lay a basis for such reconnaissance if it seems necessary or desirable after a few weeks, for military or political reasons, or both."

The President added that, like Ambassador Lodge, he reserved judgment on overt US measures against North Viet-Nam. But he authorized Lodge to prepare a contingency recommendation for specific tit-for-tat actions in the event

^{2/} Department of State Telegram 1454 to Saigon.

attacks on Americans were renewed. (There had been several terrorist attacks in Saigon in February specifically directed at Americans, including bombings during a performance at an American theater and during a baseball game.)

Ambassador Lodge replied to the President's message saying that he would carry out the program with maximum energy. With regard to North Viet-Nam he said:

"The problem is how to persuade North Vietnam, and a corollary is how to apply our power in relatively limited doses so as to give them a sample of how really dangerous we are. Some overt reconnaissance flights might be useful as an initial step."

"What we can do to them should also be linked to what we can do for them--in terms of rice and removing whatever US personnel we intend to remove anyway." ^{3/}

Commenting further four days later, Lodge said he continued to believe that overt US action should be withheld

3/ From Saigon, Telegram 1776 to Department of State, March 19, 1964. At that time there was still hope that our military advisory effort would be sufficient and that we might in fact begin reducing our military advisory personnel in the foreseeable future.

until after US and GVN covert steps had been tried as part of an essentially diplomatic pressure move. If such an effort could be successfully carried out, it would discourage the Viet Cong and greatly strengthen General Khanh's southern base.^{4/}

On March 25, Ambassador Lodge reported that a committee had been established in Saigon to make recommendations for specific tit-for-tat actions against North Viet-Nam. The committee completed its deliberations during the first week in April and the results were reported to Washington by the Embassy. "It was agreed that to obtain the 12 - 24 hour reaction time so desirable in the tit-for-tat program, primary reliance must be placed on air strikes and aerial mining. Military targets are considered preferable to industrial /targets/, and military targets which can be linked directly to DRV support of the VC are given first priority." The Embassy cable went on to state that no

^{4/} From Saigon, Telegram 1803 to Department of State, March 23, 1964.

American participation was envisaged in the preliminary planning, but that a strong case could be made for the use of Americans to insure success when retaliating for terrorism against Americans in South Viet-Nam.^{5/}

In the succeeding months, despite a continuation of the precarious military and political situation, our policy continued to be governed by an appreciation that the South was the primary arena where the war would be won or lost and that the principal objective of our military effort was to help the South Vietnamese develop the capacity to handle the insurgency themselves. There was a clear recognition, however, that supplemental military measures outside the borders of South Viet-Nam, requiring a large measure of US support, might be necessary if the North Vietnamese persisted in expanding their military assistance to the insurgency and the South Vietnamese found themselves unable to cope with the

^{5/} From Saigon, Telegram 1937 to Department of State, April 9, 1964.

heightened pressure. With the exception of some limited cross border operations against the infiltration routes through Laos, all planning for actions which would represent a fundamental change in the nature of our military assistance to Viet-Nam remained in the contingency category until enemy actions made it necessary to commit US Military forces to direct combat in early 1965.

Thus, following the McNamara-Taylor visit in March our main effort was devoted to finding ways of making the South Vietnamese counter-insurgency effort more effective. At the same time, planning for possible military measures against North Viet-Nam went ahead, slowly at first, and at a more accelerated pace as the year wore on. Covert actions against North Viet-Nam (Code Name 34-A) had been instituted before 1964. These were mainly hit and run harassing operations undertaken by South Vietnamese commando type forces (mainly seaborne) with some US support in the form of training and transportation. The military objective of these operations was to obtain intelligence and to sabotage such enemy

military installations as were vulnerable to this form of attack. The 34-A operations had an important psychological goal as well -- to remind the North Vietnamese that they were not wholly immune from attack.

As noted previously, our policy toward North Viet-Nam embodied the "carrot and stick" approach. The stick was the threat of more vigorous military action against the North coupled with stepped up assistance to South Viet-Nam's military effort, while the carrot was the elimination of the military threat with the accompanying benefits of peaceful coexistence in exchange for Hanoi's renunciation of the use of force against the South. Later it was decided to convey this message explicitly to the Hanoi authorities through the Canadian ICC Commissioner, Blair Seaborn, who arrived in Saigon in June of 1964. (The Seaborn Mission is described in greater detail below, in Part F, The US Search for Peace.)

3. Second McNamara Visit and Honolulu Conference; May-June 1964

In May, Secretary McNamara again visited Viet-Nam and reported that more needed to be done to beef-up the South

Vietnamese military capabilities, which were not improving fast enough to cope with the enemy effort. Following McNamara's return to Washington it was decided to have a meeting of high-level civilian and military officials at CINCPAC Headquarters in Honolulu, taking advantage of Secretary Rusk's Far East trip which took him to New Delhi, Saigon and back to Washington via Honolulu. In addition to Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, those participating in the conference included Ambassador Lodge and principal members of the Saigon Mission, as well as top military commanders.

The purpose of the Honolulu meeting was laid out in a telegram to our Saigon Embassy as follows:

You will have surmised from yesterday's telegram from President and Secretary that we here are fully aware that gravest decisions are in front of us and other governments about free world's interest in and commitment to security of South-east Asia. Our point of departure is and must be that we cannot accept over-running of South-east Asia by Hanoi and Peiping. Full and frank discussion of these decisions with you is purpose of Honolulu meeting. We are pleased you agree with suggestion that meeting begin on Monday, June 1, and Secretary is arranging his homeward schedule from New Delhi on that basis.

President will continue in close consultation with congressional leadership (he met with Democratic Leadership and Senate Republicans yesterday) and will wish the Congress associated with him on any steps which carry with them substantial acts and risks of escalation. At that point, there will be three central questions:

- (a) Is the security of Southeast Asia vital to the United States and to the Free World?
- (b) Are the additional steps necessary?
- (c) Will the additional steps accomplish their mission of stopping the intrusions of Hanoi and Peiping into the South? 6/

The chief proposal offered by Washington for discussion at the conference was a suggestion that US personnel drawn from the US military and civilian establishment in Viet-Nam be "encadred" into the Vietnamese political and military structure in order to "induce a sense of urgency and hopefully

6/ Department of State Telegram 2095 to Saigon, May 27, 1964.

to produce executive competence in those structures." The conference was also to discuss stabilizing the political situation, improving the pacification effort and eliminating the "business as usual" attitude in Saigon, and any other matter which Ambassador Lodge might wish to introduce.

The conference did not produce any basic changes in our policy of providing military assistance to the South Vietnamese, but planning for additional measures was agreed upon.

On his return to Saigon June 4, Ambassador Lodge went immediately to discuss the results of the conference in general terms with Prime Minister Khanh. Lodge reported his conversation with the Prime Minister in these words:

I went straight to his office and spoke somewhat as follows:

We Americans are definitely moving ahead. We have a determination not only to stand by Viet-Nam come what may, but also a determination no longer to permit a situation to exist in which the enemy can intrude at will into your territory, using the tactics in which they excel, whereas our side refrains from using on them the tactics at which we excel.

The different ways of doing this are being actively studied. Also, measures are in

preparation to insure that the United States is able to cover whatever action against Viet-Nam might take place. As we agreed when Secretary Rusk was here, the burden of this would fall very largely on us.

Measures of this magnitude, under our system of government, require the observance of certain constitutional processes, and these are being actively prepared.

In the meantime, the United States hopes the Government of Viet-Nam will press forward with the Chien Thang Pacification Plan for the critical provinces. We will have specific ideas to submit to you soon.

We are also worried about the low ARVN strength, notably in the places most necessary. 7/

In response to a question from Khanh about what kind of pressures on the North we had in mind, Lodge reported:

I said we had settled on nothing but that obviously there were many kinds of pressure that could be brought to bear by land, sea and air and that decisions would have to be made. I pointed out that you could not be sure that something which was done would not involve a Chinese reaction and that anything involving China turned the whole matter at once into a development of worldwide significance, to which he agreed. This meant that we had to be prepared for contingencies even though they might be remote.

7/ From Saigon, Telegram 2405 to Department of State, June 4, 1964.

Later, General Westmoreland discussed some of the military measures in greater detail with Prime Minister Khanh, including: "Augmentation of advisors at battalion level, extension of larger advisory teams to most districts, provision of advisors to artillery battalions, and augmentation of advisors to VNN (the Vietnamese Navy)." Khanh was very receptive to these proposals.^{8/}

During the summer, US military assistance was stepped up in accordance with the approved programs, but infiltration from the North continued at a high level, and Viet Cong forces grew in strength and continued to receive improved equipment.

4. The Gulf of Tonkin Incident

The North Vietnamese naval attacks on the US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2 and 4 introduced a new element into the politico-military equation. The nature of

^{8/} COMUSMACV 251501Z, June 1964.

the enemy action was different from what had been envisaged in our "tit-for-tat" planning. Yet it was clear that these attacks were deliberate, and the Administration's view was that "this deliberate and unprovoked attack on US vessels in international waters (could) not go unanswered." ^{9/} It also seemed entirely possible that this action by North Viet-Nam together with the increased levels of infiltration and heavy attacks in the South signalled the beginning of a new assault by the communists on the Free World position in Southeast Asia.

The method of retaliation chosen -- a one-time air strike launched from carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin against the North Vietnamese PT boats and their supporting bases -- was appropriate to the provocation, while at the same time we were not committed to move to a new level of operations in our continuing efforts to help the Vietnamese counter the

^{9/} Department of State Telegram to Saigon, No. 341, August 4, 1964.

insurgency in the South.^{10/} The strikes had an electrifying effect on the South Vietnamese but we quickly made clear to them that our objective was a limited one and that we still considered the struggle on the ground in South Viet-Nam to be the decisive element.

The August 2 and 4 incidents and the passage of the so-called Tonkin Gulf Resolution (by which the Congress expressed approval and support for the determination of the President "To take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression") lent additional urgency to planning for possible US counter-measures against North Viet-Nam.

5. Post-Tonkin Reassessment

The days following the Gulf of Tonkin incidents were devoted to a reassessment of the situation in Southeast Asia. A high level paper drafted in Washington during the second

^{10/} Department of State Telegram 341 to Saigon, August 4, 1964.

week of August suggested broad policy lines to be followed during the next few months. It began by saying that the next two weeks should be a short holding phase in which we would avoid actions that would in any way take the onus off the Communist side for escalation. The DESOTO (destroyer) patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin were to be discontinued and new covert (34A) operations were to be held in abeyance. The current situation was assessed as follows: 11/

We are not yet sure what the Communist side may do in this period. They have introduced aircraft into North Vietnam and may well send in at least token ground forces. VC activity could step up markedly any moment. Although the volume of Chicom propaganda and demonstrations is ominous, it does not yet clearly suggest any further moves; if they were made, we would act accordingly. This paper assumes the Communist side does not go beyond the above.

South Viet-Nam is not going well. The Mission's monthly report (Saigon 377) expresses hope for significant gains by end of year. But it also says Khanh's chances of staying in power are only 50-50, that the leadership (though not so

11/ Department of State Telegram 439 to Saigon, August 14, 1964.

much the people or the army) has symptoms of defeatism and hates the prospect of slugging it out within the country, that there will be mounting pressures for wider action "which, if resisted, will create frictions and irritations which could lead local politicians to serious consideration of a negotiated solution or local soldiers to military adventure without US consent."

In other words, even if situation in our view does go a bit better, we have major problem maintaining morale. Our actions of last week lifted that morale temporarily, but they also aroused expectations, and morale could easily sag back again if the VC have successes and we do nothing further.

Hanoi and Peiping as of now are certainly not persuaded they must abandon efforts in South Vietnam and Laos. The US response to the North Vietnamese naval attacks undoubtedly convinced the Communist side we will act strongly where US force units are directly involved -- as they have previously seen in our handling of Laos reconnaissance. But in other respects the Communist side may not be so persuaded that we are prepared to take stronger actions, either in response to infiltration into SVN or to VC activity. The Communists probably believe we might counter air action in Laos quite firmly but we would not wish to be drawn into ground action there.

The paper went on to assert that South Viet-Nam was still the main theater and that morale and momentum there must be

maintained. This meant: "(1) 'devising the best possible means of action that, for minimum risk, gets maximum results in terms of raising South Vietnamese morale and putting pressure on North Viet-Nam, (2) opposing any conference on Viet-Nam and playing the prospect of a Laos conference very carefully and (3) keeping our hands free for at least limited measures against the Laos infiltration areas."

On a broader plane the discussion went on to state:

Basically a solution in both South Vietnam and Laos will require a combination of military pressure and some form of communication under which Hanoi (and Peiping) eventually accept idea of getting out. Negotiation without continued military action will not achieve our objectives in the foreseeable future. But military pressures could be accompanied by attempts to communicate with Hanoi and perhaps Peiping -- through third-country channels, through side conversations around Laos negotiations of any sort -- provided always that we make clear both to the Communists and South Vietnam that military pressure will continue until we have achieved our objectives. After, but only after, we have established a clear pattern of pressure hurting the DRV and leaving no doubts in South Vietnam of our resolve, we could even accept a conference broadened to include the Vietnam issue. (The UN now looks to be out as a communication forum though this could conceivably change.)

Under the heading "A -- Limited Pressures," specific actions (not involving major risk of escalation) were proposed to be applied from late August tentatively through December, foreshadowing possible stronger measures to come. These included: (1) the Vietnamese Government's publicly acknowledging and justifying 34-A operations, (2) joint US-GVN planning for operations against NVN and the panhandle of Laos (which would help maintain South Vietnamese morale and inhibit any unilateral GVN moves), (3) accelerated training of Vietnamese in jet aircraft, (4) limited cross border operations by GVN forces into the Laos Panhandle, (5) reintroduction of DESOTO patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin (clearly dissociated from 34-A operations), (6) specific tit-for-tat actions (e.g. mining Haiphong channel or attacking Haiphong POL) to respond to VC actions such as sabotage of major POL stocks or terrorist attacks on US dependents and (7) withdrawal of US dependents if the situation should reach another intense point.

