

History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

**The Joint Chiefs of Staff
and
The War in Vietnam**

1960–1968

Part 2



The Joint Chiefs of Staff and President Lyndon B. Johnson on the White House lawn. *Left to right:* Cyrus R. Vance, Deputy Secretary of Defense; General Harold K. Johnson, Chief of Staff, US Army; General John P. McConnell, Chief of Staff, US Air Force; General Earle G. Wheeler, USA, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; President Lyndon B. Johnson; Admiral David L. McDonald, Chief of Naval Operations; General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., Commandant, US Marine Corps; W. Marvin Watson, *unofficial* White House Chief of Staff.

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Graham A. Cosmas



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Foreword

Established during World War II to advise the President regarding the strategic direction of the armed forces of the United States, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) continued in existence after the war and, as military advisers and planners, have played a significant role in the development of national policy. Knowledge of JCS relations with the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense in the years since World War II is essential to an understanding of their current work. An account of their activity in peacetime and during times of crisis provides, moreover, an important series of chapters in the military history of the United States. For these reasons, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that an official history be written for the record. Its value for instructional purposes, for the orientation of officers newly assigned to the JCS organization and as a source of information for staff studies, will be readily recognized.

Written to complement *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy* series, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam* focuses upon the activities of the Joint Chiefs that were concerned with events in Vietnam during these years. The nature of the activities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the sensitivity of the sources used caused the volume to be written originally as a classified document. Classification designations are those that appeared in the classified publication.

This volume describes those JCS activities related to developments in Vietnam during the period 1964-1966. At times, the role of the Joint Chiefs in events in Vietnam may appear to be submerged in the description of foreign relations, politics, economics, and other areas having little to do with military matters. However, developments in these areas provide essential background for understanding the military activity of the 1960s.

Originally a collaborative effort of the entire Historical Section, JCS, the classified publication on which this volume is based was written by Mr. Willard J. Webb. The current version has been updated by Dr. Graham A. Cosmas. Dr. John F. Shortal edited the resulting manuscript; Ms. Susan Carroll compiled the Index; and Ms. Penny Norman prepared the manuscript for publication.

The volume was reviewed for declassification by the appropriate US Government departments and agencies and cleared for release. The volume is an official publication of the Joint Chiefs of Staff but, inasmuch as the text has not been considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it must be construed as descriptive only and does not constitute the official position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on any subject.

Washington, DC

JOHN F. SHORTAL
Director for Joint History

Preface

Part 2 of *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968*, describes the formulation of policies and decisions during the years 1964–1966. During this period, the United States moved from advice and support to the embattled Republic of Vietnam to full-scale participation in the war. As this part was written well before the war ended, the sources its authors used were quite limited; for example, the *Pentagon Papers* were not then available. Since that time, additional source material on the war has proliferated, in US official records, official and nonofficial memoirs and monographs, and in histories produced by the other side and published in English. Using this new material, I have substantially revised and in some cases expanded many chapters of the original study. To enhance narrative clarity, I have also moved material among chapters, resulting in the elimination of some chapters of the original work.

During the period covered by this study, the United States dramatically expanded its military effort in Indochina. Following the overthrow and death of President Ngo Dinh Diem in November 1963 and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in the same month, President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration spent 1964 trying to make the advisory and support program work in South Vietnam while debating and planning for military pressure on North Vietnam. The year 1965 brought continued political turmoil in Saigon while North Vietnam steadily built up the Viet Cong and dispatched divisions of its own regular army to fight an expanding main force war against the South Vietnamese forces. In response, the United States escalated its own military role in the struggle. Through the ROLLING THUNDER air campaign, the United States brought gradually increasing pressure upon North Vietnam. In South Vietnam, American combat divisions entered the ground battle. During the last half of 1965 and all of 1966, the United States continued its buildup as fighting intensified and the cost of the war in blood and treasure steadily increased. At the end of 1966, the United States was engaged in full-scale war in Indochina with no end in sight.

Graham A. Cosmas

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Prologue: At the End of 1963

The Deaths of Two Presidents

On 1 November 1963, in a carefully organized military coup, a group of South Vietnamese generals overthrew and murdered their country's President Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem's fall ended a decade-long United States effort to build an anti-communist republic under his leadership in the southern half of Vietnam. In response to initial successes by Diem, in the late 1950s the Communist-ruled state of North Vietnam and its adherents in the South had initiated an armed insurgency aimed at overthrowing the southern government and paving the way to reunification of Vietnam under northern control. To meet that challenge, since 1961 the administration of President John F. Kennedy had provided American advisers, equipment, and specialized military units, including Army and Marine helicopter companies and the Air Force FARM GATE counterinsurgency air unit, to assist the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in fighting the insurgents, known colloquially as the Viet Cong. In February 1962, to direct the expanding US effort, President Kennedy established a new joint Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), in the southern capital, Saigon. MACV supplanted and absorbed the US Military Assistance Advisory Group that had been in place since 1954.

During 1962, bolstered by US advisers and equipment, Diem's armed forces made gains against the Viet Cong. This success, however, proved short-lived. Reinforced by a steady flow of men and weapons from North Vietnam, the Viet Cong during 1963 fought the ARVN with increasing effectiveness and expanded their control in the villages and hamlets. At the same time, Diem's autocratic style of government alienated most non-Communist elements in South Vietnamese society. In particular, the President fell into bitter conflict with South Vietnam's large, politically active Buddhist community. Resentful of Diem's dictatorial treatment and fearing that he might lose the war against the Communists, South Vietnam's generals began plotting a coup. After some internal disagreement, the Kennedy administration finally decided to support a change of South Vietnamese leadership and associated itself with the dissident generals. President Kennedy and his advisers hoped that Diem's overthrow would produce a more popular and effective government that would have a better chance to win the war against the Viet Cong.¹

On 22 November 1963, as the new Saigon regime, headed by General Duong Van Minh, was in the throes of organizing itself, President Kennedy fell to an assassin's bullets. His Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson, succeeded to the White House. President Johnson inherited the Vietnam conflict. He inherited also the Kennedy national security team that had set the course of policy, notably Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor, USA.

As President Johnson and his foreign policy advisers reviewed the situation in South Vietnam during the last weeks of 1963, the picture was not encouraging. The new government indeed appeared to have popular support and a sincere intent to prosecute the war, but its purge of Diem's officials in Saigon and the provinces had temporarily paralyzed military and pacification operations. Reports from the field indicated that the Viet Cong had been gaining in armed strength and territorial control since mid-1963. The US mission in Saigon was in disarray, with Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, who had strongly favored the generals' coup, at loggerheads with the MACV commander (COMUSMACV), General Paul D. Harkins, USA, who had favored sticking with Diem.² In the world at large, French President Charles DeGaulle was leading a diplomatic campaign for the unilateral withdrawal of US troops and the neutralization of South Vietnam.

Thus, as 1964 began, President Johnson and his national security team had to make decisions as to the next steps in Vietnam. During the year, they would move along two courses. They would seek to revive the military and pacification effort and stabilize the government in South Vietnam. At the same time, they would make plans and preparations for direct action against North Vietnam to persuade or compel the leaders in Hanoi to cease supporting the southern insurgency. As a result of their efforts, the United States would move to the brink of full-scale war in Southeast Asia.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff under Kennedy and Johnson

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the years since President John F. Kennedy's inauguration in January 1961 had been a period of frustration and diminishing influence over military policy. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara treated the Joint Chiefs as only one among several sources of military information and advice, and he often rejected their recommendations in favor of those of his staff of civilian "Whiz Kids" from business and academe. Even more disturbing to the Joint Chiefs, Secretary McNamara and his civilians, who believed that the generals and admirals were out of touch with the military and political realities of the nuclear age, regularly intervened in matters that the Chiefs considered to be within their sphere of professional authority. Hampered by interservice disagreements and cumbersome staff procedures and removed from the operational chain of command by the Defense Reorganization Act of 1958, the Joint Chiefs could not compete effectively with the Secretary of Defense and his high-powered team. As a result, by 1964, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) largely had supplanted

the Joint Chiefs and the Services in shaping nuclear and conventional force structure and military strategy.³

As the conduit between the JCS and the Johnson administration, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was in a critical and ambiguous position. On the one hand, the Chiefs expected him to strongly present their views to the President and Secretary McNamara. Yet at the same time, the President and the Defense Secretary looked to the Chairman to keep the Joint Chiefs in line with administration policy. General Taylor, Chairman until July 1964, seemed to his colleagues to be giving the second role precedence over the first, to the extent of toning down or misrepresenting their discontent with the administration's decisions, especially those related to Vietnam.⁴

When General Taylor left Washington to replace Henry Cabot Lodge as US ambassador in Saigon, his recommended candidate, General Earle G. Wheeler, Chief of Staff of the Army, replaced him as Chairman. An officer whose career was heavier in staff than combat assignments, General Wheeler was to serve as Chairman for six trying years. Urbane and diplomatic, General Wheeler won the confidence of President Johnson and Secretary McNamara and became a member of the President's inner group of advisers. He attempted to walk a fine line between private advocacy of the JCS position to President Johnson and Secretary McNamara and public support of presidential decisions, including those with which he disagreed. President Johnson once characterized him as "a good soldier" who would loyally follow his Commander in Chief "but has convictions." General Wheeler's loyalty to the administration ultimately led to his being criticized by some commentators as a weak Chairman who had let down the military, especially on Vietnam. Among the Joint Chiefs, General Wheeler worked to minimize Service disagreements so as to present Secretary McNamara with a united front on key issues; but the Secretary of Defense continued to dominate, and often dictate, military policy.⁵

Among the Service chiefs, General Harold K. Johnson replaced General Wheeler as Army Chief of Staff. Admiral David L. McDonald, the Chief of Naval Operations; General Curtis E. LeMay, Chief of Staff of the Air Force; and General Wallace M. Greene, Commandant of the Marine Corps, remained in their positions throughout 1964. Generals Taylor and Wheeler and all of the Service chiefs except General LeMay were Kennedy administration appointees, selected for their willingness to accommodate to Secretary McNamara's policies and administrative methods. They were military men who could take non-military factors into account in their advice and recommendations.⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and Vietnam: Five Silent Men?

As military planning for Vietnam intensified in 1964 and subsequent years, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were called upon repeatedly to execute their statutory role as principal military advisers to the President and Secretary of Defense. In the aftermath of ultimate US failure in Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs' performance in that role has come

under severe criticism from historians and serving and retired military officers. The critics argue that, despite surface civilian-military harmony, the US command system “functioned as badly in Vietnam as in any American war.” George Herring, a leading Vietnam war historian, summarized:

Johnson did not provide clear strategic direction to his military leaders. On the other hand, [the military leaders] did not (or could not) make clear to him the full depth of their own objections to the way the war was being fought. No one was really satisfied with the strategy, but there was little discussion of the major issues, no airing of the differences. The result by 1967 was a makeshift strategy that was doomed to failure and enormous frustration on all sides....⁷

While recognizing the civilian officials’ responsibility for this disastrous result, the critics also find US military leaders, notably the Joint Chiefs of Staff, culpable. The Joint Chiefs, they argue, failed to develop sound military objectives to achieve the administration’s political goals. They acquiesced in a strategy largely dictated by Secretary McNamara and his civilian aides even though they believed it would not work, and at critical points they tamely endorsed it in consultations with the President and Congress. In the absence of a viable military strategy, they failed to advise their civilian superiors to reduce their political goals. Focusing on parochial Service interests, the Joint Chiefs allowed McNamara to play them off against each other, further diluting and corrupting military advice. When they should have spoken out against unsound policies, the Joint Chiefs too often were “five silent men.” The title of one study highly influential among today’s military officers constitutes in itself an indictment: *Dereliction of Duty*.⁸

In defense of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and indeed of the Johnson administration as a whole, it can be said that the critics have the advantage of hindsight: they know how the Vietnam war ended. For their part, President Johnson and his civilian and military advisers, working on the basis of incomplete and often inaccurate information, had to deal with an evolving situation the outcome of which they could not foresee. Faced with uncertainty and under the pressure of competing domestic and foreign demands, they made Vietnam policy incrementally; at each stage they decided only what they had to decide at that moment. In this way, they retained an illusion of freedom of action; but in fact each successive decision narrowed their options for the next stage. As the conflict expanded, it was easy to interpret this incrementalism as deliberate concealment by the administration of its ultimate purposes and of the true costs of the war. Policy also was shaped by more than decisions in Washington. The situation on the ground in Vietnam, the fluctuations of South Vietnamese politics, the limitations of US force structure and logistical capabilities, and most important the decisions and actions of the enemy set the boundaries of choice for the administration. Against this background and under these circumstances, the Joint Chiefs of Staff participated in the Johnson administration’s struggle to find a Vietnam policy and strategy.

President Johnson's First Months

1964: A New Year Begins

On the last day of 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson sent a public letter to General Duong Van Minh, Chairman of South Vietnam's Military Revolutionary Council (MRC), and the provisional regime that had replaced the slain President Diem. In the letter, President Johnson reaffirmed the US commitment to the southern republic. He pledged "on behalf of the American Government and People a renewed partnership with your government and people in your brave struggle for freedom." The United States would continue to furnish South Vietnam "the fullest measure of support in this bitter fight" and would "maintain in Vietnam American personnel and material as needed to assist you in achieving victory." The President added, however, that as South Vietnam's forces became "increasingly capable of dealing with this aggression," the American military contingent could be "progressively withdrawn." Finally, President Johnson declared that the United States joined with the Saigon government in rejecting as "unacceptable" any neutralization of South Vietnam while the North persisted in its aggression. Under those circumstances, neutralization would "only be another name for a Communist takeover."¹

By firmly rejecting neutralization, President Johnson voiced a US policy that would prevail throughout 1964. Repeatedly, the President, reinforced by Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, made public his opposition to neutralization proposals from leaders such as French President Charles DeGaulle and United Nations Secretary General U Thant.² The principal American reason for opposing any move to neutralization was the one President Johnson had given in his letter to General Minh: the conviction that a genuinely neutral Republic of Vietnam would be

possible only after the Viet Cong were defeated and North Vietnam had ceased its support of the southern insurgency.

The United States had two further reasons for rejecting early negotiations and neutralization not dwelt upon in the public statements. First, at no time during 1964 could US officials conclude that their programs in South Vietnam were succeeding and that Saigon's forces were gaining the upper hand in the struggle. President Johnson and his advisers had no desire to enter into negotiations from a position of weakness.

The second reason was related to the first: the chronic governmental instability in Saigon that followed the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem. The Army of Vietnam (ARVN) generals' seizure of power, whatever promise it held of a fresh start and a reinvigoration of the counterinsurgency effort, had swept away the existing constitutional system. Thereafter, for well over a year, South Vietnam's public life presented a scene of continuing turmoil and instability. Regime succeeded regime, each arbitrarily proclaimed by a leader or faction that thereafter sought to legitimize its rule. Among the groups vying for power, the military establishment possessed the greatest strength, but jealousies and factionalism within its ranks added to the political ferment. None of the successive leaders and governments inspired enthusiasm among the South Vietnamese population.

For the Johnson administration, restoration of a reasonably stable government in Saigon was a central concern throughout 1964. Only such a government could advance the pacification program and make effective use of the advice and assistance the US was providing. As US officials contemplated possible direct action against North Vietnam, they considered an effective and firmly based government in the South a prerequisite for any such step. The need for stability also was an argument against entering into any negotiations leading toward neutralization. If South Vietnam's leaders became aware that the United States was contemplating even exploratory discussions with Hanoi, their morale might collapse, toppling the shaky government in Saigon and perhaps bringing to power a regime that was itself committed to neutralization and US withdrawal.³

President Johnson Sets a Course: NSAM 273

By the time President Johnson sent his letter to General Minh, the US administration already had set its course in Vietnam. On 26 November 1963, the morrow of the day of national mourning and funeral services for President John F. Kennedy, the new President informed Secretaries Rusk and McNamara that he had reviewed the record of their recent conference at Honolulu on 20 November and issued new policy guidance, embodied in National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 273. The NSAM opened with a declaration that

It remains the central object of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy. The test of all US decisions

and actions in this area should be the effectiveness of their contribution to this purpose.

Calling for a unified effort by all US officials concerned and for continuation of military and economic assistance programs at levels no less than those maintained during the Diem period, President Johnson termed it "a major interest of the United States Government" that the new Saigon regime be assisted in consolidating itself and in developing increased public support. In particular, the United States should try to persuade South Vietnamese leaders to concentrate their attention on the critical situation in the Mekong Delta, the heavily populated, agriculturally fertile region south of Saigon. At the same time, the President reaffirmed the White House statement of 2 October 1963 that had envisioned the US advisory effort substantially achieving its purposes during the next two years, to be followed by a major withdrawal of US military personnel after 1965. He thus reaffirmed contingency plans that the Commander in Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC), and the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), had been developing since mid-1962.⁴

NSAM 273 elaborated on earlier tentative decisions to consider action in North Vietnam and Laos, to be conducted by the South Vietnamese with nonattributable US assistance. The presidential guidance called for prompt production of plans for "different levels of possible increased activity," to include estimates of the resulting damage to North Vietnam, the plausibility of denial, possible North Vietnamese retaliation, and other international reactions. With regard to Laos, NSAM 273 called for preparation of plans for military operations launched from South Vietnam but penetrating no farther than 50 kilometers across the border, together with political plans for minimizing the international hazards of such an enterprise. Secretary McNamara soon assigned responsibility for these plans concurrently to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ISA).⁵

NSAM 273 summoned administration officials to renew their consideration of the problems of Southeast Asia. On 6 December, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, JCS Chairman General Maxwell D. Taylor, USA, CIA Director John McCone, and other senior presidential advisers met in the White House to discuss the next steps. Secretary McNamara presented a pessimistic analysis of the current military situation in South Vietnam. He reported that the Minh government was in a state of organizational turmoil, the Viet Cong were making an intensive effort to increase their hold on the countryside and improving their skill at counter-airborne operations, and there were indications that infiltration of materiel to the insurgents had increased. The number of enemy attacks had gone up since the coup and the ratio of weapons lost to weapons captured had turned against the Army of Vietnam (ARVN). The Viet Cong's antiaircraft capability had increased alarmingly, largely due to improved weapons of probable Communist bloc origin.