There followed a short discussion under the heading

"B -- More Serious Pressures" as follows:

All the above actions would be foreshadowing systematic military action against DRV, and we might at some point conclude such action was required either because of incidents arising from the above actions or because of a deterioration of the situation in South Viet-Nam, particularly if there were to be clear evidence of greatly increased infiltration from the north. However, in absence of such major new developments, we should be thinking of a contingency date for planning purposes, as suggested by Ambassador Taylor, of January 1, 1965.

Ambassador Taylor commented on this paper in a telegram despatched on August 18. He discussed the pros and cons of course of action "A" (Limited Pressures) as follows: ^{12/}

If successful, course of action "A" will accomplish the objectives set forth at the outset as essential to the support of US policy in South Viet-Nam. (I will press the Khanh Government into doing its homework in pacification and will limit the diversion of interest to the out-of-country ventures.) It gives adequate time for careful preparation estimated at several months, while doing sufficient at once to maintain internal morale. It also provides ample warning to Hanoi and Peking to allow them

^{12/} From Saigon, Telegram 465, August 18, 1964.

to adjust their conduct before becoming over-committed.

On the other hand, course of action "A" relies heavily upon the durability of the Khanh Government. It assumes that there is little danger of its collapse without notice or of its possible replacement by a weaker or more unreliable successor. Also, because of the drawn-out nature of the program, it is exposed to the danger of international political pressure to enter into negotiations before NVN is really hurting from the pressure directed against it.

With regard to course of action "B" (More Serious Pressures)

Ambassador Taylor made the following observations:

It may well be that the problem of US policy in SVN is more urgent than that depicted in the foregoing statement. It is far from clear at the present moment that the Khanh Government can last until January 1, 1965, although the application of course of action "A" should have the effect of strengthening the government internally and of silencing domestic squabbling. If we assume, however, that we do not have the time available which is implicit in course of action "A" (several months), we would have to restate the problem in the following terms. Our objective is to avoid the possible consequences of a collapse of national morale. To accomplish these purposes, we would have to open the campaign against the DRV without delay, seeking to force Hanoi as rapidly as possible to desist from aiding the VC and to convince the DRV that it must cooperate in calling off the VC insurgency.

To meet this statement of the problem, we need an accelerated course of action, seeking to obtain results faster than under course of action "A." Such an accelerated program would include the following actions:

Again we must inform Khanh of our intentions, this time expressing a willingness to begin military pressures against Hanoi at once, providing that he will undertake to perform as in course of action "A." However, US action would not await evidence of performance.

Again we may wish to communicate directly on this subject with Hanoi or await the effect of our military actions. The scenario of the ensuing events would be essentially the same as under course "A" but the execution would await only the readiness of plans to expedite, relying almost exclusively on US military means.

Pros and cons of course of action "B" ("More Serious Pressures"). This course of action asks virtually nothing from the Khanh Government, primarily because it is assumed that little can be expected from it. It avoids the consequences of the sudden collapse of the Khanh Government and gets underway with minimum delay the punitive actions against Hanoi. Thus it lessens the chance of an interruption of the program by an international demand for negotiation by presenting a fait accompli to international critics. However, it increases the likelihood of US involvement in ground action, since Khanh will have almost no available ground forces which can be released from pacification employment to mobile resistance of DRV attacks.

The Ambassador concluded by saying that course of action "A" offered the greater promise of achieving US policy objectives in South Viet-Nam during the coming months. But bearing in mind the fragility of the Khanh Government, we should be prepared to shift quickly to course of action "B" if the situation required, at the same time being ready for any military response which might be initiated by North Viet-Nam or Communist China.

These various recommendations were considered at the highest levels during the latter part of August and early September. On September 10 the President, after having reviewed the situation personally with Ambassador Taylor and other advisors, approved the following actions:

1. US Naval patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin were to be resumed promptly after Ambassador Taylor's return.
2. South Vietnamese covert operations against the North (34-A) were to be resumed after the completion of the first new DESOTO patrol. The GVN was to be prepared to acknowledge that the maritime operations were taking place

and justify them on the basis of the fact of North Vietnamese infiltration by sea. (Air strikes under 34-A were not to be considered for the present.)

3. Prompt discussions were to be initiated with the government of Laos concerning plans for limited South Vietnamese air and ground operations into the corridor areas of Laos, together with Lao air strikes and possible use of US armed aerial reconnaissance. Action would be taken on the basis of these discussions.

4. Preparations were to be made to respond appropriately against North Viet-Nam in the event of an attack on US units or in response to any "special" NVN/VC actions against South Viet-Nam.

The results of these decisions were to be kept under constant review. The President also reemphasized the importance of economic and political actions having immediate impact in South Viet-Nam and said that money would be forthcoming for all worthwhile projects in this field. All these decisions were governed by a prevailing judgment that the

first order of business under the existing circumstances was to take actions which would help strengthen the fabric of the Government of Viet-Nam. If larger decisions were required at any time, they would be taken.^{13/}

At a meeting in Saigon on September 11 attended by representatives from the US missions in Bangkok and Vientiane, basic agreement was reached on operations in the Laos corridor. CINCPAC was to submit plans for these operations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff by September 24. A major unresolved issue was whether US advisors would accompany Vietnamese units into Laos.^{14/}

The latter part of 1964, when these decisions were being implemented, was a period characterized by political turmoil in South Viet-Nam. We had set broad conditions which we expected the South Vietnamese to meet before we embarked on Phase II operations (equivalent to course of action "B," More Serious Pressures). These conditions

^{13/} National Security Action Memorandum NSAM 314, September 10, 1964.

^{14/} Memorandum to the Secretary from S/VN - Michael Forrestal, dated September 22, 1964, Subject: Status of Actions under NSAM 314 .

envisaged "a stable, effective government capable of conducting successfully the campaign against the Viet Cong" and "a government in Saigon able to speak for and to its people." On December 7 and again on December 9, Ambassador Taylor, Deputy Ambassador Johnson and General Westmoreland met with Prime Minister Huong, Deputy Prime Minister Vien and General Khanh to discuss specific actions designed to strengthen the government of Viet-Nam. Performance was to be measured against such criteria as attainment of authorized strength for military, paramilitary and police forces, establishment of new and higher force levels for these forces, better performance by government officials, improvement of budgetary operations, clarifying and strengthening the power of province chiefs and police, more vigor in the Hop Tac (pacification area near Saigon) operation.^{15/}

The political convulsions of late December and early January temporarily side-tracked further consideration of

^{15/} From Saigon, Telegrams 1746, December 7, 1964, and 1763, December 9, 1964.

these actions or any new measures against North Viet-Nam. On the US side, however, work went ahead in preparing a public release which would spell out in greater detail than had hitherto been made public the nature of North Viet-Nam's involvement in the war in the South and the level of infiltration. Such a document would be used to lay the ground work in world opinion for possible US counter-measures. ^{16/}

Although we were prepared to move against the North if necessary, our policy remained focused on our primary objective -- that of strengthening the Vietnamese Government to enable it to cope with the insurgency in the South. Ambassador Taylor had seen merit in a reprisal attack for the bombing of an American BOQ in Saigon on Christmas Day, preferably against a barracks in NVN, if the bombing could be clearly

^{16/} Department of State Telegram 1231 to Saigon, and Embassy Saigon's 1776 to the Department, December 10, 1964. The information discussed in these telegrams was eventually published by the Department of State in late February 1965 as a pamphlet titled "Aggression from the North, the Record of North Viet-Nam's Campaign to Conquer South Viet-Nam."

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shown to be the work of the Viet Cong. He acknowledged that a restraining factor was the poor state of relations at that time between the US representatives in Viet-Nam and the Vietnamese military. Nevertheless, he was prepared to recommend a strike by US aircraft alone, excluding the South Vietnamese.^{17/} However, despite provocations such as this and the attack on the Bien Hoa air base in November, Washington did not consider the time was ripe to retaliate with strikes against the North.

6. Initiation of Bombing Attacks on North Viet-Nam

As 1965 dawned, the situation on the ground in South Viet-Nam was grim, matching the disarray on the political front. Although the South Vietnamese continued to fight on with occasional successes in individual battles, the net balance was decidedly unfavorable. Infiltration from the North was continuing at a high level and regular North Vietnamese Army units were heading south; subsequent intelligence indicated that the first battalion

^{17/} From Saigon, Telegram 1941, December 25, 1964.

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having entered South Viet-Nam in December.

In early February the President sent his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy, and several other high-ranking advisers to South Viet-Nam to survey the situation and make recommendations. In his report to the President of February 7, 1965, Bundy began by saying:

The situation in Viet-Nam is deteriorating, and without new US action defeat appears inevitable -- probably not in a matter of weeks or perhaps even months, but within the next year or so. There is still time to turn it around, but not much.

The stakes in Viet-Nam are extremely high. The American investment is very large, and American responsibility is a fact of life which is palpable in the atmosphere of Asia, and even elsewhere. The international prestige of the United States, and a substantial part of our influence, are directly at risk in Viet-Nam. There is no way of unloading the burden on the Vietnamese themselves, and there is no way of negotiating ourselves out of Viet-Nam which offers any serious promise at present. It is possible that at some future time a neutral non-Communist force may emerge, perhaps under Buddhist leadership, but no such force currently exists, and any negotiated US withdrawal today would mean surrender on the installment plan.

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In this atmosphere the enemy was becoming bolder; and on the night of February 5-6, 1965, two heavy attacks were mounted against an air base at Pleiku and a US barracks at Tuy Hoa, causing heavy American casualties. These attacks were judged by the highest authorities in Washington to be of sufficient magnitude and seriousness to warrant a reprisal in the form of an air strike against targets in North Viet-Nam. The basic considerations involved in this decision were stated in a circular telegram from the Department to all diplomatic posts as follows: 18/

- a. Attacks [on the air base and barracks] along with other intelligence indicated clear Hanoi intent step up attacks on GVN and US installations.
- b. Attacks were related directly to continuing and lately increased infiltration from DRV.
- c. For these reasons GVN requested and we agreed to joint attack on military targets directly associated with infiltration.

18/ Department of State Circular Telegram 1438 to Saigon, February 6, 1965.

Accompanying the decision to retaliate with air strikes against the North was another to evacuate American dependents from Saigon, in view of what appeared to be a campaign of terror ordered by Hanoi against Americans.^{19/}

The first air strikes were carried out on February 7 against barracks and staging areas in the southern part of North Viet-Nam, all related to the training and infiltration of Viet Cong personnel.^{20/} For operational reasons South Vietnamese aircraft were unable to participate in the initial attacks, but they did take part in a follow-up strike the next day. In counselling Acting Prime Minister Oanh on how to treat these actions in public statements, Ambassador Taylor cautioned against giving any indication that they would or would not continue. He also said that there should be no suggestion in the Vietnamese statement that our ultimate objective was the unification of North and South Viet-Nam.^{21/}

^{19/} Department of State Telegram 1633 to Saigon, February 6, 1965.

^{20/} Department of State Circular Telegram 1634 to Saigon, February 9, 1965.

^{21/} From Saigon, Telegram 2440 to Department of State, February 8, 1965.

Immediately following these first air strikes, Ambassador Taylor recommended to Washington that we embark on a program of graduated reprisals so as to bring increasing pressure on North Viet-Nam and to cause Hanoi to cease its intervention in the South. Such a program had been discussed with Presidential Assistant McGeorge Bundy and his party at some length during their visit in the first week of February. Ambassador Taylor said: 22/

The general concept of such a program is that through a measured, controlled sequence of actions against the DRV taken in reprisal for DRV inspired actions in South Viet-Nam, significant pressures can be brought to bear on the DRV to persuade it to stop its intervention in South Viet-Nam. The program would be carried out jointly with the GVN and would be directed solely against DRV military targets and infiltration routes, not against DRV population. While the February 7 and 8 military actions were specifically tied to Viet Cong attacks on Pleiku and Tuy Hoa, in the future we could look to a situation in which US/GVN reprisals could be initiated based on a general catalog or package of Viet Cong outrages, no one particularly grave itself, not necessarily to a specific

22/ From Saigon, Telegram 2445, February 9, 1965.

VC act in each case. For example, we might announce that VC acts against specific targets (such as the railroad in South Viet-Nam) will result in retaliation against similar targets in the DRV, our graduated reprisals with the general level of VC outrages in South Viet-Nam, or if we so desired progressively raise the level of pressure on the DRV. Thus, it would be tantamount to the so-called Phase II escalation but justified on basis of retaliation.

Ambassador Taylor added that we should simultaneously convey to Peking, Moscow and Hanoi the limited nature of our objectives but at the same time our determination to achieve them. In addition he recommended that the GVN be integrated into the program against North Viet-Nam in order to maintain a sense of momentum and to capitalize on the psychological factors which "if exploited early could lead to a greater sense of purpose and direction both in the government and the military and awaken new hope for eventual victory on the part of the Vietnamese people; we should attempt to avoid in the present situation a general let-down in morale and spirit which followed our action in the Tonkin Gulf."

On February 11 joint air attacks were again launched against military facilities in North Viet-Nam, this time in response to Viet Cong attacks on a district town and a US barracks at Qui Nhon, as well as attacks elsewhere in South Viet-Nam and assassinations of South Vietnamese officials. Washington's instructions to the Embassy regarding announcement of these new strikes included the following passage: ^{23/}

You should avoid any explicit statement that responses of this sort (we are avoiding words "reprisal" and "retaliation" for legal reasons involving Middle East cases) will continue, leaving this implicit in the action itself or in such statements as the last paragraph of Sunday's White House statement. This is to avoid unnecessary complications in Soviet reaction and also more generally until we wish to make policy of continuing responses more explicit, which may not be at least until Kosygin returns to Moscow.

Over the next few days it became apparent that a decision would have to be made on the nature of our bombing program for

^{23/} Department of State Telegram 1686 to Saigon, February 10, 1965; Embassy Saigon Telegram 2497, February 11, 1965. Kosygin had been in Hanoi when the first US attacks were launched.

the long haul. Ambassador Taylor continued to urge the "graduated reprisals program" and tied this with a recommendation that, in coordination with the GVN, we formulate terms for a cessation of these attacks which we would at some point want to disclose to selected allies and possibly the USSR. In broad outline, Ambassador Taylor recommended that if the DRV returned to strict observance of the 1954 accords with respect to South Viet-Nam and of the 1962 Agreements on Laos, the United States would return to the 1954 accords with respect to military personnel in South Viet-Nam and the United States and the GVN "would give assurances that they would not use force or support the use of force by any other party to upset the accords with respect to the DRV." ^{24/}

On the same day, a telegram from the Department informed Ambassador Taylor that work was underway to refine his recommendations and those of Mr. McGeorge Bundy into a

^{24/} From Saigon, Telegram 2495 to Department of State, February 11, 1965.

systematic course of action constituting in effect a modified "Phase II" program, the principal difference being that our actions would be justified as responses to VC actions and that the tempo might hopefully be slower than some versions of Phase II had envisaged. There were many reasons for wanting to go slowly, including a desire to lengthen the time before reaching the point when pressures for negotiations would become extreme or the danger of a sharp Communist response would become substantial, or both. At the same time we wished to maintain the necessary pattern of response and pressure, both to strengthen South Viet-Nam and to affect Hanoi's attitudes.

Proceeding along this line, the telegram to Saigon made the following observations: 25/

Timing and criteria for specific actions are thus crucial. Hanoi may force our hand, as it did by Qui Nhon and other actions, so that there is really no choice but to respond at once. However, we remain anxious to keep our

25/ Department of State Telegram 1693 to Saigon, February 11, 1965.

response actions controllable and optional to the maximum degree possible, and particularly to relate timing to any special factor outside SVN. For example, Kosygin's continued presence in Far East gave us concern yesterday although we concluded that immediate action was essential.

Thus, we will need to stay in closest touch assessing VC actions against the threshold of further response actions. Procedurally, we want to keep maximum discretion here and to try to make our own minds up before we become in any degree committed to GVN for specific actions...

An underlying basic point -- and another factor pointing to controlled tempo -- is that GVN and South Vietnamese generally should not slide into believing we have taken over the war and they can resume bickering and not go all out in the field. Would appreciate your judgment how far such danger exists as we go along. Your present estimate would also be helpful in next few days.

On February 12 Ambassador Taylor responded, saying that the Saigon Mission, too, was developing a proposal for a specific course of action to implement the graduated reprisal concept. In the Mission's view the program should have the following objectives in order of importance: 26/

26/ From Saigon, Telegram 2530, February 12, 1965.

(A) the will of Hanoi leaders; (B) GVN morale; and (C) physical damage to installations having some bearing on the DRV ability to support VC. Of these three, first appears to us by far the most important, since our effectiveness in influencing Hanoi leadership will, in the long run, determine the success or failure of our efforts in both North and South Vietnam. Second objective, effect on GVN morale, is also important and fortunately the requirements for building morale in the South are roughly the same as those for impressing Hanoi leaders with the rising costs of their support of the VC. In this case, what is bad for Hanoi is generally good for Saigon.

As for the program itself, Ambassador Taylor's telegram noted:

The exact rate of acceleration is a matter of judgment but we consider, roughly speaking, that each successive week should include some new act on our part to increase pressure on Hanoi. As indicated at the outset, we are working on a paper which will contain specific suggestions along these lines.

These concepts finally evolved into a regular bombing program against the North, restricted at first to the southern-most portion of North Viet-Nam and gradually moving north. "Rolling Thunder I," the first scheduled series of attacks on designated targets in North Viet-Nam, began on February 20, 1965. Under ROLLING THUNDER the graduated

reprisal concept was expressed by a gradual expansion of the area subjected to bombing accomplished by moving the upper geographic limit farther and farther north and by adding new targets to the list of those authorized to be struck.

The program was closely controlled by Washington. Each week CINCPAC submitted a proposed schedule of operations for the coming week for Washington approval and, in the initial stages at least, these individual proposals were reviewed at the highest levels. Later the JCS were given broad guidelines under which they had authority to operate, but any deviations from these guidelines required Presidential approval.

After it had been underway for several weeks, ROLLING THUNDER was reviewed by the President, along with several other aspects of our Viet-Nam policy. The President approved the following general framework for our continuing action against North Viet-Nam: 27/

27/ National Security Memorandum NSAM 328,
April 6, 1965.

We should continue roughly the present slowly ascending tempo of ROLLING THUNDER operations, being prepared to add strikes in response to a higher rate of VC operations, or conceivably to slow the pace in the unlikely event VC slacked off sharply for what appeared to be more than a temporary operational lull.

The target systems should continue to avoid the effective GCI range of MIGs. We should continue to vary the types of targets, stepping up attacks on lines of communication in the near future, and possibly moving in a few weeks to attacks on the rail lines north and northeast of Hanoi.

Leaflet operations should be expanded to obtain maximum practicable psychological effect on the North Vietnamese population.

Blockade or aerial mining of North Vietnamese ports need further study and should be considered for future operations. It would have major political complications, especially in relation to the Soviets and other third countries, but also offers many advantages.

The pattern of our bombing program against North Vietnam was thus set and, with variations in targets and geographic areas authorized for attack, it held until the bombing was finally halted in 1968.

not
quite
left
in doubt

~~TOP SECRET~~

7. Introduction of US Combat Forces

While our policy on bombing North Viet-Nam was being hammered out, serious consideration was being given to what additional steps might be necessary in South Viet-Nam to arrest the continuing deterioration of the military situation there. With South Vietnamese forces backed up on the defensive, Hanoi was sending in its regular forces to deliver the coup-de-grace. Subsequent intelligence indicated that three North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regiments, the 95th, the 32nd and the 101st, had left North Viet-Nam by December 1964 and by the end of 1965 there were 33 NVA battalions -- about ten regiments -- in the South.)

The question of introducing US combat forces to help shore up the South Vietnamese position had been considered before, but it had been rejected in favor of concentrating on doing more to help the Vietnamese help themselves. As early as the summer of 1964, however, the Saigon Mission had been considering some limited introduction of US combat forces to provide security for certain important installations if we should embark on a program of exerting pressure against the North.

On August 17, 1964, Ambassador Taylor had reported that COMUSMACV was concerned about the security of certain important military installations, particularly the Danang air base. Taylor went on to say: 28/

In view of this threat, COMUSMACV recommends holding a Battalion Landing Team (BLT) on call to land at Danang within 6 hours and the remainder of Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) to follow as soon as possible. In addition, he wishes a US brigade available on call to move to the defense of Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa if needed and to provide a general reserve. He also recommends deployment to SVN ASAP logistic, communication and anti-aircraft missile units, the latter for the air defense of Saigon complex, Danang and Nha Trang.

Ambassador Taylor acknowledged the logic of COMUSMACV's assessment of the North Vietnamese capability to mount a ground attack against Danang, but he did not at that time take a position for or against a decision to ready US forces for deployment. He pointed out that the question came down to the point of deciding whether or not North Vietnamese

28/ From Saigon, Telegram 457, August 17, 1964.

actions in the Gulf of Tonkin had so changed our evaluation of Hanoi's capabilities and possible intentions as to warrant taking the measures recommended by MACV.

With the initiation of air strikes on the North in early February, the matter of protection for the Danang Air Base complex again came to the fore. Once bombing of the North was underway on a regular basis, there was little doubt that the security of this base was vital; and two battalions of the Marine Expeditionary Force which had been at sea off the coast of South Viet-Nam were landed on March 6. Shortly thereafter General Westmoreland sought and received Ambassador Taylor's concurrence in moving the third battalion of the MEF to Phu Bai, near Hue, to protect the communication facilities and the air strip there.^{29/} Washington approval was soon forthcoming and the troops landed at Phu Bai in early April.

In the same telegram, Ambassador Taylor discussed the

^{29/} From Saigon, Telegram 3003 to Department of State, March 17, 1965.

possibility of requests, either from the US military or from the GVN, for additional US ground combat forces in South Viet-Nam. He said that we would soon have to decide whether to try to get by with inadequate indigenous forces or to supplement them with Third Country troops, largely, if not exclusively US. For purposes of illustration he examined the pros and cons of introducing a US division, suitably modified, for the purpose of relieving the current shortage of South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) units either by replacing them in the defense of key installations or by engaging in active operations against the Viet Cong. He added:

Such a reinforcement would allow a strengthening of military efforts in the I and II Corps areas where the situation is deteriorating and would give a boost to GVN morale, military and civilian. Likewise, it should end any talk of a possible US withdrawal and convince Hanoi of the depth of our resolve to see this thing through to a successful conclusion.

This statement of the purpose of introducing a US division is, in effect, a tabulation of the arguments in favor of so doing. However, there are counter arguments on the other side of the case. The introduction of a US division obviously increases US involvement in the counter-insurgency, exposes greater forces and invites

greater losses. It will raise sensitive command questions with our GVN allies and may encourage them to an attitude of "Let the United States do it." It will increase our vulnerability to communist propaganda and Third Country criticism as we appear to assume the old French role of alien colonizer and conqueror. Finally, there is considerable doubt that the number of GVN forces which our action would relieve would have any great significance in reducing the manpower gap.

Ambassador Taylor then examined two possible missions for a large US ground contingent in South Viet-Nam: (1) operate in the high plateau area where much of the infiltration was taking place and (2) defend such key enclaves along the coast as Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon, Tuy Hoa and Nha Trang. Analysis of these missions led Ambassador Taylor to the following conclusions:

First, it is not desirable to introduce a US division into South Viet-Nam unless there are clear and tangible advantages outweighing the numerous disadvantages, many of which have been noted above. One must make a definite determination of the numbers and types of GVN forces relieved by the introduction of the US unit and thus the effect of the increased US presence in closing the manpower gap of 1965. Obviously, our division would make some contribution but it remains to be proved that it

will be sufficient to reverse the downward trend and give such a lift to the GVN forces that they would perform better by the stimulation of the US presence rather than worse in a mood of relaxation at passing the Viet Cong burden to the United States.

If the evidence of the probable effectiveness of this US contribution is convincing, then the matter of mission becomes the primary question. The inland mission in the highlands is clearly the more ambitious and, if well done, will make a greater contribution during the present critical period. On the other hand, it is the more exposed and even permits one to entertain the possibility of a kind of Dien Bien Phu if the coastal provinces should collapse and our forces were cut off from the coast except by air.

The coastal enclave mission is safer, simpler but less impressive and less productive than the inland mission. The contrast of the pros and cons of the two suggests the desirability of reexamining the question to see whether the advantages of the inland disposition could not be combined in some way with the retention of a base coastal area, linked with a position inland. In any case, considerable additional study is required before we are prepared to make a recommendation either for the introduction of a division or for the assignment of its mission. In the meantime, we should be giving much thought both in South Vietnam and in Washington as to the right course of action if and when this issue becomes pressing -- as it shortly will.

A few days later, on March '27, 1965, Ambassador Taylor again addressed the problem of US military manpower requirements. He noted that COMUSMACV was recommending a further increase of about 18,000 US personnel to round out table of organization shortages, to improve local security at US installations, to provide better air and communications support and to create a much needed logistics command. Approval of the various recommendations then pending would increase US military strength in South Viet-Nam to approximately 50,000.

Ambassador Taylor then went on to say that, in addition to these mounting requirements there was a more significant one taking form, since it was becoming increasingly clear that the existing operational units of the South Vietnamese armed forces were insufficient to cope effectively with the internal Viet Cong threat. Recent weeks had seen a serious deterioration in the I and II Corps areas requiring the transfer of most of the ARVN general reserve units to that area. The intensified build-up of ARVN forces was not

expected to be felt in terms of available operational units until toward the end of 1965.

In these circumstances, the Ambassador had begun to wonder whether we should try to find some way at once to compensate for the manpower shortage which would exist until new ARVN units were ready for battle. He postulated three possible strategies for the remainder of the year:

(1) Accept the current unsatisfactory progress against the Viet Cong and base our hopes on the effects of our air strikes on the will of the Hanoi regime; (2) take the position that it is essential to reverse the downward trend in certain critical provinces in order to avoid the danger of a debacle in these areas and to give, through successes in South Vietnam, added weight to the effectiveness of the air campaign on Hanoi's will; and (3) take the position that we must do everything possible to prevent a collapse of national morale and to shorten the period of international tension which would exist throughout the duration of our military pressure on Hanoi -- implying the injection of all possible US military

strength into South Viet-Nam which could be supported and used effectively.

Assuming that US forces would in fact be introduced, Ambassador Taylor said that nothing less than 9-12 battalions would have any significant effect in the short term. The immediate question would be how to deploy such a force. He posed a new set of alternatives which he labelled:

(1) Defensive or Offensive Enclave, (2) Territorial Clear and Hold Operations and (3) Mobile Reaction Reserves.

The Defensive Enclave, he said, was typified by the employment of the two Marine battalions in defense of the Danang Air Base. They secure the immediate base but do not engage in military operations outside the defensive perimeter. This disposition could be changed to an offensive enclave if the Marines were allowed to sally forth outside the perimeter either on self-initiated operations or in support of the ARVN.

Territorial clear and hold operations would be similar to the highlands mission described in the earlier telegram.

Mobile Reaction Reserves would perform a function

similar to that of the ARVN general reserve. That is, they would go to the aid of ARVN units who had "found and fixed" the enemy.