The conferees agreed upon four broad measures to counter the enemy gains: (1) institute a program of pressures on North Vietnam of rising intensity; (2) begin probes of Laos, including use of American advisers and resupply capabilities; (3) initiate aerial

reconnaissance of both Cambodia and Laos; and (4) accelerate dispatch of US economic experts to South Vietnam. In addition, the United States would conduct an analysis of waterborne traffic into South Vietnam and develop plans to interrupt this type of infiltration. Pursuant to a call by the President in NSAM 273 for development of “as strong and persuasive a case as possible” to prove to the world that the Viet Cong were controlled, sustained, and supplied from North Vietnam, the officials agreed to send Mr. William Jorden of the State Department to Saigon to gather new evidence for the production of an updated report on this subject similar to an earlier one the department had issued in 1961. Informing Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., of the results of the meeting, Secretary Rusk concluded that the President “has expressed his deep concern that our effort in Vietnam be stepped up to the highest pitch and that each day we ask ourselves what more we can do to further the struggle.”⁶

Planning for Actions against North Vietnam

In NSAM 273, President Johnson authorized his administration to proceed with planning for South Vietnamese operations against North Vietnam with nonattributable US assistance. Earlier in November, at their Honolulu meeting, senior US officials had defined this as a requirement for “an optimum 12 months’ program for intensified operations against North Vietnam including sabotage, propaganda incursions, intelligence and commando hit-and-run raids.” The operations would use South Vietnamese military and paramilitary resources, fully supported by the United States. The plan was to show what could be done with the means currently available and specify what additional means would be needed to carry out the most advantageous program. It was to list actions of graduated intensity, ranging from low-level harassment and deception to large amphibious commando raids.⁷

Immediately upon the issuance of NSAM 273, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC, Admiral Harry D. Felt, to undertake this planning task in coordination with the Saigon station of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). CINCPAC in turn delegated the military role in the planning to General Paul D. Harkins, Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV). The target date for submission of the plan was 20 December 1963, and General Taylor advised Admiral Felt that Washington was keenly interested in the early receipt of the plan. On 10 December, Secretary McNamara informed Ambassador Lodge that, at the President’s behest, he would stop in Saigon on his way back to Washington from a NATO Council meeting. Secretary McNamara looked forward particularly to seeing the plan for operations against North Vietnam, which, in his words, was designed “to make clear to the North Vietnamese that the US will not accept a Communist victory in South Vietnam and that we will escalate the conflict to whatever level is required to insure their defeat.”⁸

During consultations with the Secretary of Defense in Saigon on 19 December, General Harkins presented the plan, a joint effort of his headquarters and the CIA station.

Subsequently, the program was designated Operations Plan (OPLAN) 34A-64. Following the presentation, Secretary McNamara decided that, whether or not OPLAN 34A was eventually implemented in full, the United States should act at once to assemble in South Vietnam all the materiel required for the total execution of the plan.⁹

In a White House meeting soon after Secretary McNamara returned from Saigon, he and CIA Director McCone described OPLAN 34A to the President. The plan listed more than 2,000 possible actions, ranging from small propaganda efforts to battalion-size commando raids and overt bombing of key targets. Mr. Johnson accepted the suggestion of his two advisers that an interdepartmental State-Defense-CIA committee be set up to select from this large list the operations that were most feasible and promised the greatest return for the least risk. Under the chairmanship of Major General Victor H. Krulak, USMC, the Chairman's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA), this committee completed its report on 2 January 1964. Secretary McNamara then prepared a shorter draft memorandum for the President and referred it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for comment.¹⁰

As a first phase in implementing OPLAN 34A, the interdepartmental committee proposed a four-month program of covert operations against North Vietnam, with a suggested starting date of 1 February 1964. The program provided for: (1) expansion of intelligence collection operations, including U-2 photographic missions and communications-electronics flights; (2) psychological operations, including leaflet drops, delivery of propaganda kits, harassment and deception operations, and radio broadcasts; and (3) sabotage operations against 18 targets. The United States could plausibly deny responsibility for all these actions, and the Saigon government would be asked to adopt the program as its own. The United States would provide logistic and advisory support, but no American personnel or forces would engage in operations against North Vietnam. Americans would continue, however, to serve as air crews on certain reconnaissance flights.

The proposed program was supposed to help convince the North Vietnamese leaders that it was in their interest to desist from aggression against the South. The planners based their sabotage program on the theory that, because the Hanoi government placed much importance on economic development, damage to industrial projects and destruction of resources might cause it to reduce its material support of the Viet Cong. The selection of sabotage targets had been guided by this view. Besides affecting North Vietnam's economy and morale, the program could be expected to yield increased intelligence and to compel Hanoi to take costly countermeasures.

Response to this proposal within the administration was generally favorable. After considering it, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that, taken altogether and even if successful, these covert actions would not greatly influence the progress of the war. Still, the operations were within the current or early prospective capabilities of the South Vietnamese and represented a useful beginning. Intensive planning should go forward for a more vigorous program, including overt actions if necessary. On 16 January, the President approved the program, for execution over a four-month period beginning 1

February. Selected from OPLAN 34A, the operations included 23 intelligence collection missions; 14 physical destruction operations; and several hundred psychological operations. The President did not approve any air strikes or other operations the sponsorship of which could not be denied. In Saigon, Ambassador Lodge was to exercise political control of these activities, with operational control assigned to General Harkins.¹¹

In Saigon, Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins lost no time in putting the operation into motion. The Ambassador welcomed the increased pressure on North Vietnam and considered the initial level of activity well chosen. At the direction of the State and Defense Departments to bring the Vietnamese into the planning, on 21 January Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins explained the proposed operation to General Minh and his principal associates. After what Ambassador Lodge called thoughtful and “constructive” questioning, and after an additional meeting with General Harkins to discuss military details, the South Vietnamese concurred in the OPLAN 34A program for February and promised to provide forces to carry it out. At that point, however, the first of South Vietnam’s post-Diem political convulsions occurred; the Minh government was overthrown.¹²

The Khanh Coup, 30 January 1964

When he received President Johnson’s letter of New Year’s greeting, General Minh and his fellow officers had been in power scarcely two months. In that time, the record of the Military Revolutionary Council under Minh’s leadership had not been impressive. The generals lacked political and administrative experience; and there were signs of disunity, distrust, and a curious inertia among some members of the government. Nevertheless, in an early assessment, Ambassador Lodge, an enthusiastic proponent of Diem’s overthrow, called the generals “able men who will do big things once they get started.” It is apparent that he was speaking from hope rather than from firm conviction.¹³

On 21 December, after his visit to Saigon to discuss plans for action against the North, Secretary McNamara told President Johnson that the situation in South Vietnam was “very disturbing.” “Current trends,” he declared, “unless reversed in the next 2–3 months, will lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a Communist-controlled state.” Secretary McNamara saw the new government as indecisive and drifting, with no clear idea of how to reshape or conduct the pacification program. The province chiefs, most of whom were new, were receiving little or no direction. Army commanders were preoccupied with political matters and ineffective in directing military operations.

Secretary McNamara also found the US mission in disarray. “It lacks leadership, has been poorly informed, and is not working to a common plan.” Ambassador Lodge “simply does not know how to conduct a coordinated administration He has operated as a loner all his life and cannot readily change now.” Lodge “has virtually no official contact

with Harkins." The Ambassador "sends in reports with major military implications without showing them to Harkins, and does not show Harkins important incoming traffic."

Given these circumstances, Secretary McNamara, not surprisingly, found that the Viet Cong were gaining ground and probably had been doing so since about July 1963. Earlier US reports of progress had apparently been ill-founded "because of our undue dependence on distorted Vietnamese reporting." The Viet Cong now controlled very high proportions of the people in some key provinces, particularly those directly south and west of Saigon. In those provinces, the strategic hamlet program was seriously overextended. The Viet Cong had been able to destroy many hamlets, while others had been abandoned, or betrayed and pillaged, by the government's own Self Defense Corps. In these key provinces, the insurgents were collecting taxes at will. The situation in the northern and central areas of South Vietnam was considerably better than around Saigon and in the Mekong Delta; but overall conditions were far from encouraging.¹⁴

Major General Krulak spoke in the same vein of the weaknesses in the new government. On 23 December 1963, he reported that "operations of the governmental mechanism—far from satisfactory before the coup—have decelerated greatly." The junta, although composed of competent military leaders, was now preoccupied with politics, a field in which its members were far less qualified. As a result, the South Vietnamese generals slighted their primary task of fighting the war. At the same time, General Krulak judged, the civilian element of the Saigon government was of marginal quality, unprepared to handle complex administration. In the provinces, officials were unsure of their authority, their obligations, and their tenure. The same was true throughout the military chain of command.¹⁵

Ambassador Lodge, however, persisted in his optimism. On 23 January, Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins accompanied General Minh and other top South Vietnamese military leaders on a tour of several provinces, viewing the new administration in action. Ambassador Lodge reported to Washington that the government was trying to reach the people and prosecute the counterinsurgency. He even ventured the opinion that the struggle against the Viet Cong was now turning in favor of the government. Ambassador Lodge was most impressed with General Minh's efforts to win over the people and make himself a popular leader. Of Minh, the Ambassador concluded, "He is . . . pushing a sound plan, political and military, with determination and ability, and so far seems to have kept his own crowd together on a cordial basis."¹⁶

Not all of General Minh's "crowd" worked "together on a cordial basis." On 28 January, Major General Nguyen Khanh, commander of the I Corps, South Vietnam's northernmost military region, spoke confidentially with his senior American adviser, Colonel Jasper Wilson, USA. General Khanh told Wilson that he had learned from sources in France that a clique of pro-French Vietnamese generals, members of the Military Revolutionary Council, were going to attempt another coup, possibly within three days. Once the coup was under way, the plotters would call for neutralization of South Vietnam. General Khanh asserted that the conspirators were already in touch with General Nguyen Van Hinh, an exiled former RVNAF chief of staff friendly to France, whom Diem

had ousted in 1954. General Khanh sought assurance that the US Government would back a counter-coup and would oppose neutralism.¹⁷

Colonel Wilson informed Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins of Khanh's statements. On the 29th, Ambassador Lodge passed the information to Washington. Lodge expressed skepticism about Khanh's charges against the generals but he also assessed Khanh as "the most capable general in Vietnam." General Khanh, Ambassador Lodge declared, "controls the I and II Corps, which is the most orderly part of Vietnam; and . . . in addition to being a capable soldier he has the reputation of being politically perspicacious." Nevertheless, while doubting the truth of Khanh's allegations, Ambassador Lodge had not informed the South Vietnamese leadership of the general's activities. In rare agreement with his rival the Ambassador, General Harkins concurred with Lodge's views.¹⁸

Before the Johnson administration could react to this information, General Khanh made his move. At about 0215 on 30 January, Khanh informed Colonel Wilson that he, together with the commanders of the 7th Division and the III Corps (the principal formations controlling the Saigon area), would move against the government at 0400 that morning to "secure changes in the MRC." General Khanh had Colonel Wilson brought to the coup command post, where Wilson remained all day as an observer. Colonel Wilson immediately informed Lodge and General Harkins of what was happening, and the Ambassador sent word to Washington at once.¹⁹

As predicted, at about 0400, troops loyal to General Khanh and his co-conspirators took over Joint General Staff headquarters while men and armor deployed into downtown Saigon. General Khanh's forces detained or placed under house arrest General Minh and four other allegedly neutralist MRC members as well as the civilian prime minister. The coup was quick and bloodless. It was done so quietly that the majority of Saigon's people had no inkling of events until the afternoon newspapers appeared. Later that day, Radio Saigon broadcast a declaration, signed by a majority of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) generals and colonels including all the corps commanders, that the Military Revolutionary Council was being reorganized. General Khanh followed this with a declaration that he had acted because the government had shown itself incapable of bringing about promised social, economic, and political changes. He blamed this failure on neutralists within the regime who had been "paving the way for the communists to enslave our people." General Khanh concluded with a pledge that the Army was determined to unite the people and to bring about real security, happiness, and democratic freedom in final victory.²⁰

At 1100 on the morning of the coup, Ambassador Lodge called on General Khanh, seeking information about his plans, his attitude toward the counterinsurgency campaign, and the fate of the captured generals. The new head of government was anxious for early US recognition and support. He promised Secretary Lodge that he would prosecute the war against the Viet Cong vigorously and without delay. Claiming that he knew nothing about politics, economics, or foreign policy, General Khanh said that he was going to depend heavily on the Ambassador for advice. Reporting this conversation to Washington, Ambassador Lodge described General Khanh as a "cool, clearheaded,

realistic planner” who had been able to “bring about order in much of the areas which he has commanded. He hopes to do the same in the rest of the country. He looks tough, ruthless, and far sighted.”²¹

General Khanh’s takeover of the government had been accomplished with some forewarning to US officials and under their immediate observation but without any positive exercise of US influence. In fact, in its first response to reports of a possible coup, the State Department had instructed Ambassador Lodge to make it very clear through his actions that the United States had nothing to do with the unfolding events. Finessing the issue of recognizing the new regime, the US administration handled it as a continuation of normal relations with a government whose head of state had changed. Ambassador Lodge informed General Khanh of this conclusion and he accepted it. On 1 February, after additional assurances from Ambassador Lodge that General Khanh would press the war with vigor, President Johnson at a press conference referred to the “new and friendly leaders” of South Vietnam. He read aloud a letter to General Khanh applauding the general’s determination to keep up the fight and pledging that the United States would continue to “help you to carry the war to the enemy and to increase the confidence of the Vietnamese people in their government.”²²

Thus General Khanh launched his new government, the first of the succession that was to emerge during 1964 from the political turmoil in South Vietnam. Judged against the record that later unfolded, General Khanh’s regime was unusual in one respect: it remained in power for more than six months.

OPLAN 34A Starts Slowly

With the Minh regime overthrown, US officials in Saigon and Washington attempted to get on with the war. Concern arose that the OPLAN 34A information passed to South Vietnamese officials might have been compromised. However, after investigating, General Harkins concluded that the deposed generals had not had access to the more sensitive portions of the plan and had apparently not been given any extensive written materials. Accordingly, the operations planned for February and March went off as scheduled. These initial OPLAN 34A forays produced little, however, due to equipment shortages, poor weather, bad luck, and lack of motivation and enterprise on the part of the Vietnamese forces assigned.²³

In response to the failures of February, Secretary McNamara questioned the adequacy of OPLAN 34A’s operational procedures and asked General Harkins for comment. In his reply, General Harkins held that the operational procedures were adequate and sound, but he acknowledged that South Vietnamese motivation and morale had serious deficiencies. The South Vietnamese Special Forces, source of the existing agents and sabotage teams, had been loyal to Diem and to their immediate superior, a Diem supporter removed in the November coup. Special Forces personnel knew they were in disfavor with the Khanh government, and many were being called back from their

missions for “interrogation.” Changes in government and in key officials had caused delays in executing programs, and some information appearing in the local press suggested lapses in security. General Harkins expressed hope for improvement, chiefly from the intensified training program then under way for Saigon’s Special Forces.²⁴

Encouraging Steps in Pacification

While the OPLAN 34A results during February and March were disappointing, US officials drew encouragement from General Khanh’s early steps toward carrying out an effective pacification plan. During January, before the coup, the RVNAF Joint General Staff had issued a new National Pacification Plan (NPP). MACV advisers had participated extensively in the development of the NPP, a revision of the earlier National Campaign Plan which had been prepared under the Diem regime. The NPP outlined a national strategy for a combined military, political, and economic offensive against the Viet Cong. The campaign would proceed in two phases. In Phase I, the armed forces and civilian agencies, under military command, would clear territory of the Viet Cong following the “spreading oil drop” technique—moving successively from secure, heavily populated areas into insecure, less densely populated ones. In Phase II, while civilian rule was consolidated in secure areas, the military forces would destroy the Viet Cong in their secret bases and thus end the insurgency. The plan set priorities for carrying out Phase I, with first priority given to the provinces surrounding Saigon and the upper part of the Mekong Delta. Second in emphasis came the remainder of the Delta and critical provinces north of Saigon. All of I and II Corps came third. In theory, all three areas were to be cleared by 1 January 1966.²⁵

General Khanh approved the plan on 18 February. He decreed that military leaders would conduct Phase I operations with civil authorities in supporting roles. In secured areas, the relationship would be reversed. To coordinate implementation of the NPP, General Khanh on 9 March organized a National Pacification Committee which he headed and included key government ministers. The RVNAF high command served as executive agent for pacification. General Khanh replaced Diem’s old Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets with a commissariat for “Hamlets of the New Life” (the new name for strategic hamlets) attached to the Joint General Staff. By this action, he reinforced the principle that all aspects of pacification would proceed under military direction, with province chiefs assuming responsibility only in secured areas.²⁶

US advisers viewed the National Pacification Plan with satisfaction, since it incorporated recommendations they had repeatedly made to President Diem without result. In particular, the plan promised to resolve long-standing South Vietnamese confusion over the combined civil and military authority of the province chiefs. Further, the NPP’s schedule of priorities accorded with US officials’ emphasis on securing the Delta region.

New Organization and Planning in Washington

Even as General Khanh reorganized his government in Saigon for more effective prosecution of the war, President Johnson did the same thing in Washington. On 14 February, the President established a high-level committee to oversee US policy and operations in South Vietnam. He named Mr. William Sullivan of the State Department as full-time head of this committee, under Secretary Rusk. The Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Agency for International Development (AID) Administrator were asked to nominate individuals to serve on the committee. Mr. Michael Forrestal would represent the White House. The President directed that those appointed “give absolute priority to their obligations as members of this committee and as agents for the execution of approved decisions.” He expressed the hope that “the establishment of this committee will permit an energetic, unified and skillful prosecution of the only war we face at present.”²⁷

To represent the Department of Defense, Secretary McNamara nominated Mr. William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) and Major General Rollen H. Anthis, USAF, who had recently succeeded General Krulak as SACSA. Within a few weeks, however, Bundy left the Pentagon to become Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. His successor, both at ISA and on the Sullivan committee, was Mr. John T. McNaughton.²⁸

Formally designated the Vietnam Coordinating Committee (VNCC), the Sullivan committee replaced an existing lower level interdepartmental coordinating body that had never functioned effectively. In launching the new coordinating effort, President Johnson indicated that, in execution of approved policy, departments should minimize appeals from Mr. Sullivan's decisions. Sullivan was not authorized to render decisions on major questions of policy and operations, but he had considerable authority over the continuing execution of approved policy. Within the Defense Department, the level and terms of reference of the new committee raised concern that JCS responsibilities for military planning and providing the channel of command to CINCPAC might be preempted to some extent. General Anthis recognized that the two Defense representatives must be alert to prevent the commitment of their Department to policies or actions that had not received appropriate consideration by Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.²⁹

During a conference with the VNCC members and other advisers on 20 February, President Johnson directed a speed up of contingency planning for pressures on North Vietnam. Accordingly, the VNCC turned immediately to preparing a plan of action for the United States in Vietnam. The plan was to consist of a detailed scenario for imposing measured sanctions against North Vietnam on an ascending scale with back-up studies in depth of the major questions involved. In addition, the plan should specify the major policy decisions required before starting the proposed courses of action and a statement of the intelligence requirements to support the decisions and operations. A

subcommittee, including a representative from the Joint Staff, prepared and presented this plan to the full committee on 1 March.³⁰

Entitled “Alternatives for the Imposition of Measured Pressures against North Vietnam,” the VNCC subcommittee’s report described three programs of military actions, with associated political, economic, and psychological activities, and estimated North Vietnamese, Chinese, Soviet, and Free World reactions to each. The alternatives were: (1) further maritime and airborne raids against the North along the lines of OPLAN 34A; (2) a program of overt US and/or Allied activity, short of attacking North Vietnam’s territory but not excluding combat operations in Laos; and (3) an overt program of US operations against North Vietnam, consisting of amphibious and airborne raids, destruction of shipping, mining of northern seaports, blockade, shore bombardment, and air attacks.³¹

No official action was taken on this report. Like many other papers of this period, it stood as a contribution to the continuing deliberations on Southeast Asia policy that went on at the highest levels of the US Government throughout 1964. The Joint Chiefs of Staff participated in these discussions and had submitted their views repeatedly throughout the year.