Ambassador Taylor had some reservations about the use of US forces in territorial clear and hold operations, a role for which they had not been specifically trained. He cited numerous operational, social, and legal problems which might arise (unfamiliarity with terrain, language, legal problems arising from detention of Vietnamese citizens) if US forces were to operate on their own in the highlands.

After discussing the pros and cons of the three possible dispositions, Ambassador Taylor came down in favor of a combination of the offensive enclave concept and the mobile reaction reserve. He said: 30/

It should be noted that there is nothing incompatible between a combination of the first and third concepts, that is, of placing US units in mobile reserve for reaction which would operate out of offensive enclaves. One could establish perhaps three such enclaves on or near the coast,

30/ From Saigon, Telegram 3120, March 27, 1965.

each garrisoned by a brigade of three battalions. Under normal conditions, at least two of these battalions could be used on reaction operations leaving the third on the security mission. If the third battalion were required outside the enclave, it would be possible to reinforce the enclave either from another enclave or from a Marine or Airborne unit brought in from the fleet or from Okinawa. A first step toward effecting this disposition could be to organize the Marines in the Danang area into the first of these offensive enclaves. Thereafter, we could bring two Army brigades into areas such as Qui Nhon, Nha Trang and Vung Tau-Bien Hoa. This could be an initial disposition capable of expansion after acquiring experience and gaining evidence as to the effectiveness of US forces in this new role. This conservative beginning would give us insight into the political and psychological effect of US combat participation on the GVN, on the Armed Forces of Vietnam and on the people.

With regard to the popular reaction, it is far from clear what the attitude of the GVN and the Vietnamese people would be toward the introduction of these forces. It could be that Vietnamese morale would be raised and their will to fight enhanced by the presence of US forces and their participation in combat on the ground. It is equally possible that the presence of these additional Americans would tend to sap the already flaccid purpose of the Vietnamese and would promote an attitude of "Let the US do it." In any case, before introducing further US reinforcements into SVN it is essential to be sure that they will be enthusiastically welcomed by the government, by the armed forces and by the people.

Thus, we need an answer to the following questions before proceeding farther. (A) What strategy does the US propose to follow Calendar Year 1965? (B) To carry out that strategy, is it necessary to bring in additional US ground forces? (C) What will be the reaction of the government and people of Vietnam to this proposal? If the answers to these proposals support the introduction of additional US ground forces, I would then favor their employment, initially at least, in accordance with the offensive enclave-mobile reaction concept.

In the meantime action to assist the South Vietnamese was proceeding apace, and additional helicopters and aircraft were authorized for MACV. In addition, on April 1 the President approved an 18-20,000 man increase in US military support forces in Viet-Nam to fill out existing units and supply needed logistic personnel. (Authorized US military strength in South Viet-Nam in March 1965 was about 28,000.) He also approved the deployment of two additional Marine battalions and one Marine air squadron and authorized a change in the mission of all Marine battalions deployed to Viet-Nam to permit their more active use under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of

Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State. Finally, the President approved the urgent exploration with the Korean, Australian and New Zealand Governments of the possibility of the rapid deployment of significant combat elements from their armed forces in parallel with our deployment of additional Marines. ^{31/}

The Presidential decision set the pattern for the deployment and employment of US forces for the next few months. In addition to the two new Marine battalions which were used to reinforce the defenses of the Danang complex, two battalions of the 173rd Airborne Brigade were deployed in May to Bien Hoa, near Saigon, to defend the important air base and other military installations in the area. COMUSMACV was given the authority to commit these combat units "to action in combat support on the basis of operational coordination and cooperation with the Armed Forces of the Republic

^{31/} NSAM 328, April 6, 1965.

of Viet-Nam (RVNAF)." 32/

Despite these new measures in the South and the continued bombing of the North, the US Mission in Saigon was becoming increasingly concerned about the continued deterioration of the South Vietnamese military capabilities and the slippage in the RVNAF build-up as the weeks wore on. Commenting on this situation in early June, General Westmoreland pointed to inordinately high desertion rates and higher than expected battle casualties as among the factors which were drastically reducing the effectiveness of many infantry battalions and causing ARVN troops to begin to show signs of reluctance to assume the offensive. In some cases, he said, their steadfastness under fire was coming into doubt. In order to bring existing battalions up to strength it would be necessary to declare at least a temporary moratorium on the activation of new battalions.

Summarizing his views, General Westmoreland said:

32/ Joint State-Defense Message 2812 to Saigon, June 5, 1965. Also see JCS 1141 DTG 301829Z, April 1965.

The force ratios continue to change in favor of the VC. I believe that the DRV will commit whatever forces it deems necessary to tip the balance and that the GVN cannot stand up successfully to this kind of pressure without reinforcement. Even if DRV-VC intentions are debatable, their capabilities must be acknowledged and faced. Additionally, it is prudent to consider possible enemy air action, leading to significant escalation and a broadening of the arena of conflict. We must be prepared to face such a contingency.

In order to cope with the situation outlined above, I see no course of action open to us except to reinforce our efforts in SVN with additional US or third country forces as rapidly as is practical during the critical weeks ahead. Additionally, studies must continue and plans developed to deploy even greater forces, if and when required, to attain our objectives or counter enemy initiatives. Ground forces deployed to selected areas along the coast and inland will be used both offensively and defensively. US ground troops are gaining experience and thus far have performed well. Although they have not yet engaged the enemy in strength, I am convinced that US troops with their energy, mobility, and firepower can successfully take the fight to the VC. The basic purpose of the additional deployments recommended below is to give us a substantial and hard hitting offensive capability on the ground to convince the VC that they cannot win.

In order to cope with this situation, General Westmoreland recommended immediate deployment of 21,000 troops of the army

Air Mobile Division, 8,000 Marines, 8,000 logistic troops and 4,000 Marines from the Republic of Korea, as well as an additional fighter squadron to Cam Ranh Bay and an aircraft carrier to supply tactical air support in South Viet-Nam. Looking to the future, Westmoreland recommended that planning should begin for the deployment of three Army HAWK (A-A missile) battalions, the remainder of the 1st Infantry Division or the 101st Airborne Division beginning in October, one additional Marine battalion, tactical air units for the support of these forces and the required combat and logistic support forces, including helicopters, to support all of the foregoing. These requirements had been previously discussed with Ambassador Taylor who was in Washington at the time Westmoreland's message was sent.^{33/}

June was a month of rapid downward movement in the military situation as the VC resumed their offensive

^{33/} COMUSMACV Message 19118, 070335Z, June 1965
~~(TOP SECRET/LIMDIS)~~; Saigon Telegram 4074,
June 5, 1965.

operations with a vengeance. On June 18 the Saigon Mission submitted a new estimate of the situation which reported, inter alia, that five ARVN battalions had been rendered ineffective in the previous three weeks and a sixth had been badly mauled. A check of actual battle strength revealed that there were on an average only 338 men instead of the authorized 714 per ARVN battalion. (The average VC battalion had a strength of 425.) Morale was low and desertion rates were high, especially in the Regional and Popular Forces. The ratio of allied to enemy forces was very nearly one-to-one, counting an ARVN battalion as equal to one enemy battalion, a US army or ROK battalion as equal to two of the enemy and a US Marine battalion as equal to three of the enemy. On this basis the allies had 163 battalion equivalents to the enemy's possible strength of 166 battalions, 115 of which were confirmed. Even if MACV's recent recommendations were implemented, allied strength would rise only to 191 battalion equivalents giving the allies only slightly better than a one-to-one ratio overall, with

the numerical advantage lying with the enemy in the IV Corps area. ^{34/}

In mid-June General Westmoreland began to see the approach of the kind of warfare which the Viet-Minh had forced on the French in the last phases of the Indochina War, and he thought it entirely possible that the North Vietnamese might deploy three or more regular army divisions into South Viet-Nam, one of which had probably already entered. He foresaw the need for US forces together with Vietnamese airborne and Marine battalions of the General Reserve to conduct mobile warfare from fixed bases in "reaction" and "search and destroy" operations, thus permitting the concentration of Vietnamese troops in the heavily populated areas along the coast, around Saigon and in the Delta. ^{35/}

On June 13 General Westmoreland reported that the situation around Dong Xoai in the dense jungle of Phuoc Long

^{34/} From Saigon, Telegram 4265, June 18, 1965.

^{35/} MACV 20055 DTG 131515Z, June 1965

~~(TOP SECRET)~~

Province north of Saigon had become critical and that South Vietnamese forces there had been badly mauled. Five main force Viet Cong battalions had been committed to the attack. He therefore stated his intention, unless directed otherwise, to commit the two battalions of the 173rd Airborne Brigade to the Dong Xoai area. Thus, for the first time, US forces were committed to action in a relatively uninhabited area at considerable distance from their base, setting the pattern for the bulk of our operations in the months and years to come. ^{36/}

Under these circumstances it was apparent that more US troops would be needed quickly. On June 16 it was announced that additional forces would be deployed to Viet-Nam. These forces included a brigade from the 1st Division to arrive July 15 and a brigade from the 101st to arrive July 28, totalling 8,200 men. As mentioned earlier, Ambassador Taylor

^{36/} COMUSMACV 20028, June 13, 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~)

was in Washington June 7-12 and he discussed these and possible future deployments with the highest authorities. The GVN had also been consulted about the deployments announced on June 16.^{37/}

In the meantime urgent attention was being given in Washington to additional major deployments in response to COMUSMACV's recent recommendations. After careful weighing of all the political and military factors involved, the President announced on July 28, 1965, that American military strength in South Viet-Nam would be raised to 125,000 almost immediately and that additional forces would be sent later as they were needed.

With this decision the die was cast, and from then on military considerations governed the deployment of US forces until March 31, 1968, when the President announced that, in conjunction with a partial halt of the bombing of North Viet-Nam, there would be no further build-up of our military strength in South Viet-Nam once forces then in the pipeline had been deployed.

^{37/} Department of State Telegram 2977, June 19, 1965.

D. PACIFICATION AND REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT

1. Background

The internal political disturbances caused by the overthrow of the Diem regime were disastrous to GVN pacification efforts in the countryside. By early March 1964 when Secretary McNamara and General Taylor arrived in Saigon on a special fact-finding mission for President Johnson, the Vietnamese Government had already changed twice since the overthrow of Diem. The Viet Cong were on the offensive and had achieved some notable military victories, particularly in heavy fighting early that year in Tay Ninh Province. Secretary McNamara returned from Viet-Nam and reported to the President. He said, "The situation has unquestionably been growing worse...40 percent of the territory is under VC control or predominance in influence...large groups of the population are now showing signs of apathy and indifference... ARVN desertion rates are up...(and its) morale poor and failing...the political control structure extending from Saigon down into the hamlets disappeared following the

November coup." ^{1/} Among the recommendations in his report the first one read as follows: "To make clear that we are prepared to furnish assistance and support to South Viet-Nam for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control." ^{2/} By written directive dated March 17, 1964, President Johnson required all concerned agency heads to implement the recommendations set forth in Secretary McNamara's report. ^{3/}

The situation through the rest of 1964 continued to deteriorate. Viet Cong organization was spreading rapidly and local guerrilla units were sending their best fighters to be formed into main force units. Viet Cong hit and run tactics and ambushes were more than a match for ARVN. The rapid changes in national leadership caused rapid turnover in provincial and district leadership. Political pressures, favoritism, corruption, administrative weaknesses, and lack of

^{1/} Report by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to the President, dated March 16, 1964.

^{2/} Ibid.

^{3/} National Security Action Memorandum NSAM 288, March 17, 1964.

motivation were all obstacles to the organization of any pacification effort. The sine qua non of pacification, local security, was not being provided. As the VC intensified their attacks against strategic hamlets, the GVN was forced to consolidate and abandon many hamlets.

Although there was some failure to appreciate fully the political and psychological aspects of organizing the rural population, for the most part the magnitude of the problem was recognized and the complexity and difficulty of the solution appreciated. The President directed that the highest priority be given by US civilian and military agencies to the selection and training of Americans to work in Vietnam and made it known to Ambassador Lodge that whatever was needed in the way of manpower and resources would be forthcoming. ^{4/} Every emphasis was given to the concentration of pacification resources in the area around Saigon under a program known as Hop Tac. Although it failed to achieve

^{4/} Department of State Telegram 1791, April 28, 1964

significant results, a great deal was learned about the nature of the insurgency and about what would be required to counter it.

Early 1965 saw little improvement. AID programs were in operation by this time throughout the countryside and some impact was being made, but the effort was largely one of holding and organizing for the future. In these circumstances the Saigon Mission took a new look at the entire non-military effort.

A 41-point program recommended by Ambassador Taylor and approved by the President on April 1, 1965 ^{5/} cut across the whole spectrum of non-military problems. It included actions to be taken by the Mission and by agencies in Washington. It addressed itself to pacification programs, political problems, reorganizations of Vietnamese public administration, logistics, US organization, refugees, and much more.

^{5/} National Security Action Memorandum NSAM 328, April 5, 1965.

The US military build-up in 1965 was a logistics exercise of tremendous proportions, one which strained the capacity of South Vietnamese facilities. Seaports were jammed; new port facilities being constructed were going up rapidly, but were not yet in operation. With troops, munitions, medicines, food and military supplies pouring into the country, material and economic support for the general economy of South Viet-Nam and for various programs under the pacification effort were often delayed in getting through these yet-limited logistical facilities.

As pacification lagged, US officials in Saigon and Washington began to give thought to ways of giving new emphasis to the program. In early 1966 there were two conferences which crystalized US thinking on pacification and which marked the beginning of intense efforts to move our Vietnamese allies in a direction that history and experience indicated was right. The first conference was an all-US gathering at Warrenton, Virginia, January 8-11, 1966; the second was the summit meeting in Honolulu between President Johnson with his top advisers and the top Vietnamese leaders.

From that point on, allied efforts in pacification enjoyed the highest priority in human and material resources, as well as the closest attention of top Vietnamese and American leaders.

2. The Warrenton Conference

The Warrenton meeting included senior representatives of the US Mission in Saigon, the Viet-Nam Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee in Washington, CINCPAC, representatives of the Bureau of the Budget, and other top working level officials of the White House, State, Defense, CIA, USIA and AID. Besides decisions taken in the military, political and economic fields, a detailed review was undertaken of the concept, current operations, and plans for the pacification program. Priorities were established to insure maximum support for this effort, including concentration of pertinent US resources. Existence of an agreed concept on the GVN side and an apparent readiness to assign top priority to pacification was noted with satisfaction. It was the consensus of the meeting that the importance of the pacification program required the assignment of a high-level official to work full

time on this subject in the US Mission.^{6/}

3. The Honolulu Meeting

President Johnson was convinced of the wisdom of this new emphasis on the pacification effort, and he recognized that what remained to be done was to meet with the GVN leadership to assure that both governments were fully behind the effort and were giving it highest priority. Accordingly, he decided to get together with them in Honolulu. The meeting took place February 6-8, 1966.

The President was pleased with the quality of the Vietnamese leadership that he met there. "He was struck by the young leaders' espousal of real political, economic, sociological reform which they prefer to call social revolution."^{7/} The Honolulu Conference was not a war council. The Declaration, the Joint Communique and other public documents and

^{6/} Report of the Warrenton Meeting, made to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Director of CIA, January 13, 1966.

^{7/} Memorandum from Bill Moyers to U. Alexis Johnson dated February 16, 1966.

pronouncements which came out of the meetings accurately reflected the fact that the meetings and discussions had concentrated on a program of joint US-Vietnamese efforts in the social, economic and political fields, which "are of at least equal importance to our military efforts in achieving our basic goals in Viet-Nam." ^{8/} More specifically, the Honolulu Conference concentrated on priority programs to meet the economic crisis in Viet-Nam and to get the pacification effort moving. In the words of the Joint Communique itself, "The leaders of the two governments received comprehensive reports on the intensified program. The Government of Viet-Nam set forth a plan for efforts of particular strength and intensity in areas of high priority and the President gave directions to insure full and prompt support by all agencies of the US Government." ^{9/} The communique went on to detail

^{8/} Department of State Circular Telegram 1520, February 11, 1966.

^{9/} Paragraph 4 of the Joint Communique issued following the Honolulu talks, February 6-8, 1966; The Communique used the term rural construction which was then in vogue. As noted above, we are using the term pacification throughout.

further agreements on points which were recognized as essential for rapid progress in pacification. It stressed, inter alia, "continued emphasis by both Vietnamese and allied forces on the effort to build democracy in the rural areas-- an effort as important as the military battle itself." ^{10/}

Soon after the Honolulu Conference it was agreed on the US side that the pacification effort would be universally referred to as Revolutionary Development. The Vietnamese understood and approved this term; however their terminology still translated as Rural Construction, as the program had been known since early 1964.

4. President Assigns Top Leadership

Part of the emphasis agreed upon at Warrenton and Honolulu was that certain areas of Viet-Nam would be singled out for particular, intensified investment of pacification assets. The four areas chosen were widely distributed geographically and presented a variety of military, economic and

^{10/} Ibid., paragraph 5.

social problems. As things worked out, however, the Vietnamese soon lost interest in making exceptional efforts in these areas, and by mid-1966 it was only the US side that continued to focus efforts on "the national priority areas."

Recognizing the need for continued highest-level emphasis on pacification in order to get the program moving, the President, shortly after Honolulu, made two key appointments: He gave new management to the US effort by appointing Deputy Ambassador William Porter to direct American efforts in the field under the guidance of Ambassador Lodge. The President then designated Mr. Robert Komer as his special assistant to carry out the responsibility of acting as a specific focal point for the direction, coordination and supervision in Washington of US non-military programs for peaceful construction relating to Viet-Nam. 11/

5. New Obstacles

No sooner had the 1966 pacification effort gotten started in Viet-Nam than the spring (1966) Buddhist "struggle"

11/ National Security Action Memorandum NSAM 343, March 28, 1966.

movement all but wiped out the effort in most of the northern five provinces, and seriously disrupted efforts and diverted government attention elsewhere. 12/

Nevertheless, pacification moved forward in areas not affected by the struggle; and where it had been halted, the forward direction was restored. On September 13 Komer reported to the President on the first five months of his stewardship. The report, which was made public, was an optimistic one which concentrated not only on the progress that had been made in pacification since Honolulu but also on summarizing the status of all non-military efforts, including those not strictly in the field of pacification -- e.g., buttressing the economy, caring for refugees, building an industrial base, reopening lines of communication, pumping new life into the Chieu Hoi program, and upgrading Vietnamese public administration. 13/

12/ From Saigon, Telegram 4783, May 20, 1966

13/ Mr. Komer's report to the President on "the other war" September 13, 1966.

In another memorandum dated April 21, 1966, to the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Administrator of AID, and Director of CIA, Mr. Komer called for a priority push behind the RD cadre program that some of the addressees felt excessive. When the agency chiefs' reservations were made known to the President, he agreed with his senior advisers that more knowledge was needed as to the status of the Vietnamese manpower pool and as to what priorities should be assigned by our Mission to all of these non-military programs. As a result, a series of interagency studies were undertaken in Viet-Nam, and hard thinking was exchanged between the Mission and Washington on priorities among the various programs, as well as the roles and missions that should be assigned to the various paramilitary, military, police and civilian forces charged with implementing pacification.

In the meantime the White House instructed the Mission as to the intermediate decisions which had been taken on measures for economic stabilization, steps to be taken in the expansion of the cadre program and the police force, and a "freeze" on support for any GVN manpower increase (other than

cadre and police) until further information was developed and further priorities assigned. 14/

6. Office of Civil Operations

During all of this time the Department of Defense and the civilian agencies with advisory and support responsibilities in pacification were expanding their in-country advisory efforts. What had been considered a few years earlier as a bold step in sending individual American advisers out into provinces had long since been recognized as merely scratching the surface. Typical provinces by this time had 40 or more MACV sector advisers, perhaps 5 USAID advisers including those working with the Vietnamese police, 2 or 3 CIA advisers to the Pacification Cadre Program, and a USIS civilian from JUSPAO, just as a bare minimum team, not to mention medical programs, civilian and military, third country and private agency representatives, representatives of various intelligence agencies whose work to a certain extent overlapped with

14/ Department of State Telegram 3531, May 19, 1966

pacification, and many others. The leaders of each separate team had to compete for attention for their programs from province chiefs and other top GVN local officials. The Department of Defense was of the opinion that the only solution for what it felt was an inefficient US support effort was for the entire program to be run by MACV with all civilian agency assets absorbed in place and brought under the military chain of command. ^{15/} The Mission, the Department of State, and AID and USIS were firmly of the opinion that such a reorganization was not called for, at least not at that point because it smacked of militarizing what was essentially a political effort at a time when we were encouraging the GVN to move from what was essentially a military regime to civilian representative government. The argument on both sides were persuasive and it was a hard decision. The Embassy proposed that a unification of all civilian efforts in support of pacification be made under

^{15/} Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to the President dated September 22, 1966, proposing unified pacification effort under COMUSMACV.

the Deputy Ambassador and the President decided to adopt this plan at least for the time being. It had the advantage of moving in the direction of unification while stopping short of total amalgamation with the US military effort.

On November 22 the Mission announced the formation of the new Office of Civil Operations, designed to unify all of the efforts of the Embassy, AID, JUSPAO, and CIA which were directly connected with overt pacification support. Essentially this reorganization combined the field operations, the refuge operations, and the police advisory efforts of USAID, the field services division of JUSPAO, and the cadre-operation division of CIA. A senior US civilian in each province was soon selected, and thus the Vietnamese Province Chief had only two American senior advisers, one civilian and one military. 16/

Despite Vietnamese political problems, the escalation on the level of the fighting, the reorganizational pains on both

16/ See Embassy Telegram 114911 of November 22, 1966 and memorandum from Deputy Ambassador Porter to USAID, OSA, and JUSPAO dated December 1, 1966, for terms of reference for OCO.

the Vietnamese and American sides, and dozens of other problems, 1966 was a year of relative success in pacification. The primary accomplishment was that it built up the base for real progress in future years; but there was also some modest forward motion.

7. Year of Solid Progress

General Nguyen Duc Thang who was directing the Vietnamese pacification effort ordained some new departures in the 1967 operations which were to bear fruit. For example, the emphasis was on quality and thoroughness, with each cadre team expected to pacify no more than two hamlets during the year. Following US advice, almost half of all ARVN maneuver battalions were assigned by the Vietnamese Joint General Staff the responsibility of direct security support of the 1967 pacification program, thus greatly increasing the assets available for providing physical security for the areas of operation. The pacification program was to include new aspects that had never been considered before. For example, village and hamlet elections were held in all of the then-secure areas, and in new areas as they were brought under

control. The cadre were to concentrate on not only improving materially the lives of rural Vietnamese but also on such spiritual things as the eradication of old hatreds, the exposure of corruption, and the winning of a psychological commitment of the people to work together with the government to bring about "revolutionary development."

8. CORDS

Despite the progress made during the brief life of the Office of Civil Operations, the advantages of bringing to bear the full resources of the military establishment on the pacification effort continued to exert considerable appeal; and in the spring of 1967 the President decided to order a complete merger of the US effort in pacification, military and civilian, placing it all under the responsibility of the Department of Defense. The arrival of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to replace Ambassador Lodge was an appropriate time to take this step.

On May 9, 1967, a National Security Action Memorandum was approved which said in part that the US civil and military responsibility for support of pacification would be

integrated under a single manager concept and that because the bulk of the resources involved were military, COMUSMACV would be charged with this responsibility under the overall authority of the Ambassador. To carry out these responsibilities under COMUSMACV, Mr. Robert W. Komer was appointed as General Westmoreland's Deputy for Pacification. 17/

The Division within the overall MACV Command structure that formerly was directed charged with the support of pacification was known as the Revolutionary Development Support Division. With the new amalgamation of resources, there came into being an organization known as CORDS ("Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support"). Given the unprecedented nature of this unique civil military multi-agency organization, a surprisingly smooth transition was made. This melding of the US pacification advisory and support effort was complete from the highest level in Saigon, through

17/ National Security Action Memorandum NSAM 362, May 9, 1967; From Saigon, Telegram 25329, May 11, 1967; MACV Directive 10-12, May 28, 1967.

regions, provinces, and right down to district level.

9. Progress, 1967; Setbacks and Recovery, 1968

1967 was a year of unspectacular but steady progress in pacification. According to CORDS statistics, by the end of the year, 67 percent of the population enjoyed relative government protection and economic well being. 18/ This encouraging progress continued through January 1968 -- up until the launching of the Tet Offensive. The Communist assaults on population centers and bases, which turned the attention of allied forces to the defense of these targets, brought a swift deterioration in many areas of the countryside. As a result, statistics for the end of February derived from CORDS' Hamlet Evaluation System showed that a large number of hamlets, containing more than one million people, had fallen from the relatively secure to the contested category. Additionally, about a quarter of a million people who previously lived in contested hamlets were

18/ COMUSMACV 030250Z, February 1968.

reported to have reverted to outright Viet Cong control.

The Vietnamese Government reacted with commendable vigor to the crisis which had brought the war to large urban centers for the first time. The US Mission joined with the GVN in establishing a Joint Recovery Committee, headed initially, on the GVN side, by Vice President Ky, and on the US side by Ambassador Komer.

New problems were added to those created by the Tet Offensive when in May the Communists again launched a series of assaults on population centers, concentrating their efforts for several weeks on the city of Saigon. The Tet and May offensives left 13,000 Vietnamese civilians dead and 27,000 wounded. Over 1,000,000 people were at least temporarily displaced and 170,000 families found their homes destroyed or extensively damaged. All sectors of the economy were adversely affected. However, by the last quarter of 1968 most pacification indicators were nearly back to where they had been before Tet and much of the damage had been restored. The Mission in its final report on Project

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Recovery said, "Many mistakes were made, efficiency was often lacking, but the overall GVN performance in reestablishing over a million urban evacuees and renewing urban viability was one of the bright spots of 1968." 19/

19/ From Saigon, Telegram 39547, October 5, 1968.

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SERVICE SET

E. U.S. EFFORTS TO ENLIST THIRD COUNTRY COOPERATION

1. Economic and Military Assistance

The United States began a concerted diplomatic effort in 1964 to enlist economic assistance from other free world nations in the Viet-Nam effort. Prior to that year the United States Government had always recognized the importance of having other countries share the burden in Viet-Nam but it had not devoted the same amount of time to this endeavor. The new effort was officially dubbed the "Free World Assistance Program."

Before the Program was launched in 1964, only nine nations other than the United States were contributing to Viet-Nam. The principal donors were France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan. France had an extensive educational and cultural program as well as other economic and technical assistance projects with numerous advisors in the country.

Germany was particularly interested in vocational training. Japan's contributions were largely in the form of war reparations. The United Kingdom sent the Malayan veteran, R.K.G. Thompson, as chief of a police advisory mission. Other countries involved were Australia, Canada, Korea, Malaysia and New Zealand.

US efforts were initiated by President Johnson when he asked for "other flags" at an April 23, 1964, press conference. The Department of State subsequently instructed Ambassadors at selected posts in East Asia, Latin America, and Europe to approach their host governments with requests to "show their flags" in Viet-Nam. The instruction (Circular Telegram 2043 of May 1, 1964) specified that "the nature and amount of the contributions being sought are not for the present as significant as the fact of their being made." On the Vietnamese side, General Nguyen Van Khanh, then head of the Vietnamese Government, addressed letters on July 15 to thirty-two governments asking for assistance to the Vietnamese cause. By the end of 1964 some twenty-four nations were providing or had pledged

to provide aid in support of Viet-Nam.