The JCS Recommendations of 22 January 1964

The Joint Chiefs of Staff made their first major contribution to the policy debate on 22 January. In a lengthy memorandum to Secretary McNamara, they declared that if the United States was to achieve the President’s objectives laid down in NSAM 273, it must be prepared to put aside many self-imposed restrictions, move more boldly, and take greater risks. The stakes were high. “If the US program succeeds in South Vietnam it will go far toward stabilizing the total Southeast Asia situation,” the Joint Chiefs observed. “Conversely, a loss of South Vietnam to the communists will presage an early erosion of the remainder of our position in that subcontinent,” with Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand likely to fall into the Communist camp. Beyond this, in Burma, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea, an American defeat would have a severe impact on judgments “with respect to US durability, resolution, and trustworthiness.”

As if the regional significance of the Vietnam conflict were not enough, the Joint Chiefs declared it the “first real test of our determination to defeat the communist wars of national liberation formula.” Hence, South Vietnam held “the pivotal position” in the world-wide Cold War. The conflict in South Vietnam must be brought to a favorable end as soon as possible, but the JCS thought it unrealistic to expect a complete suppression of the insurgency in one or even two years. The British, they noted, had taken ten years to win their counterinsurgency battle in Malaya. In voicing this opinion, the Joint Chiefs challenged the assumption of the Kennedy administration, repeated in NSAM 273, that the US advisory effort in South Vietnam could achieve its purpose during the next two

years, allowing a substantial American withdrawal after 1965. Instead, the Chiefs pointed the way toward a more extensive, and probably longer, commitment.

Given its strategic significance, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed the conviction that the US must “see the Vietnam campaign through to a favorable conclusion.” To do this, “we must prepare for whatever level of activity may be required and, being prepared, must then proceed to take actions as necessary to achieve our purposes surely and promptly.” Moreover, the Chiefs went on, action in South Vietnam should be taken in the context of an integrated United States policy for all of Southeast Asia. More attention was needed, they believed, to the combination of economic, political, and military measures to advance compatible objectives in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia, as well as South Vietnam.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed particular concern about the restrictions in the conduct of the war that the United States was imposing upon itself and its South Vietnamese ally. The allies, they said, currently were fighting on the enemy’s terms; “our actions are essentially reactive.” “We have obliged ourselves to labor under self-imposed restrictions with respect to impeding external aid to the Viet Cong.”

These restrictions include keeping the war within the boundaries of South Vietnam, avoiding the direct use of US combat forces, and limiting US direction of the campaign to rendering advice to the Government of Vietnam. These restrictions, while they may make our international position more readily defensible, all tend to make the task in Vietnam more complex, time consuming, and in the end, more costly.

In addition, US observance of these restrictions might well be “conveying signals of irresolution to our enemies,” thereby encouraging them to undertake more daring initiatives.

The Joint Chiefs followed this thought with a sentence the wording of which had received particular attention: “A reversal of attitude and the adoption of a more aggressive program would enhance greatly our ability to control the degree to which escalation will occur.” They discounted the likelihood that the Chinese Communists would intervene in reaction to a bolder US campaign. China’s “economic and agricultural disappointments,” plus the current rift with the Soviets, “could” cause Beijing to “think twice about undertaking a large-scale military adventure in Southeast Asia.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff acknowledged that the focus of the counterinsurgency battle lay in South Vietnam itself and that “the war must certainly be fought and won primarily in the minds of the Vietnamese people.” Nevertheless, they judged that North Vietnam’s operational direction and personnel and material support to the Viet Cong had reached significant proportions. If this outside support were stopped completely, “the character of the war in South Vietnam would be substantially and favorably altered.” The Joint Chiefs wholly favored mounting the four-month program of OPLAN 34A actions that the President had approved a few days earlier, but they believed “it would be idle to conclude that these efforts will have a decisive effect on the communist determination

to support the insurgency.” The United States must be prepared to undertake a much higher level of activity.

The Joint Chiefs then specified what “increasingly bolder actions” the United States must make ready to conduct:

- a. Assign to the US military commander responsibility for the total US program in Vietnam.
- b. Induce the Government of Vietnam to turn over to the United States military commander, temporarily, the actual tactical direction of the war.
- c. Charge the United States military commander with complete responsibility for conduct of the program against North Vietnam.
- d. Overfly Laos and Cambodia to whatever extent is necessary for acquisition of operational intelligence.
- e. Induce the Government of Vietnam to conduct overt ground operations in Laos of sufficient scope to impede the flow of personnel and material southward.
- f. Arm, equip, advise, and support the Government of Vietnam in its conduct of aerial bombing of critical targets in North Vietnam and in mining the sea approaches to that country.
- g. Advise and support the Government of Vietnam in its conduct of large-scale commando raids against critical targets in North Vietnam.
- h. Conduct aerial bombing of key North Vietnam targets, using US resources under Vietnamese cover, and with the Vietnamese openly assuming responsibility for the actions.
- i. Commit additional US forces, as necessary, in support of the combat action within South Vietnam.
- j. Commit US forces as necessary in direct actions against North Vietnam.

In conclusion, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised Secretary McNamara that “any or all of the foregoing actions may be required” to attain US objectives. The JCS declared that they would continue their close attention to developments in South Vietnam during the coming months and would recommend to him “progressively the execution of such of the above actions as are considered militarily required.” For the present, they recommended that the substance of their memorandum be discussed with the Secretary of State.³²

As the Joint Chiefs had requested, Secretary McNamara passed a copy of the 22 January memorandum to Secretary Rusk. Secretary Rusk turned aside the JCS bid for overall military control of the US program in Vietnam. Noting that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had written that the war must be won in the minds of the Vietnamese people, Secretary Rusk agreed, saying “this means that this war, like other guerrilla wars, is essentially political—an important fact to bear in mind in determining command and control arrangements in Vietnam.” Secretary Rusk subscribed to the JCS opinion that the United States must follow an integrated policy in Southeast Asia. He emphasized, however, the need for careful consideration before decisions were made. The government, he declared, must weigh the political and military risks involved and pay due regard to the impact of actions taken in one country on the situation in another. Finally, Secretary

Rusk promised that his Department would always be prepared to consider promptly any of the listed actions that the Joint Chiefs of Staff might subsequently recommend.³³

In their memorandum of 22 January 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff articulated a number of themes that they would repeat throughout the ensuing policy deliberations. Achievement of the United States objective of a secure, noncommunist South Vietnam was strategically vital and the United States must be prepared to take whatever action was necessary to attain it. That action must include the termination of North Vietnamese support to the southern insurgents. Military half measures would neither deter nor prevent Hanoi from pursuing its aggression, and the United States and South Vietnam must be prepared to bomb important targets in North Vietnam and mine its harbors. For these missions, and if necessary to press the fight against the Viet Cong, the United States must be willing to commit its own air, naval, and land forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not rule out limited measures as a beginning but considered that the full program of escalation likely would be required for success.

JCS Planning after the Khanh Coup

The Khanh coup, which occurred less than a week after the Joint Chiefs submitted their 22 January memorandum, shifted the Chiefs' attention to pacification within South Vietnam. On 5 February, General Taylor ordered the Joint Staff to draw up an outline plan for revitalizing the counterinsurgency program under the new regime. The Chairman specified that the plan should address means of assisting General Khanh to secure the political stability that was indispensable to the success of the military program. The United States, General Taylor emphasized, could not afford to have any further changes in the Saigon government before the military phase of the counterinsurgency program was concluded. "The problem," he wrote, "is to get this thought across to the senior Vietnamese military who may entertain thoughts of future coups." Besides warning off coup plotters, the Chairman wanted suggestions for actions to restore South Vietnamese confidence and morale and to reassure the US public that their government's policy in Vietnam could produce results. He directed the Joint Staff to look for "several relatively spectacular operations which, if successful, could have a psychological impact in South Vietnam and in the United States." Alluding to the existing poor state of MACV's relations with the US news media in South Vietnam, Taylor declared that for the operations to achieve a positive effect, "we shall need accurate and sympathetic press reporting."³⁴

Consulted on the possibility of spectacular military successes, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC were not encouraging. General Harkins pointed out that the basic concept of the National Pacification Plan, shortly to be implemented, and the general nature of the fighting were not conducive to such operations. In a situation where the enemy held the initiative, "spectacular successes, if attained, will be the result of successful

reaction operations rather than specifically planned operations, simply because VC forces assemble as units only at times and places of their choosing.”

CINCPAC agreed substantially, observing that “in this war, operations using large forces to corner thousands and slay them” were not to be expected. Still, Admiral Felt thought some possibilities might be developed through night guerrilla operations, ambushes using vulnerable hamlets as bait, and hot pursuit of the enemy into Cambodia or Laos. He doubted, however, that isolated military successes, even if spectacular, would cause the news media to change its tone. The correspondents seemed convinced that the US cause was lost, and “short of a major shift in press attitude, [the] US public is not likely to be reassured by increase in tempo of the Government of Vietnam (GVN) military actions.”³⁵

On 11 February, the Joint Staff circulated for JCS consideration an outline plan responding to the Chairman’s guidance. The plan included a broad spectrum of actions—political, military, socio-economic, psychological, and organizational—that could contribute to revitalizing and intensifying the counterinsurgency effort. Some of these actions expanded on existing or scheduled activities, but others represented a sharp departure from the current US program. Reviewing the plan, the Joint Chiefs expressed divergent views, mainly relating to the more consequential military actions. They agreed to refer these matters for further study, in effect merging them with the continuing consideration of the activities listed in their 22 January memorandum. Measures on which the Joint Chiefs concurred would be recommended to the Secretary of Defense immediately.³⁶

On 18 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded their recommendations to Secretary McNamara. Although including some military measures, the JCS largely restricted themselves to non-military and paramilitary actions that the country team in Saigon should be directed to implement at the earliest practicable time. The US should persuade General Khanh to accept American advisers at all levels that COMUSMACV considered necessary. It should improve South Vietnamese border controls, step up use of herbicides against Viet Cong areas recommended by the Saigon government, assist Khanh’s regime in readying civil administrations for areas cleared in the military phase of the NPP, and support the government in intensified internal psychological planning and operations. Touching upon social reform, the Joint Chiefs recommended that the country team press for an early, effective, and realistic land reform program and for tax forgiveness for low income groups in critical insurgency areas. As to the media problem, the JCS called for consultations aimed at gaining the support of US newsmen and a program of US-sponsored visits to South Vietnam by groups of prominent journalists and editors. Finally, the country team should make clear to all South Vietnamese military and civilian officials that the United States would oppose another coup. All US intelligence agencies and advisers should be alert for and report cases of dissension and plotting in order to prevent any further disruptive moves. Secretary McNamara referred these recommendations to the Vietnam Coordinating Committee for consideration.³⁷

Decisions in Hanoi

Even as President Johnson and his advisers pondered the possibility of escalation, North Vietnam's leaders were making their own decisions about the future course of the war. In Vietnam, the United States was engaging more than a southern insurgency that had begun in the late 1950s; it faced a nationwide movement, Communist-dominated, that had been organizing and fighting since before World War II. In the French phase of what the Vietnamese Communists later named "The Thirty Years' War of National Salvation," the Viet Minh had advanced through all the military phases of the people's revolutionary war, from small-scale guerrilla action to multi-division offensives, culminating in the successful siege of Dien Bien Phu. After the Geneva agreements of 1954, the Viet Minh had constituted themselves a state in North Vietnam and since then had been building a government, a socialist society, and a regular army, navy, and air force. In South Vietnam, the movement had remained a political underground. In the late 1950s, with Hanoi's approval, the southern movement had resumed guerrilla warfare, with Diem and the US as new antagonists, and had begun to build larger military units. Whereas US officials viewed post-Geneva Vietnam as two nations, the leaders in Hanoi considered it one country, temporarily divided. Their objective in what is now called the Second Indochina War was to complete the revolution by unifying Vietnam under their control.³⁸

Although the Viet Cong, officially called the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam, proclaimed itself an indigenous southern movement, it received policy direction and materiel support from North Vietnam. Its top leaders were members of the northern Communist party. North Vietnam reinforced the Viet Cong with manpower, weapons, and specialized equipment, brought overland down a complex route of foot, bicycle and motor trails known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail in eastern Laos and smuggled in by sea in small vessels disguised as civilian fishing craft. According to a later Vietnamese account, by the end of 1963, over 40,000 political cadre and soldiers, 2,000 of them high-ranking cadre and technical personnel, had marched to the South down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Mostly native southerners who had regrouped to the north after the Geneva agreements, these troops constituted 50 percent of the full-time Viet Cong armed forces and 80 percent of the command and staff personnel. In addition to people, North Vietnam claimed to have transported more than 165,000 weapons to the south between 1961 and 1963, as well as hundreds of tons of other military equipment. These reinforcements enabled the Viet Cong to expand rapidly its political administration and its armed forces. By the end of 1963, according to US estimates at the time, the enemy's regular forces—provincial companies and battalions and regional regiments—totaled nearly 25,000 men, not counting part-time guerrillas and civilian supporters.³⁹

With these assets, the Viet Cong by late 1963 were more than holding their own against Saigon's troops and their American allies. Yet the revolution still was far from complete victory. Communist party and front organizations in the cities and some rural areas remained weak, and the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem had reduced the NLF's potential appeal to Buddhists and other noncommunist elements in South Vietnam. Viet Cong

regular (main force) units were not yet large and heavily armed enough to engage and destroy the ARVN in decisive battles or take and hold strategic positions. Like their adversaries, the leaders in Hanoi had to decide on their next moves in the war.⁴⁰

The critical decisions came in December 1963, at a general meeting (the Ninth Plenum) of the Central Committee of the Vietnam Workers' (Communist) Party in Hanoi. After prolonged deliberations, the Central Committee adopted a secret directive to the Party, north and south, calling for a major acceleration of the military effort in South Vietnam. Although reaffirming the need to combine political and armed struggle, the Central Committee declared that "the armed struggle would be the deciding factor in the annihilation of the armed forces of the enemy." "The key issue at present," the Committee proclaimed, "is for the entire Party and the entire population to . . . rapidly strengthen our armed forces in order to achieve a basic shift in the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy in South Vietnam." While guerrilla operations would continue, this effort's main focus would be on expanding the main force and intensifying mobile attacks "in order to annihilate puppet regulars and assign the decisive role on the battlefield to massed combat operations." The Ninth Plenum committed the full resources of North Vietnam, including its regular army, to the battle in the south. In doing so, it reversed the Party's earlier dictum that the north should give first priority to building socialism while the south liberated itself primarily by mobilizing its own strength, although with northern assistance. Now the war was to have top priority in both sections.

The North Vietnamese leaders expressed their intention to press ahead with the campaign even at the risk of direct US military intervention, which they anticipated and discounted. "If the US imperialists throw into South Vietnam an additional 50,000 to 100,000 troops, the total, people's and protracted war must strongly develop and cause them to become bogged down and gradually defeated." Whether or not the Americans came in, the Party and people should be prepared for a prolonged war but should also "strive to take advantage of opportunities to secure a decisive victory in a relatively short period of time." In sum, North Vietnam's leaders had decided upon a major escalation of the war in South Vietnam, with the emphasis on preparation for massed combat against the ARVN, which the Communists viewed as the main prop of a politically bankrupt Saigon regime.⁴¹

Starting early in 1964, the North Vietnamese set about implementing the Central Committee's decisions. They expanded the Ho Chi Minh Trail network to accommodate an increased flow of men and materiel, turning much of it into a truck route; and they increased the seaborne movement of weapons to southern South Vietnam, as yet not reachable from the Trail. During the year, according to North Vietnamese figures, almost 9,000 cadre and soldiers marched to the south, including full-strength infantry regiments. The quantity of supplies shipped to the south in 1964 was four times greater than that moved during the previous year. North Vietnam brought its armed forces to full war strength and began training and preparing divisions for combat in the south. Anticipating US and South Vietnamese attacks, the North Vietnamese reinforced and repositioned their air defense units, readied their small navy for battle, and organized

their civilian population for civil defense and resistance to invasion. Hanoi maneuvered diplomatically to secure an increasing stream of economic and military assistance from the Communist bloc, essential to expanding the war. Taking advantage of the Sino-Soviet competition for the allegiance of the world's Communist parties, North Vietnam obtained both maximum aid and maximum freedom to pursue its national objectives.⁴²

Hanoi's decision to expand the war rendered moot much of the Johnson administration's subsequent policy deliberations. In effect, the other side was already taking the very actions that American officials had hoped the graduated military pressure would deter them from. The entire contemplated American campaign was out of phase with what was happening in Hanoi.⁴³ Where the North Vietnamese had been decisive in setting policy and immediate in implementing it, the US administration was slow in both decision and action. In fairness to President Johnson and his advisers, it should be noted that the change in enemy strategy was slow to become apparent. It took the North Vietnamese much of the year to expand their logistic system and build up their forces; the first full regiment did not start south until October. Only gradually did the allies pick up indications that the war might be entering a new phase, for example through discovery of native northerners among captured Viet Cong. Nevertheless, during the year each side would move at its own pace along paths of escalation that would lead ultimately to a violent collision.