Other special efforts followed. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, in the interval between his two Ambassadorial assignments to Viet-Nam, visited Pacific and Asian countries in late April 1965 and European countries the following autumn in a further effort to interest governments in contributing to Viet-Nam. In November 1966 Secretary Rusk travelled to countries in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, accompanied by an expert on Free World assistance, to generate further support for the program. Over subsequent months, Ambassadors in these and other countries were asked to reemphasize the need for sharing the burden in Viet-Nam.

On the military side five Asian and Pacific countries sent troops -- Australia, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines and Thailand. From 1963, when there was a small contingent of Australian advisers in Viet-Nam, the troops committed to the allied effort had increased to more than 71,000 by 1968. (A discussion of the negotiations concerning the commitment of these troops is included in the preceding chapter, in the accounts of US relations with the countries

concerned.)

In 1968, when the Viet Cong Tet Offensive occurred, the Government of Viet-Nam made another major effort to obtain aid from other nations, and the United States once again assisted in explaining the requirements to other governments. More than twenty nations responded to the Vietnamese appeal with gifts of medicines, foodstuffs, and cash. Contributions also came from many international and private organizations.

By 1968 countries contributing to Viet-Nam under the Free World Assistance Program numbered thirty-three, and their total contributions were valued at \$63 million. Other countries, such as France, that did not participate in the Program, continued to contribute during these same years, bringing the grand total for aid from other countries to more than \$80 million.

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2. Reducing Free World Shipping to North Viet-Nam

North Vietnamese trade with the Free World traditionally has been small, but a substantial portion of it was transported by Free World vessels before a concerted effort was begun, in 1965, to enlist the cooperation of Free World countries in removing ships from this trade. By all measures this policy reduced the amount of resources available to North Viet-Nam by sea: the total number of calls by Free World vessels declined annually after 1964, and the percentage of seaborne imports carried by Free World vessels declined. Moreover, the Communist flag shipping did not fully replace the Free World shipping. In general, trade by North Viet-Nam with the Free World was made more difficult and costly by this policy to deny access to Free World flag vessels.

Initial State Department efforts in 1965 coincided with the stepped-up war effort. A Department telegram conveyed the "increasing concern in Washington over the continuation

of seaborne commerce between Free World countries and North Viet-Nam" and asked certain posts for comment on the probable reactions of host governments to measures to restrict commerce of other countries with North Viet-Nam.^{1/} Two months later, the Department^{2/} advised the Embassies located in the principal maritime countries with ships in the North Viet-Nam trade that it was approaching Washington Embassies of the Free World countries seeking their cooperation in withdrawing their ships from the North Viet-Nam trade. The approach was along the following lines: "The US Government has made clear its determination that the freedom of South Viet-Nam be preserved and that the Communist attack not succeed. Some 37 other Free World countries already were providing or have agreed to

1/ Department of State Circular Telegram 1866, April 2, 1966 (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE).

2/ Department of State Circular Telegram 2497, June 11, 1965 (~~CONFIDENTIAL~~).

provide assistance to the South Vietnamese people in the struggle to defend themselves against outside aggression directed from Hanoi." The telegram noted that "During 1964 Free World vessels accounted for about 70 percent of ship arrivals in North Viet-Nam and carried 45 percent of North Viet-Nam's seaborne imports and 85 percent of seaborne exports by volume...the presence of absence of Free World flags in North Vietnamese ports symbolizes the degree those countries support the Free World effort to preserve the freedom of South Viet-Nam. Visits to North Viet-Nam of Free World ships even though under charter to Communist countries lessen the degree of North Viet-Nam's economic and psychological isolation from Free World and provide the Hanoi regime with a tangible symbol of respectability and normality in day-to-day relations with Free World countries."

In addition to the high level diplomatic approaches, heightened military efforts led to the destruction of the rail line used to move North Viet-Nam's major export, apatite, from

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minehead to port, and made some shipowners and crews reluctant to enter a "war zone." These factors resulted in a substantial decrease in the shipping from Free World countries by November 1965, when the Foreign Assistance Act was amended to provide for the President's considering denial of assistance to aid recipients failing to take appropriate steps to halt their shipping (or air carriage) of cargo to North Viet-Nam within the next 60 days. This amendment gave the Administration means to put pressure on aid-recipient countries to remove their ships from this trade.

From 1964, one Free World country after another withdrew its ships from trade with North Viet-Nam. Ships of five of the countries involved in the North Vietnamese trade in 1964 -- West Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Indonesia -- have not participated in the trade since then. Ships of six other countries -- Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Panama, France, and Liberia -- withdrew during 1965 and did not call in either 1966 or 1967.^{3/} Norwegian ships withdrew because of US

^{3/} A French ship made a noncommercial call at Haiphong in 1966; a Japanese ship called in May 1968 but the Government of Japan has so far prevented any further calls.

diplomatic pressure. British-flag ships continued to make the most calls, but their number dropped because of the withdrawal during 1965 of all British-flag ships under the effective control of the British Government. Greece and Lebanon among others publicly announced shipping restrictions which were in fact promulgated to comply with Section 620(n) of the Foreign Assistance Act.

By 1966 the only Free World countries whose flags were still appearing in the North Vietnamese trade were the United Kingdom (Hong Kong-based), Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Malta. Greek ships withdrew from the trade after June 1966.

In 1968, however, the trend was reversed, with an increase in the number of vessels from Free World nations calling at North Viet-Nam and the appearance of flag vessels from other countries. In the first 8 months of 1968 they included ships from Japan (one call), Lebanon (two calls), Italy (one call), Cyprus (ten calls), Malta (one call), Somalia (two calls), and Singapore (one call). This trend at least in part resulted

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from the partial bombing halt announced on March 31, 1968, although North Viet-Nam had started canvassing the charter market for vessels in late 1967.^{4/}

^{4/} Arrivals of Free World vessels at North Vietnamese ports, 1964-1968, were as follows:

1964 -	402
1965 -	256
1966 -	74
1967 -	78
1968 -	78 (first six months)

F. THE U.S. SEARCH FOR PEACE

Throughout the period of our involvement in Viet-Nam, the United States has pursued two separate but closely related courses of action. On the one hand we have sought to repel North Viet-Nam's aggression and to build a stable, effective and representatively governed nation in South Viet-Nam. On the other hand we have searched for ways to bring about a peaceful settlement. The intensity of our search for peace has matched the intensity of our military, political and economic involvement in Viet-Nam. This section concerns the Search for Peace in Viet-Nam.

NOTE: By the nature of such contacts and negotiations, the details of the circumstances prevailing at the time and of the specific statements exchanged are more valuable than any broad summary. For this, it is necessary to

consult the individual accounts.' The significant documents of each initiative are contained in its individual coded file; the most important public documents are attached.

The appended chronology lists 42 significant US and third party peace efforts; of these 14 major initiatives have been summarized below.

1. Canadian Explorations in Hanoi, 1964-65

The Canadian ICC Commissioner in Saigon, Blair Seaborn, made three visits to Hanoi in June, August, and December 1964 and two further visits in March and June 1965. The first two visits were the most important. In his June 18 meeting with Premier Pham Van Dong, Seaborn conveyed a US message which emphasized our determination to confine the "Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam" (DRV) to the territory allocated it by the 1954 Geneva Agreements. He reassured the DRV that the United States did not seek to overthrow it and did not want military bases in South Viet-Nam, noted that the United States was aware of Hanoi's control over the Viet Cong, indicated that the US stake in resisting a North Vietnamese victory in

South Viet-Nam was increased by the relevance of this type of struggle to others of the Free World, noted that US patience was growing thin, and hinted at the benefits of peaceful co-existence to other Communist regimes.

In response, Pham Van Dong emphasized that the key elements in a "just solution" for the DRV were US withdrawal from South Viet-Nam, the establishment of a neutral "Cambodian-style" regime in South Viet-Nam in accordance with the NLF program, and NLF participation in determining the fate of South Viet-Nam. Dong emphasized that the DRV was determined to continue the struggle if the United States increased its aid to South Viet-Nam and declared that the ultimate success of the Viet Cong was not in question.

Seaborn concluded from the conversation that it was unlikely the DRV could be brought to an accommodation with the United States by war weariness, factionalism or the prospect of material benefits. He emphasized Dong's confidence in ultimate victory and his conviction that military actions could not bring the United States success.

At Seaborn's next meeting with Pham Van Dong on August 13 the key theme was the Tonkin Gulf incident. The US message conveyed by Seaborn rejected the DRV version of the incident, charged the DRV with deliberately planning the attack, and stated as a result the United States was increasing its military forces in South Viet-Nam. The message once more referred to possible economic and other benefits to the DRV if it halted its expansionism.

Dong's reaction was one of anger rather than seeking a way out. He emphasized the very dangerous nature of the situation, said the United States might be led to "new acts of aggression" and warned that the DRV would fight a war if it came and that this would spread to all Southeast Asia, and possibly further. He referred to support from other countries including Communist China and the Soviet Union. Seaborn believed that Dong continued to be genuinely convinced that things were going the DRV's way and there was no need to compromise.

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On Seaborn's December visit, North Vietnamese leaders did not use the opportunity to discuss substantive matters with him. The March and June 1965 visits were similarly barren. Seaborn was convinced from these latter conversations that North Viet-Nam was not ^{then} now interested in any negotiations.

2. President Johnson's Proposal, April 1965

In his Johns Hopkins University speech of April 7, 1965, President Johnson said that there could be many ways to a peaceful settlement in Viet-Nam: through discussion or negotiations with the governments concerned; through large groups or in small ones; through reaffirmation of old agreements or their strengthening with new ones. The President said that we remained ready for unconditional discussions. He also proposed that the countries of Southeast Asia associate themselves in a greatly expanded cooperative effort for development. He expressed the hope that North Viet-Nam would take its place in the common efforts as soon as peaceful settlement is possible. The President said he would ask Congress to join in a billion-dollar investment in this effort, in which he

hoped all other industrialized countries, including the USSR, would join.

In an April 19, 1965, statement Hanoi described the President's speech as "a smoke screen to cover up the US imperialists' military ventures in Viet-Nam."

3. First Bombing Suspension, May 1965

Taking account of suggestions from various quarters, including statements by North Vietnamese officials, that no progress toward peace could be made while air attacks on North Viet-Nam occurred, we suspended bombing from May 12 to 17. We informed the North Vietnamese Government of this action in advance and stated that during the suspension we would be watchful to see if there were significant reductions in armed attacks against the people and Government of South Viet-Nam by forces whose actions could be decisively affected from North Viet-Nam. We warned that the bombing pause should not be misunderstood as an indication of weakness and expressed the hope that the suspension would meet with a response which would permit further and more extended suspension of this form

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of military action in the expectation of equally constructive actions by the other side in the future.

However, our efforts to deliver this note encountered a harsh rebuff from Hanoi. North Vietnamese representatives in Moscow refused either to receive our Ambassador or to accept delivery of the Aide Memoire and it was returned in a plain envelope on May 13. Similarly the British representative in Hanoi attempted to deliver this note on May 17 but it was returned to him in the same fashion unopened. Meanwhile, during a meeting in Vienna, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko told Secretary Rusk that our decision to suspend the bombing as communicated earlier to the Soviets through diplomatic channels was insulting. On May 18, after the bombing was resumed in the absence of any reply from Hanoi, North Viet-Nam denounced the suspension as "a deceitful maneuver designed to pave the way for new US acts of War."

4. Bombing Suspension and Peace Efforts, December 1965-
January 1966

Again taking into account renewed indications from responsible Eastern European sources that a longer bombing

suspension would produce positive results, the United States suspended the bombing for 37 days, from December 24, 1965 to January 30, 1966. The United States opened a direct channel to Hanoi through the North Vietnamese representative in Rangoon and stated on December 29 that no decision had been made regarding resumption of bombing, and that if North Viet-Nam would reciprocate by making a serious contribution toward peace it would obviously have a favorable effect on the possibility of further extended suspension. Meanwhile, six Presidential envoys travelled to 34 capitals and altogether 115 governments were informed of the US position.

The harsh statements by Hanoi on January 4 reaffirming insistence that the United States accept the Four Points and prove it by actual deeds, including the permanent cessation of the bombing, coupled with a detailed rebuttal of the US 14 Points, culminating in Ho Chi Minh's intransigent January 24 letter (made public January 28), all indicated North Vietnamese lack of receptivity to this major US initiative. The Rangoon

channel remained unrewarding and in fact no reply to our Aide Memoire was ever received until January 31, after the bombing had already been resumed in the absence of any other signal from Hanoi. A February 16 US note submitting a revised text of Hanoi's Four Points designed to be consistent with the Geneva Accords -- and avoid explicit reference to the NLF Program -- received only a negative North Vietnamese reply three days later, and at the same time Hanoi broke off all further contact with us through this channel.

5. Soundings Through the Canadians: The Two Ronning Missions to Hanoi

After the failure of the 37-day bombing suspension to elicit a constructive Hanoi response, we supported the unofficial visit to Hanoi of retired Canadian Ambassador Chester Ronning, who talked with senior North Vietnamese officials March 7-11. He found these officials adamant in insisting that Hanoi's Four Points remained the basic condition for any forward motion, although finally, in response to repeated questioning, they indicated readiness for talks provided the United States declared an unconditional and permanent halt to the bombing.

Ronning made a second trip to Hanoi in June, conveying our message that we could not accept an unconditional undertaking to cease bombing in return for only the possibility of talks. We suggested a reciprocal reduction in hostilities in which a bombing cessation would be one element. However, Ronning found no interest whatsoever in this suggestion and the North Vietnamese made it clear that the only thing they might consider in exchange for a total halt of bombing was to have informal talks. They made no other proposal. The result of the second Ronning visit was as negative as the first.

6. Goldberg Elucidation of US Position on Restraint

Ambassador Goldberg in his September 22, 1966, UNGA speech said that the United States was prepared to order a cessation of all bombing of North Viet-Nam the moment we were assured, privately or otherwise, that this step would be answered promptly by a corresponding and appropriate de-escalation on the other side. We indicated that these assurances of appropriate and timely action to reduce or bring to an end North Vietnamese military activities against South Viet-Nam could

apply to activities in the future. Goldberg also asked whether Hanoi would agree to a time schedule for a supervised phased withdrawal from South Viet-Nam of all external forces. Goldberg reaffirmed President Johnson's statement of July 28, 1965 that participation of the Viet Cong in negotiations would not be an "insurmountable problem".

Hanoi, in an October 12 statement by its Foreign Minister Trinh, attacked Ambassador Goldberg's speech as "deceitful" because the United States had refused to recognize the Four Points and to recognize the NLF as the "only genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people."

7. Manila Communique Emphasizes Mutual Withdrawal

In the October 1966 meeting of the seven Allies in Manila, basic agreement was reached on the six essential elements of peace as set forth by the Republic of Viet-Nam. In particular, emphasis was placed upon the terms of withdrawal of Allied forces, in close consultation with the GVN, as the other side "withdraws its forces to the North, ceases infiltration, and

the level of violence thus subsides." The Communique provided that these forces would be withdrawn as soon as possible and not later than six months after the above conditions had been fulfilled.

Both Hanoi and the NLF harshly attacked the Manila Communique as a "demand for our people to lay down their arms and serve as slaves of US neocolonialism."

8. Phase A/B Proposal Conveyed to Hanoi via Third Parties

In November 1966, the United States made clear to Hanoi through third parties that there were important elements of flexibility in our position. We informed UK Foreign Secretary Brown, as he prepared to visit Moscow for talks with the Soviets, that Hanoi needed to make no public statement about the nature of its restraint and that there could be a time interval between US and North Vietnamese actions to de-escalate the conflict. While we could not accept vague statements that "something would happen" following a prolonged and indefinite bombing halt, Hanoi could itself suggest the kind of meaningful and discernible de-escalation which it might decide upon.

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Actions relevant to increased infiltration, we said, appeared to be the best area to watch, but Hanoi's response could take any one of several forms so long as these responsive actions pointed toward a significant process of de-escalation.

We also advanced the concept of a totality of de-escalatory actions divided into two separate phases in their execution. In Phase A we would stop the bombing. In Phase B all the other de-escalatory actions previously agreed upon by both parties would be carried out. Hanoi's actions in Phase B would appear to respond to our actions in Phase B rather than to the bombing stop. Hanoi did not respond, directly or indirectly, to these suggestions.

9. Effort to Arrange Private Talks via the Poles

During the summer and fall of 1966 Ambassador Lodge had exchanged views with the Polish ICC representative, Lewandowski, on a possible basis for negotiations and provided him with full statements of the US position. Lewandowski returned from a visit to Hanoi in late November and on December 1 presented Lodge with a draft of ten points reflecting what he said was

his understanding of the US position. Lewandowski said Hanoi would meet with US representatives in Warsaw to hear us "confirm" these points. On December 3 we accepted Lewandowski's draft as a basis for discussion, subject to "important differences of interpretation," and proposed that US and DRV representatives meet in Warsaw December 6.

However, no North Vietnamese representatives appeared on December 6. It turned out that the Poles had delayed in transmitting our December 3 message to Hanoi, apparently because they objected to our reservation on possible differences of interpretation. It was never entirely clear then or afterwards how firm a mandate the Poles actually had from Hanoi to arrange a meeting. Meanwhile, Hanoi intensified its military operations in the South, including the assassination of a prominent politician and the mortaring of the Saigon airport shortly before Secretary Rusk was due to arrive. US air attacks against targets in the area of Hanoi and Haiphong, which had been delayed by weather conditions during the last half of November, took place on December 2, 4, 13 and 14.

These were targets of types that had previously been attacked and were not located closer to Hanoi than several that had been previously attacked in July. The only condition the other side had proposed for this meeting was that it should remain secret. In any case, on December 13, before word had been received of the air strike of that day, the Poles conveyed a message that Hanoi now wished to postpone the contact in Warsaw. On December 15 the Poles informed us that Hanoi wished to terminate all conversations on the possibility of direct talks.

The Polish episode raised serious questions about Hanoi's actual willingness to talk in a serious way without demanding unreciprocated preconditions affecting military operations. The United States intensified its efforts to determine whether any basis existed for having private talks leading to de-escalation. Toward this end, in late December, the United States ordered that no targets within a 10 nautical mile circle of the center of Hanoi could be struck. This set the stage for a further round of efforts to sound out Hanoi's

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position both directly and through a reliable third party.

10. US/DRV Contacts in Moscow, Kosygin, Wilson Conversations,
and President Johnson's letter to Ho Chi Minh

In early January 1967 we were able to establish in Moscow direct contacts with the North Vietnamese for the first time since Hanoi had broken off contacts in Rangoon in February 1966. Seeking to clarify whether common ground existed for an acceptable settlement, we set forth a wide range of topics for possible discussion and said we would be prepared to consider any topics Hanoi felt should be included. However, Hanoi never made any substantive response to this proposal or gave us any counter-proposals or questions. Instead North Vietnamese representatives handed us on January 27 a propagandistic statement which closely paralleled what Hanoi had long been saying in public and contained no new element which would encourage continuing the dialogue. On January 28 Hanoi chose to publish Foreign Minister Trinh's statement to Wilfred Burchett that only after the unconditional cessation of bombing and all other acts of war against North Viet-Nam "could" talks

be held. The ambiguities in this statement included the question whether an unconditional cessation was equivalent to permanent cessation and whether Hanoi would actually talk after such a cessation or whether other conditions would be interposed. In any case, in early February we again sought to interest Hanoi in de-escalation, suggested restraint in response to our restrictions on bombing targets with the 10 nautical mile circle and recalled for Hanoi the terms of the Phase A, Phase B proposal which had already been conveyed to them by two reliable sources in mid-November. No reply was ever received to this message.

Meanwhile, Soviet Premier Kosygin was scheduled to visit London for talks with Prime Minister Wilson in the period which coincided with the four-day Lunar New Year truce, February 8-12, and the United States sought to probe Hanoi's readiness to respond seriously to this conjunction of events. We informed the British that we planned to tell Hanoi that if the North Vietnamese would agree to the assured stoppage of infiltration into South Viet-Nam, we would stop bombing the

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North and also halt further augmentation of US forces in South Viet-Nam. We said we were prepared to move immediately on major steps of mutual de-escalation. We said we could not, however, exchange a guarantee of safe haven for North Viet-Nam merely for discussions without form or content during which time Hanoi could continue to expand military operations in the South without limit. President Johnson's letter to Ho Chi Minh containing his offer was transmitted on February 8.

Hanoi's response on the ground soon became clear: during the first 30 hours of the Tet Truce, just under 1,000 vessels were observed heading southward carrying equipment and supplies sufficient to give major new impetus to military operations immediately north of the demilitarized zone. Three North Vietnamese divisions were deployed in the attack formations immediately north of the DMZ. These well-organized hostile dispositions gave rise to the major fear on our part that before any promise to halt infiltration under our latest proposal could take effect, the enemy might attempt a major dash south of the DMZ and thus gain major military advantage.

This intensification of DRV military activity was the reason for seeking from Hanoi an assured stoppage of infiltration or, as the President's letter to Ho put it, assurances that "infiltration into South Viet-Nam by land and sea has stopped." The version of our proposal which the British had given to the Soviets in London did not make clear the timing of the cessation of bombing, the cessation of infiltration, and the halt to further US troop augmentation, and we therefore asked the British to revise their message to make the proposal conform with the President's letter to Ho.

In the light of Hanoi's failure to show any interest in the Phase A, Phase B proposal for three months, its past exploitation of bombing suspensions for large-scale troop movements, its preparations for further military action, and the fact that the bombing cessation and the halt of augmentation would necessarily be public, it was important to know how assurances on the infiltration halt should be established. Although the need to correct the British draft version of our proposal was awkward, it did not affect the substance of the

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proposal. None of those involved in London or Moscow sought to relate this incident to Hanoi's failure to give any positive response whatsoever during this period.

As the Tet Truce drew to a close, the United States made a final effort to elicit some constructive response from Hanoi and withheld the resumption of air strikes for an additional 32 hours. Just before the expiration of the time limit on February 13, Radio Hanoi broadcast a harsh reply from Ho Chi Minh to a message from the Pope of several days earlier, in which Ho reiterated the Four Points and the terms of the January 28 Trinh interview. On February 13, in announcing resumption of the bombing, the White House said that the only response we had had from the DRV was to use these truce periods, not for abatement of hostilities and moves toward peace, but for major resupply efforts of their troops in South Viet-Nam. Despite US efforts and those of third parties, no other response had come from Hanoi.

On February 15 Ho's reply to the President was received, and it was almost identical in form and substance to Ho's message

to the Pope. At the same time Hanoi once again broke off all contacts with US representatives. Third party officials who had been closely involved in this effort offered their post-mortem view that Hanoi had been "too stubborn."

11. US Accepts U Thant's Ceasefire Proposal

On March 14, 1967, UN Secretary General U Thant presented to the parties directly involved with the Viet-Nam conflict an Aide Memoire proposing (1) a general standstill truce, (2) preliminary talks, and (3) reconvening of the Geneva Conference. On March 18 the United States accepted this three-step proposal, stating it was ready to enter immediately and constructively into discussions on the details of such a general cessation of hostilities as the first element in this three-point proposal. The Government of Viet-Nam accepted the U Thant proposal and proposed that GVN and DRV military representatives meet at the DMZ or elsewhere.

Hanoi stridently attacked U Thant's suggestion on the grounds that it "placed the aggressors and the fighters against aggression on the same footing," failed to call for an end to

US "aggression" or for US withdrawal, and contained no clause dealing with the NLF, described as the only legal representative of the South Vietnamese people.

12. US and GVN Propose Separation of Forces at DMZ

Taking as a point of departure the April 11 Canadian proposal which had as its first step the restoration of the demilitarized character of the 17th parallel, the United States and the GVN on April 19, 1967, called for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops on the one hand and US and GVN troops on the other hand to a distance of ten miles north and south of the DMZ. The two governments proposed that all military activities in this expanded DMZ area could stop, and the ICC could be invited to administer and inspect the enlarged demilitarized area. Upon such a separation of forces, the US and GVN expressed their willingness to take part in talks with North Viet-Nam leading to further de-escalation and settlement.

Hanoi's reaction was to denounce the proposal as a "trick aimed at camouflaging the US war escalation, and violation of

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the 1954 Geneva Agreements," and as an attempt to set up "a vast no man's land perpetually partitioning Viet-Nam."

13. The San Antonio Formula; More Private Explorations

In August 1967, taking advantage of private contacts established with Hanoi by two French citizens, the United States broached to Hanoi the proposal which became known as the San Antonio formula. The essence of the proposal, as it was later stated publicly by the President on September 29 at San Antonio, was that we would stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Viet-Nam whenever this would lead promptly to productive discussions. We would assume that while discussions proceeded, North Viet-Nam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation.

The full meaning of this proposal was explained to Hanoi through these private intermediaries, but the reaction was negative. Meanwhile, Ambassador Goldberg in his September 2 speech to the United Nations General Assembly asked whether Hanoi conceived that the cessation of bombing should lead to any results other than meaningful negotiations under circumstances

which would not disadvantage either side. Hanoi denounced both the Goldberg speech and the San Antonio speech as "a maneuver to cover up the fact that the United States is trying hard to intensify and widen its aggressive war against North Viet-Nam." In mid-October the two French intermediaries received a final and categorical rejection of the US proposal. Simultaneously, Hanoi launched a new wave of offensives at Dak To and Loc Ninh. Once again Hanoi had rebuffed an initiative and had coupled its rejection with the renewal of military operations on an intensified scale. It had also ignored the restraints in bombing which had been imposed on targets in the Hanoi area from mid-August until mid-October in order to facilitate these private explorations.

But the United States continued its efforts to probe Hanoi's intentions, following another interview by the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister in late December which appeared to indicate a more explicit interest to talk following an unconditional bombing cessation (a shift of the verb "could" to "will" in the context of Hanoi readiness to have talks).

Again the United States, through a reliable third party, sought to probe Hanoi's receptivity to the San Antonio formula as reiterated by Secretary Rusk on January 4, and again we introduced restraints upon targets in the Hanoi area to facilitate these explorations. Moreover, on January 25 Defense Secretary Clifford made an important amplification of the San Antonio formula when, in answer to a question during testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, he said that we would not expect the North Vietnamese to stop their military activities prior to an agreed ceasefire and that he assumed that they would continue to transport "the normal amount of goods, munitions and men to South Viet-Nam." However, Secretary Clifford made clear that an increase of the North Vietnamese military effort during negotiations would be viewed as an act of bad faith.

Hanoi's response to these explorations was the massive Tet offensive of early February.

On February 14 Secretary Rusk, summing up the US position, said that in recent weeks Hanoi knew that discussions for a

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peaceful settlement were being seriously explored; they also knew that there was a reduction of bombing attacks on North Viet-Nam, specifically on the Hanoi and Haiphong areas during these explorations. Hanoi's reply, said the Secretary, was a major offensive throughout South Viet-Nam to bring a war to the civilian population in most of the cities in that country. The Secretary said that North Vietnamese preparations for a major offensive in the northern provinces in South Viet-Nam continued unabated. However, he said all proposals made by the United States for peace in Southeast Asia continued to be valid and specifically the San Antonio formula.