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Unaware of what the North Vietnamese had set in motion, President Johnson and his advisers continued their policy deliberations and planning. On 20 February, at a White House meeting attended by Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, General Taylor, and other officials, the President directed that “contingency planning for pressures against North Vietnam should be speeded up. Particular attention should be given to shaping such pressures so as to produce the maximum credible deterrent effect on Hanoi.” In furtherance of this effort, Mr. Johnson decided to send Secretary McNamara and General Taylor to South Vietnam early in March, to review with Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins the planning for pressure on the North and “other aspects of the counterinsurgency campaign.”¹

JCS Recommendations to McNamara

On 21 February, in preparation for his journey to Saigon, Secretary McNamara sought the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on “a number of military uncertainties which must be resolved” before final decisions could be made on action against North Vietnam. To begin with, McNamara asked the JCS what military actions South Vietnam could take against the North, employing air and naval power but limiting ground activity to small-scale raids. He also inquired what further actions could be attributed to Saigon even though not within plausible range of its capabilities. Similarly, what actions could US forces take without public acknowledgement or, alternatively, after an open declaration of Washington’s intent to exert military pressure on North Vietnam? What targets, the Secretary of Defense asked, would it be most effective to attack from the standpoint of (a) specific effect on North Vietnam’s capabilities for action against South Vietnam,

Laos, and Thailand; (b) interdiction of sea communications into North Vietnam and of land communication routes from Communist China; and (c) damaging key installations while minimizing the effect on North Vietnam's civilian population? In addition, Mr. McNamara sought the Joint Chiefs' views as to what actions under the above headings would be most likely to cause Hanoi to stop supporting the Viet Cong but least likely to "lead to stepped-up conflict and adverse reactions in third countries."

The majority of Secretary McNamara's queries had to do with North Vietnamese and Chinese capabilities for military action and with US means and capabilities for deterring or opposing them. Must US plans take account of the possibility that the enemy would react to attacks on North Vietnam with countermoves in Southeast Asia, Korea, or Taiwan? The Secretary seemed particularly interested in what modifications the United States must make in existing contingency plans so as to be able to respond to Communist escalation primarily through "air activities rather than the intervention of substantial US ground forces." If North Vietnam and/or Communist China, in reaction to US attacks on North Vietnam, invaded Laos, South Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, South Korea, or Taiwan, to what extent could the United States effectively counter the invasion through air and naval power without adding to the ground forces currently deployed, using means ranging from conventional ordnance only to selective use of tactical nuclear weapons?²

In closing his memorandum of 21 February, Secretary McNamara noted that a detailed response might well require some time to prepare. He wished, however, to have preliminary JCS judgments for consideration prior to his scheduled departure for Vietnam on 4 March. Recognizing the magnitude of the Secretary's requirement but seeking to meet his request, General Taylor set 1 March as the deadline for an initial response. He held open the possibility that supplementary material might be submitted later. To draft the initial response to Secretary McNamara, the Chairman directed the establishment of an ad hoc planning unit within the Joint Staff, to be headed by Brigadier General Lucius D. Clay, Jr., USAF, of the J-3 Directorate.³

Three JCS members submitted individual views that were made available to General Clay's group. The Air Force Chief of Staff, General Curtis E. LeMay, presented a major paper the same day McNamara posed his questions. "In my military judgment," he declared, "the time has come for a showdown in South Vietnam if we are to contain Communism there and in the whole of Southeast Asia." In an 11-page outline plan for revitalizing the counterinsurgency effort, General LeMay proposed that the United States issue a policy statement reaffirming its determination to assist Saigon in defeating the externally directed insurgent forces, with an added warning that communist sanctuaries beyond South Vietnam's borders would no longer be immune to attack. The United States should take action to increase offensive strength within South Vietnam, including the introduction of jet aircraft for both US and Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) use. General LeMay called for the lifting of restrictions on both US and RVNAF forces to allow hot pursuit of the Viet Cong into Cambodia and deliberate operations against enemy bases and lines of communication in Laos. He proposed

intensive covert operations against North Vietnam, with participation by personnel from Taiwan, Thailand, or the Philippines.⁴

The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral David L. McDonald, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., followed with their own views. Like General LeMay, both officers were concerned about the fact that the United States had as yet committed only a token of its immense military power to achieving vital objectives in Southeast Asia. Admiral McDonald cited the Lebanon intervention, the 1958 Taiwan Straits confrontation, and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis as instances in which the United States had effectively used its power, gaining both a favorable outcome and heartening expressions of support from the free world. The Chief of Naval Operations thought it strange that “we are hesitant to use it again in the particular and serious crisis we now face.” His specific proposals paralleled those of the Air Force but went farther by recommending direct US military actions against North Vietnam.⁵

General Greene was even more forthright. He called for a prompt and clear-cut governmental decision “either to pull out of South Vietnam or to stay there and win. If the decision is to stay and win—which is the Marine Corps recommendation—this objective must be pursued with the full concentrated power of US resources.” General Greene recommended that the United States “commence systematic destruction—in a rising crescendo—of targets in North Vietnam by air attack, amphibious raids, covert operations, and naval gunfire,” initially using South Vietnamese forces but with readiness to add those of the United States. He would “place a single military officer, COMUSMACV, in complete and total control of all operations” and introduce such wartime measures as news censorship and controlled accreditation of US and foreign correspondents. General Greene concluded with the following recommendation:

While maintaining the necessary tempo of operations to convince the Communists that we mean business, make it clear that the US is willing to confer and negotiate at any time with Ho Chi Minh. Listen patiently to our allies, friends, and enemies, but continue to press home the campaign in South Vietnam until a settlement on US terms is reached.⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff incorporated some of these views in their reply to the Secretary of Defense, which they submitted on 2 March. In a lengthy memorandum with several appendices, the Joint Chiefs gave detailed estimates of North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist military capabilities. They concluded that while the two enemy powers might exert military pressures in several areas at once, such as Southeast Asia, South Korea, and the Taiwan Straits, they could mount and sustain a major campaign in only one direction at a time, owing mainly to logistic limitations. As to the US effort required to contain a large-scale invasion of any of these areas, the Joint Chiefs listed the forces already designated in CINCPAC's contingency plans.

To the query regarding the United States ability to counter a major communist invasion through air and naval action without deploying additional ground forces, the Joint

Chiefs of Staff answer was indirectly stated but unmistakable. In applying land- and sea-based air power in that situation, nuclear attacks would have “a far greater probability” of stopping the enemy than would attacks with conventional ordnance. Sea power could be applied most usefully in a blockade, but it would take considerable time before having a marked effect on the enemy’s operations. Hence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized that in initiating actions against North Vietnam, the United States must be ready and willing “to follow through with appropriate contingency plans to counter DRV/CHICOM [Democratic Republic of Vietnam/Chinese Communist] reaction as required.” That is, air and sea power alone could not be counted upon to halt a major aggression. As to modifying contingency plans to exclude the use of substantial US ground forces, the Joint Chiefs declared that, while many of CINCPAC’s plans called for substantial US air effort in conjunction with ground intervention, “there are no specific plans based solely on air and naval responses which apply to all of the situations contained in this paper.” While doubting their viability, they nevertheless undertook to direct the preparation of such plans as required.

In assessing the means available to apply military pressures against North Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cited particularly air strikes, amphibious raids, sabotage operations, and a naval blockade. The RVNAF, acting alone, possessed a very limited capability to conduct the first three types of operations. With non-attributable US reinforcement by the FARM GATE (from the US 1st Air Commando Group) unit, the VNAF could intensify and expand its effort, striking lines of communication, military installations, and industrial targets. FARM GATE capabilities would be greatly enhanced if the unit were augmented with B-57 jet aircraft. Escalating further, the United States could increase destruction of the targets mentioned by unacknowledged commitment of its own air and naval elements. Open US announcement of its attention to apply pressures would provide still more freedom of action.

Secretary McNamara’s central question had been his request for the Joint Chiefs of Staff views on the course of action most likely to cause North Vietnam to stop supporting the insurgents in South Vietnam and Laos, with the least unfavorable enemy and international reaction. In their reply on 2 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that:

- a. US intentions and resolve to extend the war as necessary should be made clear immediately by overt military actions against the DRV.
- b. Military actions should be part of a coordinated diplomatic, military, and psychological program directed at deterring the enemy and preparing the world for extension of the war.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff then for the first time defined two possible modes of applying military pressure, offering a choice that was to be debated repeatedly during subsequent months: “We should prepare military actions, one in the form of a sudden blow for shock effect, another in the form of ascending order of severity with increasing US participation”

In their detailed recommendations, the JCS favored initial military preparations for “overt demonstrations of US intentions” through US low-level aerial reconnaissance over Laos and North Vietnam. This should be accompanied by expansion of South Vietnamese and FARM GATE activities in North Vietnam in the form of air strikes, amphibious raids, sabotage, and harassment of shipping and fishing activities. At the same time, the United States and South Vietnam should prepare to increase the intensity of their efforts against the North through armed reconnaissance along the principal supply routes from North Vietnam to Laos and the destruction of highway bridges, military targets, and airfields used to support the wars in South Vietnam and Laos. In addition, the allies should prepare to attack North Vietnam’s Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants (POL) installations and its major communication routes to China, as well as “industrial base targets” in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. Additional pressures could include mine laying in selected areas, cross-border operations, and a maritime blockade of North Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered these categories of targets the most effective ones to attack within the limits set by the Secretary of Defense.

Considering possible enemy response to these recommended actions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff doubted that the Chinese would send large ground forces into North Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia “except as part of an overall campaign against all of Southeast Asia.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff assessed that “the Chinese communists view Laos and South Vietnam as DRV problems.” The Beijing government might offer fighter aircraft, antiaircraft units, and “volunteers” to North Vietnam and at some stage might commit Chinese aircraft to the defense of that country. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) could be expected to continue and possibly increase its economic aid to Hanoi, but the Soviet leaders “would probably be highly concerned over possible expansion of the conflict.” If the communist regimes in Hanoi and Beijing appeared to be in jeopardy, the Soviets would probably set aside their differences with China and send additional assistance, including higher performance aircraft. Nevertheless, the Joint Chiefs believed that the leaders in Moscow would assess realistically their own national interests and US determination and intentions and would take no action that increased the likelihood of nuclear war. While condemning US policy in international forums, the Soviets might even “seek to initiate, or have initiated by other parties, discussions aimed at terminating hostilities and stabilizing the situation throughout all of Vietnam.”

In summation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed their assertion of 22 January 1964 that defense of South Vietnam was of overriding importance to US security interests. Since North Vietnamese direction and support of the insurgency was one of the controlling factors in the continuation of the war, “intensified operations are warranted and essential at this time to convince both the DRV and CHICOM leadership of our resolution to prevail.” Recognizing that the program they had set forth would involve a major change in US policy, the Joint Chiefs recommended that the actions they had specified be approved as a basis for discussion and planning during Secretary McNamara’s impending visit to South Vietnam.⁷

At a meeting on 2 March, the Joint Chiefs discussed their recommendations in detail with Secretary McNamara. General Taylor drew attention to the two modes of attack they had defined—the sharp blow or the steadily intensifying application of pressure. He stated that the Joint Chiefs had not yet matured their view regarding which should be chosen. They would study the matter further, particularly in the light of any decisions resulting from the Secretary's trip to South Vietnam.

In his comments, Secretary McNamara showed a continued strong disposition toward maximum use of air power in any Southeast Asia contingency, although he had apparently abandoned any thought that it could preclude the commitment of US ground forces. Whatever the ultimate level of escalation, he now sought to minimize American troop involvement by substituting Nationalist Chinese or other third-country ground units as well as by a “far more massive use of air.” In CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64 (Defense against North Vietnamese Invasion of South Vietnam and Laos), for instance, he wanted to see up to three times as many US Air Force squadrons committed as were currently listed. The Chairman undertook to have all the plans for Southeast Asia reviewed to provide for maximum use of air power, including naval air. At the end of the meeting the participants agreed that the JCS memorandum of 2 March would receive further review and that Secretary McNamara and General Taylor would discuss it with CINCPAC on their way to South Vietnam.⁸

On 4 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed their recommendations directly with President Johnson and received an indication of their Commander in Chief's fundamental concerns. In response to a query from President Johnson, General Taylor stated that, in the JCS view, “our program should consist of two main parts: one, an intensive continuation of the counterinsurgency campaign in South Vietnam and, second, a progressive program of selective air and naval attacks against North Vietnam using means beyond those employed in the past.” The other Chiefs concurred and added that it was “unlikely” that the Chinese Communists would intervene “in strength.” “However, once embarked on the program the US must carry it to success, cost what may.” The President “accepted the need for punishing Hanoi without debate, but pointed to some other practical difficulties, particularly the political ones with which he was faced.” From this, Taylor concluded: “It is quite apparent that he does not want to lose South Vietnam before next November nor does he want to get the country into war.” These conflicting desires in fact would preoccupy the President and significantly influence his decisions throughout the next several months.⁹

The JCS Push for Cross-Border Operations

As a separate action on 2 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent Secretary McNamara a strong recommendation that the United States lift restrictions on military incursions into Laos and Cambodia. They declared that “While our hard intelligence does not reveal the exact dimensions of the infiltration of men and materials into South Vietnam from

the North, and the true extent to which the [enemy] are utilizing sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia, there is mounting evidence that these are of such proportions as to constitute an increasingly important factor in the war." Hence, the Joint Chiefs urged that the US abandon the self-imposed restrictions that prevented the interdiction of infiltration routes and the pursuit and destruction of hostile forces. Cross-border operations, the JCS affirmed, were "essential to successful prosecution of the war."

CINCPAC had already proposed specific cross-border operations, and the Joint Chiefs recommended that Secretary McNamara seek approval to implement them. Terming them "Overt Secret Operations," the Joint Chiefs recommended South Vietnamese hot pursuit of Viet Cong into the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), Cambodia, and Laos and authorization for US advisers to accompany their units in such actions. The FARM GATE unit should be allowed to engage in hot pursuit under the same rules as the VNAF. The United States should conduct reconnaissance flights over Laos and Cambodia (with operations over Cambodia limited for the time being to high altitude missions). Saigon should be encouraged to conduct ground and air attacks on enemy facilities in Laos, in cooperation with friendly Laotian forces. US personnel should be authorized to accompany South Vietnamese units in international waters north of the 17th parallel and on ground and air forays into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. In addition, the Joint Chiefs recommended encouraging the South Vietnamese to launch covert ground raids and air operations into Cambodia.¹⁰

Blockading North Vietnam: Problems Identified

More than once, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had listed a naval blockade as a prospective measure against North Vietnam. To support more detailed consideration of this option, they had asked CINCPAC for his views on the feasibility of such a blockade, including the recommended concept of operations, types and numbers of ships required, and the magnitude of the effort needed to obtain effective results.¹¹

Replying on 28 February, Admiral Felt emphasized the diplomatic and military complexity of a blockade. The Pacific commander pointed out that, although the predominant portion of North Vietnam's trade was with Communist bloc countries, most ocean-going ships entering the three principal ports were under free-world registry. About 85 percent of North Vietnam's maritime commerce moved via shallow draft coastal shipping. Since the maritime shipping to be cut off would be owned by nations other than North Vietnam, the blockade would have to be a "total" rather than a "pacific" one. Accordingly, the United States would have to adopt the status of a formal belligerent in the war. In addition, to make the blockade effective, the United States would have to stop coastal shipping, which would require American forces to enter North Vietnam's territorial waters and air space.

On the operational side, Admiral Felt observed that a blockade would require considerable effort and involve great risk, with a constant threat of Chinese Communist

countermeasures. The Tonkin Gulf, where the blockade zone would be declared, was a virtual cul-de-sac, surrounded by existing or potential hostile air bases in South China, Hainan Island, and North Vietnam. The Admiral believed that US carrier aircraft could neutralize these threats and establish control of the air, but only at the risk of precipitating broader hostilities with China. Hence, during a blockade “advanced readiness must be assumed to implement a family of war plans.”¹²

Drawing heavily on CINCPAC’s reply, the Joint Staff made its own study of the blockade issue, which was circulated to the Joint Chiefs on 6 March. The staff concluded that the United States had the capability to impose an effective naval blockade on North Vietnam. However, this action was feasible only if the US “is prepared to accept escalation of the tempo of operations into a belligerent status with the DRV and subsequently with the Chinese communists.” Thus, the Joint Staff identified naval blockade as a measure high up on the scale of escalation.¹³

McNamara’s March Trip and Report

On 5 March, just before the Secretary of Defense departed for Southeast Asia, President Johnson sent him an informal letter of instructions. The President expressed “hope that you and your colleagues will work together to bring back the most careful possible estimate of the situation and of the best possible courses of action for improving it. Some of these possibilities have been discussed in a preliminary way here in recent days, but what we now need is an assessment of all the possibilities and needs on the spot.” In particular, the President wanted Secretary McNamara to frame his opinions and recommendations “in the light of your discussions with Ambassador Lodge and his colleagues, and with the leaders of the Vietnamese Government.”¹⁴

Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, accompanied by William H. Sullivan, William P. Bundy, and several other officials, reached Hawaii on 6 March. During consultations at CINCPAC headquarters, Admiral Felt indicated his complete agreement with the JCS proposals of 2 March, except for the naval blockade, about which he already had expressed reservations. A briefing on the implementation of OPLAN 34A, reciting the consistent failure of operations to date, drew Secretary McNamara’s strong displeasure. The Secretary of Defense directed CINCPAC to begin training South Vietnamese pilots in aerial mine-laying techniques at once.¹⁵

From Hawaii, Secretary McNamara and his party continued to Saigon, arriving on 8 March. In conferences and briefings by US and South Vietnamese officials, the Secretary and General Taylor received a comprehensive picture of the situation and the status of plans and problems. They made several trips into the countryside and visited Hue with General Khanh on 11 March. On the 12th, General Khanh briefed his US visitors on his latest plans for national mobilization to fight the Viet Cong. General Khanh proposed a National Service Act that would bring hundreds of thousands of young men into either military or civil defense service. The civil defense component included an administrative

corps for work in the countryside and civic action teams for the hamlets and villages. As the Americans had advocated, General Khanh intended to make a maximum pacification effort in the eight provinces surrounding Saigon, to begin as soon as province cadres had been recruited and trained. Secretary McNamara asked General Khanh whether he could tell President Johnson that Saigon was now operating on the basis of a full national mobilization of its human and material resources and whether the President could so inform the American people. General Khanh answered affirmatively, expressing confidence that it would not take him long to get his National Service Act promulgated.¹⁶

On the question of out-of-country operations, Mr. McNamara found General Khanh primarily concerned with the need to establish a firm base in South Vietnam. While the Vietnamese leader favored continuation of covert activities against North Vietnam, he did not wish to engage his forces in overt operations there until he had established "rear area security."¹⁷

Secretary McNamara returned to Washington with his draft report to the President already completed, dated 13 March. Secretary McNamara opened with a statement of the principal US objective in South Vietnam. The United States, he wrote, sought an independent, noncommunist South Vietnam. The country need not serve as a Western base or as a member of a Western alliance, but South Vietnam must be free to accept outside assistance in maintaining its security, including military help. "Unless we can achieve this objective in South Vietnam, almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance," and in many world capitals the United States would be seen as having failed in "a test case of US capacity to help a nation meet a Communist 'war of liberation.'"

Secretary McNamara described current US policy as "trying to help South Vietnam defeat the Viet Cong, supported from the North, by means short of the unqualified use of American combat forces," taking no action against North Vietnam except a very modest covert program conducted by the South Vietnamese. The United States and South Vietnam would continue to observe the Geneva Accords with regard to Laos and respect the neutrality of Cambodia; hence, the allies had to accept extensive Viet Cong use of Cambodian and Laotian territory for sanctuaries and infiltration routes.

Secretary McNamara declared that "the military tools and concepts of the GVN/US effort are generally sound and adequate." Substantially more could be done toward effective employment of military forces and in economic and civic action, but these improvements would not require any major equipment replacement or increases in US personnel. Indeed, the Secretary of Defense observed that the US policy of "reducing existing personnel where South Vietnamese are in a position to assume the functions is still sound." No major reductions might occur in the near future, but by adhering to the policy the United States openly avowed the more fundamental principle that it regarded the war as "a conflict the South Vietnamese must win and take ultimate responsibility for." Secretary McNamara asserted that substantial reductions in the number of US military training personnel should be possible before the end of 1965.

In something of a contradiction to this estimate, Secretary McNamara declared that the situation in South Vietnam had been growing steadily worse since at least September 1963. In 22 of the country's 43 provinces, the Viet Cong (VC) now controlled at least half the land area. In the eight critical provinces around Saigon, VC control ran as high as 90 percent. Large segments of the South Vietnamese population were apathetic toward the government and the war. Military and paramilitary morale and motivation were failing, as evident in a rising desertion rate. Draft dodging was prevalent, while the Viet Cong continued to recruit effectively. After the November 1963 coup, effective political control of the provinces from the capital had largely disappeared. Since the death of Diem, 35 of the 43 province chiefs had been replaced. In three months' time, nine provinces had each experienced three different chiefs; one province had had four. Scores of lesser officials had been replaced and almost every major military command had changed twice since Diem's overthrow.

The viability of the Khanh government, then in its second month, Secretary McNamara assessed as open to doubt. Himself intelligent and forceful, General Khanh possessed limited experience at governing. He lacked wide political appeal and his control of the Army was uncertain. He lived under constant threat of assassination or another coup. Yet there was some basis for encouragement in the Khanh government's performance to date. Its key members appeared generally able; they were highly responsive to US advice and seemed to understand what they needed to do to defeat the Viet Cong. The opposition to the regime was fragmented, and General Khanh was seeking to keep it so. Secretary McNamara saw evidence of energy, decision, and comprehension, adding up to "a sufficiently strong chance of Khanh's really taking hold in the next few months for us to devote all possible energy and resources to his support."

In his draft report, Secretary McNamara considered three possible US courses of action in Southeast Asia. The first he summarily rejected—Negotiation on the Basis of Neutralization—along the lines recently advocated by President de Gaulle. If such an arrangement included total US withdrawal, as de Gaulle appeared to suggest, "this would simply mean a Communist take-over in South Vietnam."

The second possible course of action—Initiate GVN and US Military Actions against North Vietnam—Secretary McNamara analyzed at length. He reviewed a number of diverse possible operations: border control actions, retaliatory actions, and graduated overt military pressure. He considered all these actions, except for aerial reconnaissance for border control, to be of "extremely delicate nature," entailing a variety of military and diplomatic problems. These included marshalling a case to justify the operations, deterring or defeating communist counteractions, and "dealing with the pressures for premature or 'stacked' negotiations." While the stronger actions would be aimed at eliminating North Vietnamese support and direction of the insurgency, their real objective would be to break down the morale of the hard-core Viet Cong cadres while bolstering the morale of the Khanh regime. Secretary McNamara observed:

We could not, of course, be sure that our objective could be achieved by any means within the practical range of our options. Moreover, and perhaps most

importantly, unless and until the Khanh government has established its position and preferably is making significant progress in the South, an overt extension of operations into the North carries the risk of being mounted from an extremely weak base which might at any moment collapse and leave the posture of political confrontation worsened rather than improved.

“On balance,” he concluded, “I recommend against initiation at this time of overt GVN and/or US military actions against North Vietnam.”

Secretary McNamara recommended adoption of the third course—Initiative Measures to Improve the Situation in South Vietnam. While holding open the option of future military pressures against North Vietnam, the Secretary said, it was necessary at any event to take every reasonable measure to assure success in South Vietnam. In particular, the United States Government and Country Team should both publicize and help General Khanh to execute his Program for National Mobilization, including the National Service Act and other measures to put South Vietnam on a total war footing. The United States, Secretary McNamara continued, should give full support to Khanh's National Pacification Plan and to development of the civil administrative corps and civic action teams needed to execute it. The United States should encourage expansion and improvement of Saigon's regular military and paramilitary forces, as well as promoting development of an offensive guerrilla force within the RVNAF that could fight the Viet Cong with their own methods. All this could be done, Secretary McNamara asserted, with only a modest requirement for additional American military equipment, costing an estimated \$20 million. On the economic side, Secretary McNamara called for the enlargement and publicizing of the approved but unannounced US program of providing fertilizers to South Vietnam. This program promised to yield great improvement in the rice crops and the resulting export earnings, benefiting both the government and peasants in the secure areas.

If the Khanh government could stay in power while the United States urgently pursued the above course of action, Secretary McNamara judged that “the situation in South Vietnam can be significantly improved in the next three to four months.” At the same time, however, the United States should press its preparations for further action, since it might still become desirable to apply military pressures against North Vietnam. For example, if hard evidence came to hand of significantly stepped-up shipment of arms to the Viet Cong from the North, the United States might wish to take any or all of the actions under the headings of border control, retaliation, and graduated overt pressure. At a longer range, these actions might be seen as necessary in any event, if the Khanh government's programs, even with improved execution, proved insufficient to put down the insurgency.

Secretary McNamara concluded his report with twelve recommendations for action by the appropriate agencies of the US Government. The first two called upon the administration to make it clear that “we are prepared to furnish assistance and support to South Vietnam for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control” and that “we fully support the Khanh Government and are opposed to further coups.” The next

eight specified actions were to be taken in support of South Vietnam's national mobilization and pacification campaigns, RVNAF expansion and improvement, and the fertilizer program. Recommendation Eleven endorsed continued high-level US reconnaissance flights over South Vietnam's frontiers and battalion or smaller size RVNAF operations into Laos for the purpose of border control. Larger operations should be authorized only with the approval of Laotian Premier Souvanna Phouma. Operations into Cambodia "should depend on the state of relations with Cambodia."

In Recommendation Twelve, McNamara addressed future expansion of operations. The United States, he declared, should place itself in position to initiate on 72 hours' notice the full range of "border control" actions in Laos and Cambodia and the "Retaliatory Actions" against North Vietnam. It should be ready on 30 days' notice to initiate "Graduated Overt Military Pressure" against the North.¹⁸

JCS Views on the McNamara Report

Copies of Secretary McNamara's draft report went to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the afternoon of 13 March for study and comment. The Air Force Chief of Staff and the Commandant of the Marine Corps submitted views in writing, both criticizing various aspects of the report. General Greene declared that Secretary McNamara's 12 recommendations offered "little more than a continuation of present programs of action in Vietnam." He repeated his dictum that if the US Government decided to stay in South Vietnam and win, then it must pursue this objective with the full concerted power of the United States. "Half-measures won't win in South Vietnam."¹⁹

General LeMay concurred in the actions recommended to shore up and stabilize the Khanh government, but he disagreed with the Secretary of Defense's assertion that "the military tools and concepts of the GVN/US effort are generally sound and adequate." This proposition offered no escape from the restrictions on US and South Vietnamese actions to end the Viet Cong sanctuary in Cambodia and interdict the movement of reinforcements and supplies from North Vietnam through Laos.²⁰

Considering these views together with a draft memorandum proposed by the Chairman, the Joint Chiefs of Staff formulated a collective reply that went to the Secretary of Defense on 14 March. The Joint Chiefs concurred with Secretary McNamara's recommendations. However, they stated that they "do not believe that the recommended program in itself will be sufficient to turn the tide against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam without positive action being taken against the Hanoi Government at an early date." The JCS had in mind the kind of actions outlined in their 2 March submission, aimed at ending North Vietnam's support of the insurgency. "To increase our readiness for such actions," the Joint Chiefs insisted, "the US Government should establish at once the political and military bases in the United States and South Vietnam for offensive actions against the North and across the Laotian and Cambodian borders" The JCS recommended authorizing hot pursuit into Cambodia at once. Further, they believed the reaction times

proposed in Recommendation 12 should be reduced. The United States should be ready to implement border control and retaliatory operations within 24 hours and graduated overt military pressures within 72 hours.²¹

Approval of the 12 Recommendations: NSAM 288

Secretary McNamara formally submitted his report on 16 March, and the National Security Council (NSC) took it up the following day. Among other senior officials, both Secretary McNamara and General Taylor attended the meeting. All those present endorsed the Secretary of Defense's twelve recommendations for action. Speaking for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor expressed support for Secretary McNamara's report, noting that the Chiefs favored "readying forces now which would be required if it were decided later to take further military action than that recommended in the report." The Chairman also transmitted his colleagues' view that the proposed program "may not be sufficient to save the situation in Vietnam" and that "action against North Vietnam might be necessary" to make effective Secretary McNamara's recommended measures in the South. President Johnson summarized the alternatives to Secretary McNamara's program: inserting more US forces, or pulling out and neutralizing the area. He concluded that "the course we are following is the only realistic alternative. It will have the maximum effectiveness with the minimum loss." He noted also that the approved proposals "did not foreclose action later if the situation did not improve as we expected." After asking for any objections and hearing none, President Johnson stated that the Secretary of Defense's recommendations were approved.²²

Embodying the President's decision, National Security Action Memorandum 288, issued on 17 March, announced that Secretary McNamara's recommendations had been approved and directed all concerned agencies to "proceed energetically" with their execution. Apparently forgetting about the interagency Vietnam committee he had set up earlier, the President designated Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs William P. Bundy to coordinate the actions of the departments involved. In a press release the same day, the White House revealed the general nature of the presidential decisions and began highlighting the Khanh government's programs as Secretary McNamara had recommended, making special mention of the National Mobilization Plan. The release also mentioned that an increased commitment of US economic and military assistance funds would be required to support the Khanh program.²³

Before the day ended on the 17th, President Johnson dispatched a message to Ambassador Lodge that revealed some of his thoughts and anticipations, running beyond the decisions made at that morning's NSC meeting. Regarding Laos, the President declared, "I will authorize low-level reconnaissance there wherever the present high-level flights indicate that such reconnaissance may be needed." He was also fully prepared to authorize hot pursuit into Cambodia if relations with that country's ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, deteriorated further. The President was reserving judgment for the present

on overt US measures against North Vietnam, but he appeared to accept the need for specific retaliatory actions if the Viet Cong singled out Americans for attack. He authorized Lodge to make contingency plans for such retaliation. President Johnson was not ready to make a decision on conducting high- or low-level aerial reconnaissance over North Vietnam. Such action might be desirable “after a few weeks, for military or political reasons, or both.” Hence, the President had directed that the political and diplomatic groundwork be laid for this eventuality.²⁴

Following the issuance of NSAM 288, the Joint Chiefs of Staff engaged in a discussion that culminated in the submission of split views to the Secretary of Defense. General LeMay initiated the discussion on 18 March. He expressed concern that “the Joint Chiefs of Staff have not taken a firm position on specific courses of action which they recommend be taken at this time.” The Air Force Chief of Staff noted that the JCS had advised Secretary McNamara on 14 March that they did not believe the program recommended in his report would be sufficient to overcome the Viet Cong unless accompanied by action against North Vietnam at an early date. Therefore, General LeMay argued, the Joint Chiefs should set forth the course of action they did recommend and urge its immediate implementation. General LeMay declared that the Commandant of the Marine Corps had expressed similar views.²⁵

In response to General LeMay’s overture, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered a study from which an optimum course of action could be selected. When completed at the end of the month, however, the study recommended a course that differed from the one the President had approved in NSAM 288 only in timing. That is, it proposed implementation of certain military actions immediately, whereas NSAM 288 had called for preparation to carry out these operations within specific time periods after they were authorized. Both the Chief of Naval Operations and the Chief of Staff of the Army objected that the study presented no new facts or arguments that would justify attempting to modify a policy decision so recently made at the highest level.²⁶

On 14 April, the Joint Chiefs forwarded to Secretary McNamara a copy of the study they had commissioned, accompanied by a discussion. They informed the Secretary that the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the Commandant of the Marine Corps were “convinced that operations in Vietnam should be extended and expanded immediately” by implementing essentially the same list of actions that the JCS had recommended on 2 March. The Chairman, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and the Chief of Naval Operations each attached dissenting views. Typical of their line of argument, General Taylor considered it inappropriate and indeed impossible to cut across government-wide preparations for the program of NSAM 288, then in progress, by immediately implementing expanded military operations. At any event, General Taylor declared, “some lapse of time will be required to attain a condition of readiness for the implementation of an effective course of action against North Vietnam.” The Chairman and his Army and Navy colleagues preferred to postpone recommendations for additional military action until preparations for escalation were further advanced. Noting that the dissenting view was, in fact, that of a majority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary McNamara did not pursue the matter further.²⁷

Implementing NSAM 288: South Vietnamese Forces

NSAM 288 included three major actions aimed at improving the South Vietnamese armed forces, regular and territorial. The fourth of McNamara's twelve recommendations called for assistance to Saigon in expanding these forces by at least 50,000 men. The sixth recommendation looked toward the improvement, reorganization, and increased compensation of the territorial components; and the seventh recommendation set the goal of creating an offensive guerrilla force within the RVNAF. Within the Department of Defense, Secretary McNamara assigned Recommendations 4 and 6 to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) in collaboration while making Recommendation 7 solely a JCS responsibility. Closely related to these three, Recommendation 3, support for South Vietnam's National Mobilization Program, was assigned exclusively to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA).²⁸

These efforts began under difficult conditions. They depended for success heavily on planning, decision, and effective administration by South Vietnamese officials—rare commodities at that time. Deterioration of Saigon's armed forces was far advanced. The strength of the regular and territorial components had declined each month since October 1963, as the rising desertion rate, added to combat losses, outstripped the government's feeble efforts at recruiting and conscription. As Secretary McNamara had noted in his report, an estimated 20,000 of the prospective 50,000-man increase would be absorbed simply in bringing the ARVN, Civil Guard (CG), and Self Defense Corps (SDC) up to authorized strength. On 4 April, General Khanh signed his National Public Service Decree, obligating all able-bodied male citizens between ages 20 and 45 to national service in either the armed forces or civil defense. The decree, however, was a promise for the future, not an immediate remedy for existing deficiencies, and its effective implementation was by no means certain.²⁹

On 23 March, Ambassador Lodge received instructions to act quickly through the Country Team and in concert with South Vietnamese officials to develop a concept for putting Recommendations 4, 6, and 7 into effect. Before the 50,000-man force increase could be implemented, for instance, General Khanh had to refine more precisely his plans for distributing the additional men. Officers of MACV and the RVNAF high command discussed these issues well into April.³⁰

As discussions progressed, the Americans and South Vietnamese disagreed over both the future strength of the regular forces and the reorganization of the territorial components. General Khanh wanted to expand his regular establishment by 10,000 men, to an authorized strength of 237,000, by 31 December 1964 and to nearly 252,000 by 31 December 1965. He proposed enlarging the major territorial components, the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps, from their present authorized total strength of 183,000 to 242,500 by the end of 1965. General Harkins agreed that the 10,000 increase in the regulars by December 1964 was warranted, but he doubted that the goal for the end of 1965 was justified. He had greater reservations about the CG and SDC strengths. General Harkins had advised General Khanh that a joint group should study the security

situation province by province before establishing numerical requirements for the local defense forces. On the question of reorganizing the territorial components, Secretary McNamara and General Harkins favored consolidating the ineffectual hamlet militia with the SDC and raising the pay and allowances of both the SDC and the CG at once. General Khanh, however, wanted to further fragment the hamlet defense component by establishing a “combat youth” with a chain of command separate from the Self Defense Corps. For his part, General Harkins continued to press for consolidation of all hamlet defense forces into the SDC.³¹

On 27 April, General Earle G. Wheeler, the Army Chief of Staff, just returned from a visit to South Vietnam, briefed Secretary McNamara and the JCS on the implementation (or lack of it) of Recommendations 4, 6, and 7. The Defense Secretary expressed great disappointment at the lack of progress. Six weeks after the issuance of NSAM 288, there had been no positive action to bring the regular and territorial forces up to strength, to reorganize them, or to create an offensive guerrilla force. He expressed concern over MACV's difficulty in securing Khanh's agreement on realistic strength projections and effective territorial force reorganization. Nevertheless, he said, the US mission should press ahead with improvements in the conscription and recruiting systems without awaiting agreement on strength figures, and he demanded that the whole effort be accelerated. On 29 April, the Defense and State Departments sent joint instructions to this effect to CINCPAC and Ambassador Lodge.³²

The following day, the Ambassador, accompanied by Deputy COMUSMACV Lieutenant General William C. Westmoreland, USA,³³ visited General Khanh and his associates. Both men described in detail Saigon's failings in armed forces recruitment and the lack of improvement in troop pay and welfare. General Khanh in response promised greater efforts in these fields. A week later, General Harkins reported that the Vietnamese leader “has turned on the pressure” since his 30 April meeting with Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland. The government had promulgated definite recruiting goals, set new draft quotas, and issued orders to tighten up the induction system. MACV and the Joint General Staff had reached tentative agreement on RVNAF strength goals for the end of 1964. The Americans accepted the figure of 237,000 as the objective for the regular forces and agreed to support increases in the CG and SDC, with the latter conditional upon merger of the SDC and Combat Youth into one organization with a single chain of command. Regarding the development of South Vietnamese guerrilla capability, Harkins reported that the government was trying to strengthen border control using Ranger battalions, Special Forces, and air surveillance supported by an integrated intelligence system. In addition, the United States and South Vietnam had established a joint Special Forces Center near Nha Trang to train junior officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and some Montagnards in guerrilla warfare techniques.³⁴

During a visit to Saigon from 11–13 May, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor gave special attention to these issues, as well as to implementation of the National Mobilization Plan. They learned that General Khanh had signed a further mobilization decree on 6 May, authorizing the draft of men for the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps on the

same basis as for the regular forces. The decree also required that men not in military service, plus women volunteers, perform part-time, unpaid duty in various kinds of security, medical relief, and social welfare work. At a meeting with Country Team officials, the Secretary of Defense tacitly accepted the force increases agreed upon between MACV and the RVNAF high command. To remedy existing understrengths and reach the new force ceilings, these would require the addition of at least 75,000 men between April and the end of 1964—31,000 in the regular components, about 30,000 in the CG and SDC, and the remainder in the National Police and hamlet civil action cadre. Both the Secretary and the Chairman stressed that the RVNAF must develop a capability for guerrilla operations in VC-dominated areas. Secretary McNamara charged General Harkins specifically with this task. Secretary McNamara declared that, if this effort required more US Special Forces personnel, he was prepared to approve an augmentation.³⁵

Implementing NSAM 288: Cross-Border Operations

Recommendation 11 in the list approved by NSAM 288 authorized the only new military operations in the program. Besides continuing the existing high-level US reconnaissance flights over South Vietnam's borders, the appropriate US agencies were to authorize "hot pursuit" and South Vietnamese ground operations over the Laotian line "for the purpose of border control." However, operations of larger than battalion size should be undertaken only with the approval of the Laotian Premier, Souvanna Phouma. Operations across the Cambodian border should depend on the state of relations with Cambodia. The State Department had primary responsibility for carrying out this recommendation, presumably because of the diplomatic arrangements involved.³⁶

The undertaking got off to a seemingly promising start. On 17 March, Ambassador Lodge reported that General Khanh had met with General Phoumi Nosavan, the senior Lao armed forces commander. Their conference had the consent of Premier Souvanna Phouma. The two leaders had reached agreements allowing for very extensive military cooperation between their countries. Laos would grant to the South Vietnamese forces free passage and use of bases in southern Laos, and the two countries would plan together for combined Lao-South Vietnamese commando raids and other operations in the same area.³⁷

Replying to Ambassador Lodge, the State Department took a cautious line. Noting that it had received no information about Souvanna's reaction to the military agreements, the Department expressed strong reservations about some of the actions contemplated. In particular, its officials feared that any extensive operations against communist-held areas of Laos might breach the understanding on which the tripartite government was based, namely that the territorial holdings of each party would be respected. Besides inviting North Vietnamese retaliation, such operations, with evident US approval, might lead Souvanna to believe that the United States was no longer supporting the Geneva accords respecting Laos; he might then resign.³⁸

On 20 March, in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff seconded Ambassador Lodge's recommendation that the US assure General Khanh financial and materiel support for his prospective operations in Laos. Specifically, the Joint Chiefs urged that the United States provide General Khanh with aerial photographs of areas in Laos that he would designate. They endorsed the Khanh-Phoumi agreement as calling for "appropriate military steps" but pointed out to Secretary McNamara that "large-scale" air and battalion or larger size ground operations "will require the United States to be prepared to counter possible communist reaction."³⁹

On 7 April, the Department of State issued "tentative guidelines" for implementation of Recommendation 11, seeking comments from the Ambassadors in South Vietnam and Laos. Acceptable actions by South Vietnamese forces, for which the United States would provide financial and materiel support, included hot pursuit into Laos, but not deep penetration by large units, and intelligence collection and sabotage raids into the region south of Tchepone (a major Ho Chi Minh Trail junction directly west of the DMZ), under certain restrictions and only when cleared by the US embassies in Saigon and Vientiane. Operations requiring aerial resupply would have to be approved by Washington "on a case-by-case basis." If approved, unmarked VNAF planes flown by VNAF crews would perform the missions. No United States personnel would accompany South Vietnamese forces on any cross-border operations, except advisers attached to ARVN units engaged in hot pursuit. The State Department designated South Vietnamese use of Laotian bases an unapproved activity that "Khanh should be warned should not be undertaken." VNAF aerial bombing of targets in Laos "by either marked or unmarked plans should be specifically prohibited under current circumstances."⁴⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff criticized the State Department's cautious approach to cross-border operations, claiming that it did not fulfill the spirit and letter of NSAM 288. They expressed this view to Secretary McNamara at a meeting on 20 April and three days later provided him a draft memorandum, for use in discussions with Secretary Rusk. The Joint Chiefs wished McNamara to voice concern over the general lack of progress in implementing Recommendation 11. They pointed out that no firm planning guidelines had been sent to the field, that no joint planning with the South Vietnamese had been undertaken, and that no actual operations had been conducted. The Joint Chiefs went on to express concern over the restrictions imposed by the tentative guidelines, contending that they "do not define a program of the scope authorized by the President in NSAM 288." They asked McNamara to urge the Secretary of State to remove the proposed restrictions on aerial bombing (at least in support of ground operations), resupply, and US advisory assistance, as well as the requirement for extensive coordination in advance of operations. Finally, they recommended that COMUSMACV be authorized at once to begin joint planning for cross-border operations with the South Vietnamese.⁴¹

By the second half of April, the issue of air and ground reconnaissance in Laos was coming to a head, driven by new intelligence reports. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) had informed Secretary McNamara that there was a requirement for cross-border air and ground intelligence missions in Laos. Ambassador Lodge had raised the possibil-

ity that the enemy was preparing a capability there “to support future direct military unit cooperation in VC operations in South Vietnam”—preparations the North Vietnamese were in fact making to carry out the decisions of the Ninth Plenum. The DIA judged that its current intelligence sources were insufficient to verify this. “Ground reconnaissance patrols into Laos would appear to be the best way to get detailed information on the extent of Communist activity there.”⁴²

Additional information moved the State and Defense Departments toward consensus on the Laos issue. On 30 April, the conferees at an NSC meeting were presented with strong evidence from high-level aerial photography that military logistic activity was increasing along the infiltration routes in Laos. State Department officials began considering the desirability of a larger ground reconnaissance effort than had been contemplated in the tentative guidance, as well as the possibility of low-level reconnaissance flights over certain parts of Laos. At the same time, General Taylor sent a concept for covert reconnaissance patrols to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV for comment. Both officers replied that the concept was feasible. Reconnaissance missions, they declared, could begin within two to four weeks following the Khanh government’s agreement to undertake them. But, as Admiral Felt pointed out, nothing could be done at all until the “long-overdue” joint planning with the Vietnamese was authorized.⁴³

On 5 May, following interdepartmental agreement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to initiate planning with the South Vietnamese for covert reconnaissance patrols in Laos of the type General Taylor had outlined. Meanwhile, the State Department continued active consideration of low-level reconnaissance flights over some areas. On 11 May, General Harkins secured General Khanh’s agreement to the cross-border incursions. Saigon’s Special Forces would furnish the personnel, to be trained and advised by the US Special Forces. Six-man teams, not in uniform and inserted into Laos and withdrawn by air, would gather intelligence, fighting only in self-defense. Subsequently, the Americans and South Vietnamese set 15 June as the target date for the start of operations, initially employing four teams.⁴⁴

During his mid-May visit to South Vietnam, Secretary McNamara received a briefing from General Harkins on the reconnaissance program. The Secretary said that he wanted cross-border operations to develop the maximum possible information on North Vietnamese assistance to the Viet Cong. General Harkins should strive for a rapid expansion of capabilities for patrolling in Laos and should assume that authority to seek out additional intelligence targets would be forthcoming. Secretary McNamara set a goal of doubling the number of operational teams every 30 days, with eight teams to be ready by 15 July.⁴⁵

Aerial Reconnaissance in Laos: YANKEE TEAM

Later in May, the United States began low-level air reconnaissance over Laos, more as the result of internal developments in that country than in implementation of

Recommendation 11. Forces within Laos had upset the stability that the State Department wanted to preserve. On 19 April, a group of right-wing military officers staged a briefly successful coup against Souvanna Phouma. With US support, Souvanna was shortly restored as head of the government. Then, less than a month later, the Pathet Lao launched an offensive in Laos's central Plaine des Jarres that drove Souvanna's forces westward into the hills in confusion.⁴⁶

As part of the US response to these developments, the Secretary of State on 17 May directed the Ambassador in Vientiane to obtain a request from Souvanna for low-level US reconnaissance flights over the Plaine des Jarres. Besides collecting target information and other intelligence of communist activity, these flights were aimed at improving the morale of the pro-government forces and at demonstrating US determination to the Pathet Lao. On the following day, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to launch the first low-level reconnaissance flights over Laos. On 19 May, US RF-101 jet aircraft of the 2nd Air Division⁴⁷, based in South Vietnam, flew the initial missions, augmented in later operations by US Navy carrier aircraft. The Laos reconnaissance flights received the code name YANKEE TEAM, and COMUSMACV was designated as the coordinating authority. On 21 May, the State Department publicly acknowledged that the flights were occurring; and on the 26th the JCS directed that the reconnaissance program be "continuous." On 6 June, in a fuller statement, the State Department explained that the US had initiated the reconnaissance in response to an appeal from Souvanna Phouma and would continue the missions by agreement with the Royal Laotian Government.⁴⁸

Implementing NSAM 288: Future Operations

In NSAM 288, Recommendation 12 contained the provisions looking to future expanded operations. It called on all appropriate agencies:

To prepare immediately to be in a position on 72 hours' notice to initiate the full range of Laodian and Cambodian "Border Control" actions ... and the "Retaliatory Actions" against North Vietnam, and to be in a position on 30 days' notice to initiate the program of "Graduated Overt Military Pressure" against North Vietnam.

Within the Department of Defense, Secretary McNamara assigned responsibility for this recommendation to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁴⁹

On 18 March, before McNamara formally made that assignment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to prepare an operation plan to meet the requirements of Recommendation 12, treating the three categories of actions: border control, retaliation, and graduated overt military pressures. Various existing CINCPAC OPLANs already contained several of these actions, but the JCS wanted them drawn together in one comprehensive plan "to permit sequential implementation as may be desired by higher authority."⁵⁰

On 23 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff repeated the recommendations they had made when NSAM 288 was moving toward approval. They referred to their suggestion that the 72-hour and 30-day reaction times should be “materially compressed” and to their statement that “the US Government should establish at once the political and military bases in the United States and South Vietnam for offensive actions against the North and across the Laotian and Cambodian borders.” To accomplish this, the Joint Chiefs pointed out, a wide range of coordinated government actions were necessary, to assure that preparation of international opinion for the campaign did not lag behind the achievement of military readiness. “The immediate interdepartmental problem,” the Joint Chiefs said, was to identify the needed preparations, incorporate them into a program with an agreed time sequence, and assign tasks to appropriate agencies. Thus far, the JCS were “unaware of any move to develop such a program in the spirit of urgency suggested by Recommendation 12.” They recommended that the Secretary of Defense “take the lead in energizing the actions which must be taken throughout the Government.”⁵¹

The Joint Chiefs were asking McNamara to assume a role that he had in fact played since early in the Kennedy administration: that of the US “point man” on Vietnam policy. Accordingly, the Secretary of Defense readily accepted the JCS suggestion. On 25 March, he informed the Joint Chiefs that he had initiated interagency action, through the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), within the Vietnam Coordinating Committee. Mr. Sullivan and White House aide Michael Forrestal were now at work on a comprehensive paper.⁵²

On 30 March, before the first results of the Sullivan-Forrestal effort appeared, Admiral Felt submitted CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, “Military Actions to Stabilize the Situation in RVN.” As directed, the plan set forth in detail how United States forces would support or participate with the South Vietnamese in graduated operations to eliminate or greatly reduce North Vietnamese assistance to the Viet Cong. The actions fell into three categories: (1) control or curtailment of cross-border Viet Cong movement in Laos and Cambodia, on 72 hours’ notice; (2) selective RVNAF retaliatory actions against North Vietnam on 72 hours’ notice; and (3) expanded pressures on the North by both US and South Vietnamese forces, on 30 days’ notice. Concurrent with the Category 2 or 3 operations, CINCPAC would ready its forces in Southeast Asia or elsewhere to deter or respond to North Vietnamese or Chinese retaliation or major aggression.

South Vietnamese forces would carry out the border control operations, with US aerial reconnaissance, airlift, and adviser support. The retaliatory operations would include overt high- and low-level reconnaissance by US or FARM GATE aircraft. Also included were air strikes and commando raids by South Vietnamese and FARM GATE elements against military targets and infiltration routes in North Vietnam. Additionally, northern ports would be mined by air by the VNAF, possibly with US assistance. The graduated overt pressures would comprise “air attacks against NVN military, and possibly industrial, targets ... utilizing the combined resources of GVN Air Force and FARM GATE, reinforced by two B-57 squadrons.” Attached to the plan were bombing target

lists for Categories 2 and 3. On 21 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, subject to several comments and a number of minor changes.⁵³

Meanwhile, the effort of Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Forrestal to develop a comprehensive program for implementing Recommendation 12 had not gone well. The first draft scenario, finished early in April, dealt mainly with political actions; for various reasons, the authors withdrew it almost immediately. Late in April, Sullivan and Forrestal completed a second version that combined a revised political program with a military draft produced in the Department of Defense. Secretary McNamara referred it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for comment. They found it unsuitable and so informed the Secretary on 16 May. With respect to military actions, the scenario considered only the third category, graduated overt military pressures against North Vietnam, the authors having dismissed planning for Categories 1 and 2 as “politically unproductive.” It also explored some contingencies not included in Recommendation 12 that the JCS thought might better be treated separately. Believing that the unsatisfactory product had resulted from the separate departmental approaches used and from lack of an orderly military input, the Joint Chiefs recommended that an interagency working group be set up to draft another new scenario. As a contribution to the effort, they forwarded an eleven-page list of military actions in support of Recommendation 12.⁵⁴

On 23 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided Secretary McNamara with a discussion of the time required for implementing various steps in Recommendation 12, keyed to the provisions of OPLAN 37-64. Preparatory steps that would consume time were, in order; (1) development of an agreed political-military scenario for implementation of the plan; (2) consultation and coordination with Saigon; (3) training of RVNAF and US forces in the types of operations contemplated; (4) activation of additional programmed forces; and (5) deployment into position of participating and deterrent forces. Commenting further on these measures, the Joint Chiefs informed Secretary McNamara that no consultation with South Vietnamese officials had yet been undertaken or scheduled. “The Department of State should take the lead on this but as yet has not.” Once Saigon agreed to the program, training and preparation could follow. Time must be allowed for sanitizing, translating, and disseminating certain TOP SECRET-NOFORN information to the RVNAF. On the positive side, training of VNAF units in aerial mine-laying would resume on 20 May and provision of higher-performance piston-engine aircraft, specifically A-1 attack planes, to the VNAF and FARM GATE was proceeding on schedule.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff affirmed that all border control operations called for under OPLAN 37-64 could be mounted within 72 hours after authorization, except certain larger actions that would require 5–10 days’ notice. Retaliatory actions likewise could begin within the 72-hour limit, except for the amphibious and airborne raids. Those would require 10–30 days’ notice. The limited deployment of US deterrent forces that accompanied retaliatory operations could be completed within 72 hours.

In Category 3, the overt military pressures could start within 12 days of authorization, assuming prior alerting of forces. The B-57 jet bomber squadrons, the only US units to be added for these operations, could reach South Vietnam from Clark Field in the

Philippines, ready for combat, in 24 hours. However, the bulk of the US forces committed to the deterrent role would need 12–15 days to move into position; the final increment would require 45 days. So long as these forces were actually in motion, CINCPAC had said, the attacks on North Vietnam could start 12 days from the date the order was given. The Category 3 operations could begin on even shorter notice, however, if circumstances allowed, the United States could forego planned deployments of ground forces to deterrent positions on the Southeast Asia mainland, such as to Thailand.

Answering a question from the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs stated that the climate in Vietnam would have limited effect on military operations:

The best period for the conduct of all types of ... operations in North Vietnam is mid-October to mid-December. However, weather for offensive air operations into NVN is suitable during the summer months and provides the worst conditions for ground operations. While coastal weather during the late winter months can be expected to hamper certain types of air operations into NVN, over-all weather conditions for military operations are satisfactory. In fact low ceilings may ... provide added protection to certain operations.⁵⁵

The JCS Develop a Target List

As part of their detailed planning for implementation of Recommendation 12, the Joint Chiefs of Staff identified targets in North Vietnam suitable for air attack. On 30 May, they submitted a list of 91 targets to the Secretary of Defense. These targets, they said, were the basis for an air campaign to cause Hanoi to desist from supporting the Pathet Lao and Viet Cong and to reduce North Vietnam's capability to renew such support in the future.

The list was divided into three categories. Category A comprised targets the destruction of which would reduce North Vietnam's assistance to the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao. This category included airfields, supply and ammunition depots, petroleum storage, and military headquarters and barracks, plus targets discovered during armed reconnaissance along North Vietnamese highways leading to Laos. Category B targets were those affecting the capability of North Vietnamese forces to attack Laos or South Vietnam—the remaining airfields, railroad and highway bridges, supply depots in northern North Vietnam, petroleum storage in Hanoi and Haiphong, and aerial mining. Category C consisted of eight plants or facilities that, if wrecked, would eliminate North Vietnam's industrial base.

The JCS estimated the time that the available strike forces would need to achieve the desired 85 percent probable destruction of the targets. Their estimates showed that it would be impractical to rely solely on the VNAF for these strikes. Theoretically, the South Vietnamese air force could finish off the Category A targets in something over seven months, assuming—which was doubtful—that the VNAF could sustain continuous

combat operations for such a period. The VNAF, reinforced by FARM GATE B–57s, could destroy the Category A targets in a little over two months. With the fullest application of power, adding all the USAF and carrier aircraft provided for in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, the allies could dispose of Category A in 12 days and all three categories in 46 days. To maintain the 85 percent level of destruction, the allies would need to restrike the more readily repairable facilities over an indeterminate period.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that most of their 91 targets duplicated those listed in CINCPAC's OPLANS. Admiral Felt was responsible for maintaining the detailed strike plans and target folders, and for adding or deleting targets as current intelligence dictated. Before launching attacks under any of the categories, the United States should first conduct low-level reconnaissance of the target system to update the target folders and provide data for combat mission planning. If feasible and not prejudicial to the security of friendly forces, the allies should drop leaflets immediately prior to the bombings, to warn civilians away from danger areas.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised Secretary McNamara that attacks could be conducted against any targets drawn from the list. "The intensity of execution can range from selective strikes in an ascending order of gradually increasing military pressure to a concentration of effort designed to attain the effect of a sudden blow." Taking a position that they were to repeat periodically over the succeeding months, the Joint Chiefs declared:

From a military viewpoint, it is considered that the most effective application of military force will result from a sudden sharp blow in order to bring home the penalties for violating international agreements and the intent of the United States to bring a cessation of DRV support of the insurgency in Laos and RVN.⁵⁶

The target list of 30 May illustrated in detail a point the Joint Chiefs of Staff had made earlier in the month: whether the United States engaged in military operations against North Vietnam out of concern over the situation in South Vietnam or in Laos, the target systems attacked would be the same and their destruction would benefit the anticommunist cause in both countries. The Joint Chiefs forwarded this observation to the Secretary of Defense on 16 May, just as aggressive communist moves in Laos were raising concern that the Pathet Lao might be attempting to overrun the entire country. As Washington officials gave increased attention to Laos, the importance of North Vietnamese support of the insurgencies in Indochina came into still sharper focus. For their part, the Joint Chiefs of Staff viewed military action against North Vietnam as "offering the possibility of a favorable long-term solution to the insurgency problem in Southeast Asia."⁵⁷

As May came to an end, NSAM 288 had produced much planning but little action. The YANKEE TEAM reconnaissance flights over Laos constituted the only tangible expansion of US operations, and those were primarily in reaction to a Pathet Lao offensive. Concerned about stability in South Vietnam and about international reaction, not to mention the US presidential campaign, the administration hesitated to escalate further.

This hesitation began at the top. On 31 May, after listening to columnist Walter Lippmann expound the case for neutralization of Southeast Asia, President Johnson

returned to the question that has been preoccupying him. (He said that he had not slept more than a few hours the night before.) How could he maintain his position as a man of peace in the face of the Southeast Asian crisis? How could he carry a united country with him if we were to embark on a course of action that might escalate under conditions where the rest of the world would regard us as wrong-headed?⁵⁸

Command Reorganization in South Vietnam

After the issuance of NSAM 288, the United States military establishment in South Vietnam settled in for the long haul. Under directives dating back to 1962, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, had made plans for its own dissolution and for the withdrawal of most American forces by the end of 1965, based on the assumption that the Viet Cong would be near defeat by that time. On 27 March 1964, Secretary McNamara in effect ended that planning. He instructed Admiral Felt and General Harkins to abandon any extended projections of troop withdrawals. Instead, they were to plan no farther ahead than the end of fiscal year 1966 and to assume that the United States would “furnish assistance and support of South Vietnam for as long as required to bring communist aggression and terrorism under control.” Accordingly, MACV began planning on the assumption that all US aviation and support units, along with its own headquarters, would remain in South Vietnam at least through Fiscal Year (FY) 1966 and that the advisory effort would continue at its existing level through the end of the insurgency.¹

In response to these changing assumptions and directives, the United States reorganized its joint command in South Vietnam and changed commanders. Called upon for views and recommendations on these issues, the Joint Chiefs of Staff split along service lines. Their divisions opened the way for Secretary McNamara to impose his will on questions of command organization and composition.

General Harkins’s Last Months

After the General Khanh coup, the lack of harmony and coordination between Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins, that Secretary McNamara had observed in December, continued and grew worse. Consensus between the civilian and military

heads of the US effort was critical, since neither possessed formal authority over the other. As a commander of US forces in a theater of operations, General Harkins had broad authority independent of the Ambassador, including the right of direct access to the most senior South Vietnamese officials. He was supposed to defer to the Ambassador on political questions. Each man was to consult closely with the other and keep him informed of his activities. Lodge, who according to McNamara had “operated as a loner all his life,” excluded Harkins from his counsels, failing to consult the general on reports with military implications and not showing him important incoming messages. Clearly, the two men were unable to maintain a coordinated US team in Vietnam. Early in 1964, Michael Forrestal of the NSC Staff declared to McGeorge Bundy: “If Lodge must remain, the military commander must be changed.”²

A contretemps in April reinforced Forrestal’s conclusion. At an Embassy meeting on 21 April, Ambassador Lodge passed out a memorandum to those present, including General Harkins, which stated that US agency heads seeking appointments with General Khanh must obtain prior clearance and approval from the Embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission. If an agency head was summoned by the South Vietnamese leader, he was to respond but also notify the Embassy that he intended to meet with Khanh. One purpose of this directive, the Ambassador stated, “is to reduce to a minimum the amount of time which General Khanh must give to American visitors.” A further purpose was “to make sure that all US agencies follow the same broad line.”³

General Harkins responded to Lodge with a memorandum of his own. He cited the COMUSMACV terms of reference, which had been agreed to by the Secretaries of State and Defense and signed by the President. That document charged the MACV commander with “direct responsibility for all United States military policy, operations and assistance” and granted him authority to “discuss both the United States and Vietnamese military operations directly with the President of Vietnam and the leaders of the Government of Vietnam.” While indicating that he would continue to keep the Ambassador informed of any such discussions, General Harkins stated that he could not feel bound by the recent directive.⁴

As required in such situations, Ambassador Lodge submitted the dispute over authority to Washington for resolution. The State Department wished to give virtually full support to Lodge. For their part, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor supported General Harkins. After consultations, State and Defense agreed on a compromise position, embodied in a letter from Secretary Rusk to Ambassador Lodge. Secretary Rusk reaffirmed Ambassador Lodge’s right to receive advance notice of any discussions between General Harkins and senior Saigon officials, but he suggested that COMUSMACV’s visits to General Khanh not be subject to clearance with the Deputy Chief of Mission. Seeking harmony, Secretary Rusk expressed the hope that Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins would consult together with such frequency that the question of calls on General Khanh would be disposed of as a routine matter. At the same time, General Taylor advised General Harkins that Rusk’s letter had the concurrence of the Secretary of Defense; hence, the MACV commander should regard it as a directive. In sum, the administration urged its two senior officials in

Saigon to try to get along. Privately, McGeorge Bundy commented, “the whole business between Lodge and Harkins is childish.”⁵

By the time this disagreement erupted, the MACV commander’s days in Saigon already were numbered. President Johnson and his advisers had been looking since the beginning of the year for a way to replace General Harkins. After the fall of Diem, most administration officials had lost confidence in the general’s reports and assessments; and it was obvious that he could not work effectively with the Ambassador. Nevertheless, Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed anything that would appear to be a summary relief of Harkins. The general, they argued, was innocent of any personal wrongdoing and had done his best to carry out administration instructions. In addition, General Harkins had developed a good working relationship with General Khanh that could help bolster the new regime. Since General Harkins was due for relief and retirement in late 1964 at any event, there was no need to humiliate him by early dismissal.

Late in January, President Johnson arrived at a solution to this awkward problem. He dispatched to Saigon Lieutenant General William C. Westmoreland, USA, General Harkins’s intended replacement, as Deputy COMUSMACV. Ostensibly, Westmoreland was to prepare for his coming promotion. In fact, he was to try to mediate between MACV and the Embassy—a role that the capable and politically attuned General Westmoreland performed with considerable success during the remaining months of General Harkins’s tenure. On 25 April, President Johnson announced that General Harkins would step down and retire on 1 August 1964 and that General Westmoreland would replace him.⁶

General Harkins, meanwhile, continued to be dissatisfied with Ambassador Lodge’s methods and procedures. Ambassador Lodge, he complained, rarely consulted anyone, including the Deputy Chief of Mission. On 7 June, he told General Taylor, “I am hardly ever privy to messages bearing on the military prior to dispatch from the Embassy.”⁷

Apparently in response to the continued squabbling between Lodge and Harkins, President Johnson hastened the latter’s departure. On 28 May, he directed General Harkins to return to the United States to receive a decoration at the White House on 24 June and then to remain in Washington until his August retirement to “counsel” the President on Vietnam. Dismayed and embittered, General Harkins viewed this order as a thinly disguised dismissal, which in fact it was. General Harkins left South Vietnam in late June. General Westmoreland, who already had supplanted Harkins in Ambassador Lodge’s counsels, then took over as acting COMUSMACV. On 1 August, the date of General Harkins’s retirement from active service, General Westmoreland formally assumed command of MACV, at the same time receiving his fourth star.⁸

Reorganizing MACV

As 1964 opened, the US military organization in South Vietnam consisted of two major elements, both subordinate to CINCPAC. One, the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, exercised operational command over all American military activi-

ties in the country. The second was the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam. Present in the country since the mid-1950s, the MAAG administered the day-to-day advisory and assistance functions and had been the senior US headquarters until MACV's establishment in February 1962. The MAAG commander (ChMAAG) had nearly 3,000 US headquarters and advisory personnel under his direction, while COMUSMACV had a relatively modest headquarters establishment of less than 400 people. Until early 1964, MACV had been viewed as a temporary headquarters, expected to work itself out of a job by defeating the Viet Cong, after which the MAAG would remain to provide long-term assistance to South Vietnam.

On military assistance matters, two channels of communication existed. One ran from CINCPAC through COMUSMACV to ChMAAG for all matters of MAAG current operations and training. Through the other, CINCPAC addressed ChMAAG directly concerning military assistance and force deployment objectives and Military Assistance Program (MAP) plans and programs under development. COMUSMACV had the opportunity to comment to CINCPAC regarding MAP plans and programs, and ChMAAG kept the MACV commander informed of his direct contacts with CINCPAC. In practice, Admiral Felt tried to keep COMUSMACV out of those aspects of military advice, assistance, and training that were the MAAG's established areas of responsibility. As Admiral Felt viewed it, MACV was to relieve the MAAG of the additional tasks, such as command and administration of US units in South Vietnam, resulting from the Kennedy buildup while exercising only minimal supervision over MAP budgeting, planning, and accounting.

Other lines of command relationship existed. CINCPAC had a direct line of operational command to COMUSMACV and thence to the US forces and military agencies in South Vietnam. For administrative and logistic support, PACOM component commands dealt with the MAAG's Service component elements. The US Ambassador had overall responsibility for MAP administration, expressed through a direct relationship with ChMAAG, and maintained coordination and liaison with MACV, other US agencies in the country, and the South Vietnamese government.⁹

It was evident from the beginning that the spheres of activity of MACV and the MAAG overlapped, especially in regard to the command and administration of the military advisers. Confusion and duplication of effort between the two headquarters resulted, and field advisers found themselves trying to serve two masters at the same time. As early as September 1962, General Harkins recommended that MACV absorb the MAAG, taking over all its functions and incorporating the MAAG's MAP administration staff as a division of MACV headquarters. Admiral Felt, however, opposed the elimination of the MAAG, claiming that MACV must avoid becoming "bogged down" in advisory and military assistance details. The issue remained unresolved through the end of 1963, although General Harkins, with support from the Joint Staff, continued to press for headquarters consolidation.¹⁰

Early in 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff revived the merger issue. On 18 February, the JCS advised Secretary McNamara that, as part of their continuing effort to improve the efficiency of the US operation in South Vietnam, they were studying possible organizational

changes. Among other things, they had asked CINCPAC and COMUSMACV for their views on the desirability of disestablishing the MAAG and merging its functions with MACV.¹¹

Both Admiral Felt and General Harkins (who now reversed his earlier position) opposed the change. General Harkins declared that the existing organization was “understood by all” and was working well. He believed that “suggested US reorganization with attendant problems involving new relationships would be counter-productive.” Admiral Felt cited similar reasons:

We will be unduly rocking the boat to no practical purpose since COMUSMACV already clearly exercises operational command over MAAG and advisers. This arrangement enables COMUSMACV and staff to concentrate on counterinsurgency effort and frees them from laboring on MAP administrative and logistical details as well as other nuts and bolts which law requires MAAG's to perform.¹²

Although the two senior commanders in the theater opposed it, consolidation of MACV and the MAAG drew influential supporters. When he arrived in Saigon, General Westmoreland became an active advocate. Most important, Secretary McNamara expressed interest in the idea as a means of increasing US military efficiency in South Vietnam. In preparation for Secretary McNamara's March visit, a MACV staff group began drafting a combined plan and feasibility study of the reorganization. After a preliminary briefing in Saigon on the results, the Secretary directed General Harkins to submit a full reorganization plan for concurrent consideration by CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As General Harkins understood Secretary McNamara's intention, the “fundamental objective is to streamline U.S. command organization in Vietnam for improved efficiency.”¹³

COMUSMACV's reorganization plan reached the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 14 March. It called for the disestablishment of the MAAG headquarters as a separate echelon and the transfer of a number of its divisions—notably those for ARVN organization and training, MAP administration, and strategic hamlet support—to MACV headquarters as special staff sections. The MAAG's Air Force, Army, and Navy advisory sections would cease to function. MACV's Service components would take over command, administration, and logistic support of their respective advisers except for the Army advisers, who would be under direct command of MACV. According to the study, this rearrangement would simplify advisory command and administrative arrangements. It also would result in personnel savings by combining certain MACV and MAAG special staff agencies, such as the adjutant general's and public information offices. In explaining the concept, General Harkins raised a potentially divisive interservice issue. He wrote that “MACV is more in the nature of a Specified Army Command rather than a Subordinate Joint Command.” He goes on to state:

The nature of the warfare being conducted; the fact that about 65% of the American military are Army; and the fact that about 95% of RVNAF forces are Army, validates the appropriateness of this conclusion. Nevertheless,

recognizing the joint aspects of the operation, the “J” staff would be retained. However, the staff would be heavily weighted with Army representatives and would contain Directorates purely Army in makeup and devoted to peculiar Army tasks.¹⁴

Admiral Felt responded to this plan with a reiteration of his earlier arguments against a MACV-MAAG merger, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were divided on the issue. On 8 April, they delivered a split recommendation to the Secretary of Defense. The Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps members opposed the disestablishment of the MAAG. They declared that “the concept of a subordinate unified command in South Vietnam, as developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and implemented by CINCPAC, remains fundamentally sound.” The MAAG “should be retained as an entity under MACV, although some individual functional adjustments” should be made between the two headquarters, notably those bearing on combat advice and support for the South Vietnamese armed forces. “Any substantial reorganization now,” they concluded, “is undesirable in light of predictable adverse impact on the operational effort and on the stability of the RVN Government.”

The Chairman and the Chief of Staff, Army, supported the reorganization. They argued that COMUSMACV, “the commander in the field with basic responsibility for the success or failure of operations, ... should be allowed to organize his headquarters as he sees fit provided he does so within his resources and without detriment to his mission.” (In this comment, they ignored Admiral Felt’s and General Harkins’s expressions of opposition to the change.) Generals Taylor and Wheeler noted that COMUSMACV had stated that the reorganization would result in a saving of personnel and could be accomplished within a month with minimum disruption. The merger “would constitute an important step toward elimination of duplication and improvement of responsiveness to command.” It was a “clean-cut” solution “which eliminates the dual US military channels of authority existing in Vietnam.”¹⁵

With the Joint Chiefs divided, Secretary McNamara decided in favor of the minority. On 8 April, he approved the reorganization proposal. At his direction, on 10 April, the Joint Chiefs directed CINCPAC to implement the merger plan. They added, however, a stipulation that MACV was to remain a “subordinate unified command,” not the specified Army one recommended by Harkins. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also amended COMUSMACV’s terms of reference to include responsibility for all aspects of the Military Assistance Program.¹⁶

Over the next month, the MACV and MAAG staffs carried out the reorganization with no major disruption of headquarters operations. In practice, however, the combination did not solve all the problems it was intended to. In the absence of a separate Army advisory group, for example, advisers from that service found themselves answering to a multitude of masters in the form of the different MACV staff sections. In addition, as Admiral Felt had feared, the MACV chief of staff and other key officers became involved in the details of the South Vietnamese defense budget, matters previously handled by the MAAG staff. The promised personnel saving did not materialize. Indeed, late in April

General Harkins requested the addition of about 300 personnel to the combined MACV/MAAG joint table of distribution (JTD), bringing the total headquarters and advisory strength to 3,580. General Harkins explained that the additional people were needed for the field advisory effort, to carry out new staff functions, and to support “previously performed but unsupported functions.”¹⁷

MACV: A Joint or Army Command?

General Harkins’s submission of a new MACV JTD ignited a long-lived dispute among the Joint Chiefs over Service composition of the headquarters and over distribution among the Services of key MACV command and staff positions. Under Harkins’s April plan, 3,000 of the command’s 3,850 people would be from the Army, a fact that drew objections from the other Services. The Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps chiefs insisted that, if MACV were to be a truly joint command, their Services should have a larger share of the overall number of billets and of the senior command positions.

Commenting on the proposed JTD, CINCPAC, although not recommending disapproval, criticized the plan on several grounds. Besides noting that no personnel saving had been attained, Admiral Felt thought the proposed staff structure complex and unwieldy, with possible conflict of responsibilities. Raising the Service issue, he objected that the reorganization would make Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, “basically an Army headquarters, with the Air Force and Naval commands serving as appendages.” This arrangement would not “maintain and improve the unified effort in Vietnam.”¹⁸

When the Joint Chiefs of Staff examined the JTD, General LeMay objected that approval of the plan “would result in a de facto Specified Army Command.” It would provide a staff with joint Service representation inadequate for “successful prosecution of current joint operations in Vietnam.” Moreover, under CINCPAC contingency plans for wider hostilities, COMUSMACV would become Commander, US Forces Southeast Asia, directing sizable forces of all Services. “The wisdom of fighting such a force without a true joint staff,” General LeMay said, “is questionable.” Specifically, he contended that the Deputy COMUSMACV should be from the Air Force rather than the Army.¹⁹

Admiral Felt’s and General LeMay’s objections notwithstanding, on 6 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve the proposed MACV JTD “on an interim basis.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized that additional adjustments would probably be necessary in the future and noted that both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV were instituting manpower surveys. Accepting the Joint Chiefs’ advice, Secretary McNamara approved the JTD on 29 June.²⁰

Separately from the overall JTD, the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued over Service distribution of the three senior military positions in South Vietnam—COMUSMACV, Deputy COMUSMACV, and Chief of Staff, USMACV. In November 1963, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had agreed that, when the Marine Corps major general then serving as Chief of Staff completed his tour in mid-1964, he would be succeeded by an Air Force officer. In the

interim, on 27 January 1964, General Westmoreland arrived and assumed the newly created post of MACV deputy commander. During his March visit to Saigon, Secretary McNamara, overturning the earlier agreement on the chief of staff slot, directed that COMUSMACV be permitted to recommend the manner of filling that post. Later in the month, General Harkins requested that Major General Richard G. Stilwell, USA, then serving as MACV Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, become the next MACV Chief of Staff. Admiral Felt concurred. Since both Generals Harkins and Westmoreland were Army officers, this action would assign all three senior positions to one Service.²¹

On 9 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted divergent views on this issue to Secretary McNamara. The Chairman and the Army Chief of Staff concurred in Harkins's recommendation of Stilwell. The Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps also concurred in the recommendation but stated "as a matter of principle" that all three senior positions should not be filled by the same Service. For his part, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force declared that, "considering the importance of air strategy in Vietnam, the Air Force is not properly represented among the three senior positions in USMACV." Therefore, General LeMay did not concur in the recommendation and asserted that the next MACV Chief of Staff "should be an Air Force officer." With the Joint Chiefs again divided, Secretary McNamara approved General Stilwell's appointment as MACV Chief of Staff.²²

The argument then shifted to the Deputy COMUSMACV position. With General Harkins scheduled to depart late in June and General Westmoreland, the deputy slot's first incumbent, to replace him as COMUSMACV, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had to decide whether to retain the Deputy COMUSMACV position and if so which Service should fill it. In a preliminary discussion the Joint Chiefs, less the Chairman, reached agreement that the position should remain and that the next incumbent should be an Air Force officer. They asked General Taylor to communicate this view to Admiral Felt, General Harkins, and General Westmoreland, whose comments the Chairman had indicated he wished to have before reaching a decision.²³

On 6 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff received General Westmoreland's comments, with which General Harkins concurred. Westmoreland declared:

I feel strongly that if there is to be a deputy commander, MACV, he should be Army not Air Force. I fully concur with the feeling expressed by the Secretary of Defense that this is predominantly a land campaign and therefore senior commanders should be prepared by experience and orientation primarily to deal with problems involving ground operations.

This being so, General Westmoreland continued, an Air Force lieutenant general would be "of marginal effectiveness as an assistant." He considered satisfactory his existing arrangement under which Major General Joseph H. Moore, USAF, commander of the 2nd Air Division, MACV's Air Force component, advised COMUSMACV on air matters. In addition, General Westmoreland noted, an Air Force major general headed the MACV J-5 (Plans) division, assuring integration of air considerations into the command's

planning. General Westmoreland did not believe that a deputy MACV commander was necessary. If the administration considered it prudent to have a senior officer in position for contingency backup purposes, General Westmoreland recommended that the slot be combined with the Chief of Staff's post.²⁴

Admiral Felt took a different view from General Westmoreland. He wrote with what appeared to be resignation:

My effort to imbue the principle of unified team effort seems to have come to naught. Insistence on exclusive recognition of parochial interests creates an unhappy and unhealthy situation. The facts belie a contention that the campaign in RVN is exclusively Army. We have made a serious effort to lead the Vietnamese into a unified effort in their organization. It is disappointing to see a proposition put forward on our side that only a foot soldier understands the kind of warfare being conducted in RVN. A unified command concept is required by the terms of reference given to COMUSMACV.²⁵

On 12 June, as the date of General Harkins's departure from South Vietnam approached, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted divergent views on the Deputy COMUSMACV issue to Secretary McNamara. Admiral McDonald, General LeMay, and General Greene declared that the Deputy COMUSMACV post should be filled and that "in order to preserve the unified nature of the command," the deputy should be from a Service other than that of the commander. In view of "the increased air activity in Vietnam and the possibility of contingency plan implementation involving expanded air operations, there is a need to broaden the frame of reference in the MACV command element to meet these circumstances." Therefore, the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps chiefs recommended that the Deputy COMUSMACV be supplied by the Air Force.

The Army Chief of Staff dissented. He argued that "there is ample and able Air Force representation in Vietnam," especially given the excellent relationship between General Westmoreland and General Moore. General Wheeler discounted the need for a separate contingency backup commander, holding that the MACV Chief of Staff, General Stilwell, was fully qualified to assume command in an emergency. Endorsing General Westmoreland's opinion of 6 May, the Army chief recommended that no Deputy COMUSMACV be assigned.²⁶

Before submitting his own separate opinion, General Taylor consulted once more with General Westmoreland. The Chairman wanted to learn whether a further five weeks of experience had altered the acting COMUSMACV's views. General Westmoreland responded that he still saw no need for appointment of a deputy in the immediate future. "However, in consideration of all factors including possible expansion of conflict and the presence of a contingency command backup," he had concluded that the assignment of a deputy about 1 August would be prudent. "For the time being," Westmoreland would not combine the deputy and chief of staff functions. Finally, "In view of the role I would assign the Deputy involving matters of insurgency, basic ground combat, frequent negotiations with ARVN generals, and supervision of our field advisers, I recommend that he be an Army officer."²⁷

On 18 June, General Taylor submitted his views to the Secretary of Defense. Essentially, he supported the Army's and Westmoreland's positions. The Chairman believed there was a definite need to fill the Deputy COMUSMACV position. "An energetic prosecution of the Pacification Program will increase the workload of COMUSMACV both in the field and in Saigon," at a time when his concern with MAP activities would become greater owing to the disestablishment of the MAAG. Thus, General Westmoreland would need a deputy even more than had General Harkins. Addressing the Service issue, General Taylor observed:

As is suggested by the above enumeration of tasks, the deputy should be an across-the-board generalist capable of acting as an alter ego to General Westmoreland either in the field or in Saigon. This concept of the task argues against the proposal to create a three-star air deputy in order to give greater weight to the air campaign. Such an arrangement would not give General Westmoreland the across-the-board reinforcement needed and would tend to erode the position of the Commanding General, 2^d Air Division ... to whom General Westmoreland now looks for the conduct of the air campaign.

A final consideration, General Taylor wrote, "is the importance of having as Deputy Commander, MACV, a potential successor to COMUSMACV" if he should fall victim to the hazards of the conflict. "The deputy should be an Army officer as it is hardly conceivable in view of the nature of the counterinsurgency operations that we would want a COMUSMACV from another Service." General Taylor recommended the assignment of an Army deputy who would be provisionally regarded as the successor to COMUSMACV.²⁸

Secretary McNamara accepted the Chairman's recommendation the same day he received it. Subsequently, Major General John L. Throckmorton, USA, was selected as General Westmoreland's deputy. Promoted to the rank of lieutenant general, Throckmorton assumed the position of Deputy COMUSMACV on 2 August 1964.²⁹

During the next two years, as MACV headquarters expanded along with the American military presence in South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to skirmish periodically over the distribution of command and staff positions. As each proposed new MACV JTD came up for consideration, the Air Force, seconded by the Navy and Marine Corps, complained that it was being short-changed in key positions, violating the principle that MACV was a joint command. Usually supported by Secretary McNamara, the Chairman, and the Army Chief of Staff, General Westmoreland argued that the Army should predominate in the headquarters since the Vietnam conflict was essentially a land war. When he succeeded General Taylor as Chairman, General Wheeler, although defending COMUSMACV's right to organize his own command, urged General Westmoreland to defuse interservice tension by giving more important posts to officers of other Services. In response, as new headquarters staff elements were formed, General Westmoreland made some concessions to jointness. He acceded to an Air Force demand that he double-hat his Air Force component commander as Deputy COMUSMACV for Air, placed an Air Force general in charge of MACV's J-6 (Communications) directorate,

and put a Marine general at the head of the Combat Operations Center. He also increased the representation of the other Services in lower-level MACV staff positions.

These concessions notwithstanding, the Army predominated in MACV headquarters, in numbers and key positions, until the last days of the command. The commander, deputy commander, and chief of staff, along with most J-section heads, came from the Army. At the end of 1965, some 1,600 of the total headquarters complement of 2,400 were Army personnel; and that proportion remained constant throughout the rest of the war. The Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff generally agreed with COMUSMACV's assertion that the war was predominately a ground conflict. The other Services, while periodically protesting, could not overrule them. Not all representatives of the other Services were unhappy with an Army-heavy MACV. Admiral Felt's successor as CINCPAC, Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, who assumed his post in mid-1964, concluded that a Military Assistance Command dominated by the Army could more easily focus on its main task, fighting the ground war in South Vietnam. Moreover, in Sharp's view, MACV's lack of a truly joint staff reduced the possibility of its removal from under CINCPAC and creation as a separate unified command—an eventuality the Navy had been determined to prevent since the first discussions of MACV's establishment.³⁰

The decisions of early 1964 set the shape of the US theater command in South Vietnam that would remain constant as the war expanded. In the process, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had split along Service lines; three of the four chiefs consistently objected to COMUSMACV's organization and staffing recommendations. On the other hand, the Chairman and the Chief of Staff of the Army usually sided with the MACV commander. The minority prevailed because their position was in accord with Secretary McNamara's views on the nature of the war. Although divided on these issues, the Joint Chiefs maintained a more solid front as the administration continued discussing and preparing for escalation of the conflict.

An Escalation Scenario Takes Shape

During May and June, consultations continued in Washington and Saigon over ways to improve the situation in South Vietnam. Discussions centered on two by now familiar themes—strengthening the war effort in South Vietnam and possible direct military action against North Vietnam—and the proper relation between these two courses of action. By the end of June, the Johnson administration was engaged in working out the specifics of an escalation scenario that encompassed political and diplomatic as well as military actions. At the same time, the administration had to restrain General Khanh, who abruptly began pressing for strong measures against the North.

General Khanh Takes a New Tack

Under the policy set in National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 288, the United States would withhold military action against North Vietnam, although planning for it, while using every possible means to strengthen General Khanh's government, build up its armed forces, and enhance the effectiveness of the National Pacification Plan. Among Secretary McNamara's reasons for recommending this line of action was the fact that it accorded with the views of General Khanh. During consultations with Secretary McNamara in March, General Khanh had said he wanted to give priority to securing and consolidating his base in the South before undertaking any move northward. Accordingly, Washington officials were unsettled to receive word in early May that General Khanh appeared to be changing his mind.

On 4 May, General Khanh unexpectedly summoned Ambassador Lodge to discuss South Vietnam's situation. He declared that it was wasteful and illogical to go on taking losses in the fight with the Viet Cong "just in order to make the agony endure." General

Khanh asked if it was time for him to declare a state of emergency in the South and move to more drastic action against the North. Among other things, the state of emergency would involve a suspension of certain civil rights and reorganization of the government to get rid of the “politicians.” At the same time, General Khanh proposed to announce to the Hanoi government that any further interference in the affairs of South Vietnam would be met with reprisals. Specifically, General Khanh asked the Ambassador if the United States would be ready to undertake tit-for-tat bombing of the North in reaction to such interference.

Lacking instructions, Ambassador Lodge replied noncommittally. He pointed out that South Vietnam must consider the reprisals the enemy might take to allied actions. General Khanh then asked directly whether the United States would “follow through” if Communist China intervened with ground forces. Ambassador Lodge said that this question could be answered only at the highest level of the US government. However, he personally could not visualize the United States sending a large land army to the mainland of Asia.¹

Ambassador Lodge’s report of this conversation brought a prompt and concerned response from Washington. Secretary of State Rusk said that General Khanh had raised grave issues that had been “considered carefully at the highest level.” Mr. Rusk detected “a trace of despair” or perhaps “an accumulation of frustrations” in the reported remarks. He noted that General Khanh’s views seemed to have changed since the consultations with him in March and more recently during a visit by Mr. Rusk to Saigon in April. “Experience in Greece, Malaya, and Korea demonstrates the need for a sound structure of support before active advances can be made,” the Secretary said, “and this would seem to mean genuine progress in South Vietnam itself before action against the North.” In conclusion, Mr. Rusk told Lodge that it was important to find out whether General Khanh was simply expressing frustration at “facing up to all the hard questions” or whether the general was making a “forced effort to determine the ultimate US intentions if he asks us to assist him in carrying the war to North Vietnam in the near future.”²

While Mr. Rusk replied to Ambassador Lodge, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked CINCPAC and COMUSMACV for their assessments. Admiral Felt thought General Khanh’s remarks indicated a temporary breakdown under pressure. He hoped that it was a passing mood. The admiral was sure General Khanh knew that real victory could come only when the people of South Vietnam were convinced that the government could protect them and give them social improvement and justice. “Confidence of a population is not gained quickly in one glorious battle or assault” but must be earned by steady performance.³

General Harkins replied in a similar vein. Among other things, he observed that it was a little late in the day to be threatening tit-for-tat retaliation for North Vietnamese “interference.” He dismissed the “whole philosophy” of tit-for-tat as “defective and reactive.” “If we are to threaten Hanoi, I believe we should do it on our own initiative and be prepared to exert credible, steadily increasing, damaging pressure on them.” The key to improvement, Harkins affirmed, still lay in effective execution of the National Paci-

fication Plan. Though a long and expensive process, this course of action would bring progress without recourse to panicky measures or unrealistic schemes for governing without “politicians.” General Harkins hoped to consult with General Khanh soon and “go over some of the hard, basic facts of life, to include the primary one that the sooner the GVN develops comparable initiative, determination, skills and aggressiveness to that which the VC display ... the shorter the agony that must be endured.”⁴

McNamara’s May Visit to South Vietnam

These and other issues received a thorough airing in mid-May during another of Secretary McNamara’s periodic visits to South Vietnam. After a meeting in Bonn with West German leaders, Mr. McNamara and two aides traveled on to Saigon, where they rendezvoused on 12 May with General Taylor, William Sullivan of the State Department, and Michael Forrestal of the White House Staff, all of whom had arrived from Washington the day before. The group held consultations with Ambassador Lodge, Generals Harkins and Westmoreland, and General Khanh.⁵

General Taylor discussed with Generals Harkins and Westmoreland the progress of the covert operations against North Vietnam under OPLAN 34A, which still had shown no striking success. The Chairman asked for an estimate of the time that would be required to establish sufficient control in South Vietnam to warrant consideration of operations against the North beyond the scope of OPLAN 34A. General Harkins replied that all of the South would be substantially pacified by the end of 1965. General Westmoreland was less sanguine. He declared that establishment of acceptable control in the provinces north of Saigon would take at least until May 1965 and that clearing up the Mekong Delta would require two or three years after that. Both officers favored some expansion of OPLAN 34A operations; but they urged that the stronger measures against the North contained in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 be delayed until the National Pacification Plan was showing more success. General Harkins observed that it would be dangerously easy to divert Saigon from the main job of internal pacification by the attractiveness of ventures against North Vietnam.⁶

As for the National Pacification Plan, briefers told Secretary McNamara that eleven clear-and-hold operations supposedly were under way in early May in furtherance of the “oil spot” concept. Progress was evident in only five of them, however; the South Vietnamese units committed to the others were either virtually inactive or, in two instances, giving way to the enemy. An uncommitted populace, low territorial force morale, and lack of capable leaders at all levels were the rule in most places. Secretary McNamara expressed concern that the total resource requirements for implementing the National Pacification Plan during 1964 had not yet been defined. He questioned why there were only eleven scheduled clear-and-hold operations and why only one “oil spot” per province was the acceptable norm. While acknowledging that the pacification deficiencies lay principally in the Saigon government and its forces, Mr. McNamara was convinced

that the combined talents of the South Vietnamese and the US mission had not yet been fully applied to an integrated civil and military pacification program.⁷

On 13 May, Secretary McNamara, the Ambassador, General Taylor, and General Harkins held an extended conference with General Khanh. General Khanh began the meeting by reviewing the recent course of the war. He asserted that over the past three months his government had reestablished control over some 2,000,000 citizens (to his US superiors, General Harkins had already sharply questioned the validity of this claim). General Khanh considered this a satisfactory rate of progress, considering the circumstances under which his government was working. Among the obstacles against which he struggled, he cited the Catholic-Buddhist political rivalry, the anti-government stance of much of the South Vietnamese press, the constant threat of coups against him, and the conspiratorial activities of the French. General Khanh declared that the mobilization and training of forces and the mounting of operations had unquestionably suffered as a result of the two successive coups. But the government was now reasserting its authority, and he had good reason to believe that it would do so at a more rapid rate thereafter.

Under the questioning of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, General Khanh expanded on his view of operations against the North. He acknowledged that a long, grinding struggle lay ahead in the South but repeated his assertion that victory could be speeded by threatening Hanoi with retaliatory attacks. If North Vietnam, or perhaps China, responded to these strikes with a major counterattack, General Khanh declared, the matter would rapidly become a problem for the United States to deal with. Accordingly, General Khanh deferred entirely to the United States on the timing of attacks against the North and if such attacks should take place at all. Nevertheless, he pointed out that the Viet Cong and the National Liberation Front were but the arms of the enemy monster; its head was in Hanoi. To destroy it quickly and effectively, a blow at the head was needed. General Khanh expressed confidence that South Vietnamese forces were already sufficient for the type of sea and airborne attacks he had in mind. What he sought was assurance that his country could rely on US support if the enemy counterattacked in strength.

At this point, General Taylor recalled General Khanh's earlier view that a solid base in South Vietnam was a prerequisite for action against the North. General Khanh conceded that this requirement remained, but he did not expect stability to be achieved before the end of the year. He now believed that the lack of a solid southern base was a reason to strike the North at once. The political and psychological impact of attack against the North might cure the weakness by galvanizing opinion in the South and engaging his people fully in the war.

Returning to measures in the South, Secretary McNamara then stressed the importance of raising the strength of Saigon's armed forces to the agreed levels as rapidly as possible. Mr. McNamara cited evidence that the effort was considerably behind schedule, not as a criticism but as introduction to his main point: the United States was prepared to help in any way it could to speed the accomplishment of this objective. If more money or materiel were needed, the United States would provide it whenever the requirement

could be demonstrated. In this connection, the Defense Secretary agreed that the South Vietnamese Air Force required more fighter aircraft and said they could be delivered within three to four months. He also urged General Khanh to speed up approval of his government's budget so as not to slow down the pacification effort. Again he emphasized that General Khanh could count on the US to provide any funds that were clearly needed and to cover any shortage that had been caused by worthwhile activity. The meeting ended