14. President's March 31 Speech and Proposals

In his March 31 speech, President Johnson reviewed at length our past efforts to obtain a peaceful settlement in South Viet-Nam and announced that he had ordered a halt to aerial and naval bombardment of North Viet-Nam except in the area north of the demilitarized zone, where the continuing enemy build-up directly threatened Allied forward positions and where the movements of troops and supplies were clearly

related to that threat.

The area in which the United States stopped its attacks included almost 90 percent of North Viet-Nam's population and most of its territory. The President stated that even this very limited bombing of the North could come to an early end if our restraint were matched by restraint in Hanoi. But, he said, he could not in good conscience stop all bombing so long as to do so would immediately and directly endanger the lives of our men and our Allies. The President said that whether a complete bombing halt became possible in the future would be determined by events, and that our purpose in this action was to bring about reduction in the level of violence.

As a result of the President's speech Hanoi finally agreed to hold talks even though it sought to limit the objectives of these talks to determining the unconditional cessation of bombing and all other "acts of war" against North Viet-Nam.

ANNEX 1

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CHRONOLOGY OF SIGNIFICANT PEACE INITIATIVES
BY THE UNITED STATES AND THIRD PARTIES, 1964-1968

1. Cambodian Request for UNSC Action on Border Situation, May 1964. In response, mission of three Security Council members recommends UN observer group be stationed on Cambodian side of frontier. Cambodia refuses to accept recommendations.
2. UN Security Council Invitation to Hanoi - August 7, 1964 - to provide any information on Tonkin Gulf Incident. DRV rejects UN's competence, declares any SC decision would be "null and void."
3. Canadian Explorations in Hanoi - 1964-65. Attempts by Canadian diplomats to discover basis for negotiations reveal no interest in discussion or accommodation with US.
4. US Letter to UNSC - February 7, 1965 - Gave notice of need for countermeasures to enemy activities and reserved right to take Viet-Nam problem to Security Council.
5. UK Proposal to USSR that Geneva Co-Chairmen Explore Basis for Peace - February 20, 1965. USSR rejects proposal and Hanoi denounces it. British Foreign Secretary reports to Commons that USSR and DRV "see no need for negotiations or a conference at all."

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6. 17 Non-Aligned Nations' Appeal - April 1, 1965 - peaceful solution through negotiations without preconditions. Rejected by Hanoi April 19.
7. Conference on Cambodia - March 15, 1965. Cambodian government requests Geneva Co-Chairmen to invite participants of 1954 Geneva Conference to meet. USSR declared support, and the US and UK were in favor. However, Sihanouk on April 24 in effect torpedoed his own proposal by stating he did not want the United States, Thailand, or the Republic of Viet-Nam to attend. This change followed Sihanouk's mid-April meeting with Chinese premier Chou En-lai in Djakarta where Chou expressed Chinese Communist opposition to reported US plans to use the conference for holding corridor talks on Viet-Nam.
8. President Johnson's Proposal for Unconditional Discussions - April 7, 1965. Rejected by Hanoi April 19.
9. Indian President Radhakrishnan's 3-Point Proposal - April 24, 1965: a) cessation of hostilities; b) policing of borders by Afro-Asian police force, c) maintenance of present boundaries so long as desired by Vietnamese people. Rejected by Hanoi May 6.
10. UN Secretary General's Peace Effort - April 1965. Proposed visit to certain capitals including Hanoi and Peking. Rejected by Hanoi April 8 and by Peking April 12.
11. Gordon-Walker Mission - April-May 1965. Visit by former UK Foreign Secretary to eight interested countries. Hanoi and Peking refuse to receive Gordon-Walker.
12. Bombing Suspension - May 12-17, 1965. Made known to Hanoi directly and through a third party to see if there would be response in kind. Hanoi returns US aide memoire unopened.

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13. Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Initiative - June 17, 1965. Proposed mission to five capitals. Hanoi denounces mission June 21. British Minister Davies' Mission to Hanoi in July encounters evident North Vietnamese conviction that their prospects of victory were too imminent to make it worthwhile to forsake the battlefield for the conference table.
14. President Johnson's Call to Members of UN to bring to the table those determined to make war - June 25, 1965.
15. President's Letter to U Thant - July 28, 1965, reiterated hope that members of UN will bring all governments involved to negotiating table.
16. Ambassador Goldberg's Letter to President of UNSC - July 30, 1965. US ready to cooperate with SC in search for peace.
17. Indian/Yugoslav Proposal - August 1965. Call for political solution within framework of Geneva Agreements and for all parties to meet at conference table. Hanoi denounces proposal August 1.
18. The La Pira Visit to Hanoi - Fanfani Letter - November-December 1965. Private Italian initiative to explore Hanoi's position and efforts of Italian Foreign Minister. On December 19 Hanoi denied that any "probe about negotiations" had taken place.
19. UK 12-Nation Appeal - December 1965. Call for NVN to stop fighting and negotiate peace and on USSR to join in signing and circulating message to 1954 Geneva Conference nations and ICC. DRV December 6 Foreign Ministry statement categorically rejects British proposal.
20. Pope Paul VI's Appeal - December 19, 1965. Appeal for truce and efforts by all to move toward negotiations.

21. Concentrated Peace Efforts - December 1965-January 1966. Bombing suspension for 36 days and 15 hours, six Presidential envoys travel to 34 capitals explaining US position to 115 governments. Hanoi rebuffs direct US soundings through Rangoon, rejects initiative in Ho Chi Minh's January 24, 1966 letter.
22. Ambassador Goldberg's letter to President of UNSC, January 31, 1966, requesting urgent meeting of SC to consider Viet-Nam.
23. Ronning Missions to Hanoi - March and June 1966. Retired Canadian diplomat explores possibility of NVN response to a cessation of bombing. North Vietnamese refused to discuss either unconditional discussions or reciprocal reduction in hostilities.
24. Asian Conference Initiative - August 6, 1966. Proposal that 17 Asian nations invite leaders of countries involved in Viet-Nam to peace conference in Asia. Hanoi denounces proposal on August 8.
25. Ambassador Goldberg's General Assembly Address - September 22, 1966. Bombing halt and corresponding de-escalation; mutual withdrawal; possible role for NLF in negotiations. Hanoi castigates Goldberg speech on September 24.
26. British Six-Point Plan - October 6, 1966. Six point plan to end war and call on USSR to reconvene Geneva Conference. Hanoi rebuffs plan on October 8.
27. Manila Communique - October 24, 1966. Statement on Allied withdrawal as the other side "withdraws its forces to the North, ceases infiltration, and the level of violence thus subsides." Hanoi harshly attacks communique.

28. Polish ICC Representative Lewandowski Explores DRV Position - November/December 1966. United States agrees to US/DRV talks in Warsaw to discuss "Ten Points" drafted by Lewandowski purporting to summarize US position. On December 13 Hanoi informs us via Poles it is no longer willing to have contacts, and on December 15 Hanoi terminates conversation on possibility of direct talks.
29. Pope Paul VI's Appeal - December 8, 1966. Appeal for armistice leading to negotiations.
30. British Proposal for Cessation of Hostilities - December 30, 1966. Immediate 3-way meeting of United States, NVN and GVN to arrange cessation of hostilities.
31. Ambassador Goldberg's Exchanges with U Thant - December 1966. Endorsed Pope's appeal for negotiations and asked Secretary-General to take steps to bring about necessary discussions.
32. Moscow Contacts, Kosygin/Wilson Conversations, and President Johnson's Letter to Ho Chi Minh - January-February 1967. United States establishes confidential channel for direct communication with North Vietnamese representatives in Moscow, makes wide variety of proposals but receives no useful response. On basis of these contacts and separate discussions in London between Prime Minister Wilson and Soviet Premier Kosygin, President Johnson despatched letter of February 8 to Ho Chi Minh offering to halt bombing of North Viet-Nam and further augmentation of US forces in South Viet-Nam if assured that infiltration had stopped. Hanoi's negative response was reflected in vastly intensified resupply efforts over Tet, February 8-12, and in Ho's letter to Pope Paul VI. After the bombing had been resumed,

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February 13, Ho sent similar February 15 letter to President Johnson. Hanoi breaks off Moscow channel, publishes Johnson-Ho exchange on March 21.

33. Visit to Hanoi by Messrs. Baggs and Ashmore - January 6-14, 1967. In a talk with two US journalists January 12, Ho Chi Minh insists that there could be no talks with United States unless the bombing were stopped and unless United States stopped all reinforcements during the talks. Ho was adamant against any reciprocal military restraint by North Viet-Nam. Although the United States had established in early January a direct channel for communication with North Vietnamese representatives in Moscow, this channel was kept wholly confidential and was not revealed to Messrs. Baggs and Ashmore. On February 5 the Department sent to Hanoi a more general message through Messrs. Baggs and Ashmore which was consistent with the important messages being exchanged in Moscow. The combined reading of the Moscow channel and of the separate discussions in London between Prime Minister Wilson and Soviet Premier Kosygin led to the despatch on February 8 of President Johnson's letter to President Ho.
34. U Thant's Three-Point Proposal - March 14, 1967. General standstill truce, preliminary talks, reconvening of Geneva Conference.
35. Ceylonese Initiative - April 10, 1967. Meeting between GVN, NLF, and NVN to discuss preconditions for ceasefire; guarantee of integrity of Viet-Nam by UN Security Council and bordering states.
36. Canadian Foreign Minister's Four-Stage Proposal - April 11, 1967. Demilitarization of DMZ; no increase in military activity or reinforcement, cessation of hostilities, return to ceasefire of Geneva settlement. Hanoi calls

proposal a "trick" to partition Viet-Nam permanently.

37. US Proposal for Mutual Withdrawal at DMZ - April 19, 1967. Ten mile withdrawal North and South, ICC inspection, talks leading to further de-escalation and settlement. Hanoi rejects plan harshly.
38. Buddha's Birthday Truce - May 23-24, 1967. Hope for constructive response. Hanoi and Viet Cong refuse to observe ceasefire.
39. Exploration of Possible Security Council Action - September 1967. United States suggested 5 points as principles for Security Council endorsement. Exploration fruitless in face of categoric Soviet opposition.
40. Ambassador Goldberg's UN General Assembly Address - September 21, 1967. Call on NVN for clarification of results it expects from cessation of bombing and on Hanoi supporters to move conflict to peaceful solution, if we were to take first step. Hanoi denounces speech.
41. President's San Antonio Speech - September 29, 1967, and Related Efforts. Cessation of bombing when this will lead promptly to productive discussions; we would assume NVN would not take advantage of bombing cessation. Offer explained and made clear to Hanoi through reliable channels. Hanoi rejects proposal in mid-October, renews harsh series of offensives in Central Highlands.
42. President's March 31 Speech: Major Action of Unilateral De-escalation to Get Talks Started. Hanoi agrees to talks but defines their purpose as solely to determine the unconditional cessation of bombing and all other acts of war against North Viet-Nam, rejects many specific US proposals to move seriously toward reduction of violence and peace.

ANNEX 2

CHRONOLOGY OF SIGNIFICANT POLICY MOVES
BY NORTH VIET-NAM, 1960-1968

(December 20, 1960) Establishment of the National Front for the Liberation of South Viet-Nam.

April 8, 1965 Premier Pham Van Dong announces the DRV conditions for settlement of the war -- the Four Points -- as "the basis for the most correct settlement."

September 1, 1965 Pham Van Dong in his National Day speech reiterates the Four points, but calls them the "only basis for settlement."

January 24, 1966 Ho Chi Minh's letter to world leaders saying the United States must accept Hanoi's Four Points as the basis for ending the war and that if the "United States really wants peace" it must recognize the NLF "as the sole genuine representative of the people of South Viet-Nam."

January 3, 1967 Pham Van Dong asserts Four Points are not "conditions" for peace talks but constitute a "basis for settlement" and "valid conclusions for discussion."

January 28, 1967

Nguyen-Duy Trinh, to Wilfred Burchett, says "it is only after the unconditional ending of the bombing and other acts of war...that there could be talks between the DRV and the United States."

February 14, 1967

Ho Chi Minh's letter to the Pope:
"The US imperialists must put an end to their aggression in Viet-Nam, and unconditionally and definitively end the bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV, withdraw from South Viet-Nam all American and satellite troops, recognize the NLF and let the Vietnamese people settle themselves their own affairs. Only in such conditions can real peace be restored to Viet-Nam."

February 15, 1967

Ho's reply to President Johnson:
Followed lines given above in his letter to the Pope. "In your message you suggested direct talks between the DRV and the United States. If the US Government really wants these talks, it must first of all stop unconditionally its bombing raids and all other acts of war against the DRV. It is only after the unconditional cessation of the US bombing raids and all other acts of war against the DRV that the DRV and the United States could enter into talks and discuss questions concerning the two sides."

(September 1, 1967)

New NLF Political Program broadcast.

December 29, 1967

Nguyen Duy Trinh to Mongolian delegation: "After the United States unconditionally ends the bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV, the DRV will talk to the United States about the problems concerned."

February 8, 1968

Nguyen Duy Trinh for the first time defines "relevant questions" (i.e., questions concerning the two sides): "They are questions related to a settlement of the Viet-Nam problem on the basis of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Viet-Nam. They are also other questions which could be raised by either side."

April 3, 1968

DRV issues statements announcing its readiness to appoint a representative to "contact the US representative with a view to determining with the American side the unconditional cessation of the US bombing raids and all other acts of war on the whole territory of the DRV."

April 5, 1968

First definition of "other acts of war." An article by "The Commentator" in Nhan Dan lists the acts as: sending reconnaissance planes to take photographs, dropping leaflets and "gifts" as a part of psychological warfare, airdropping commandos or smuggling them from Laotian territory, and using artillery based in South Viet-Nam to bombard the territory of North Viet-Nam.

(April 20-21, 1968)

Formation of the Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces.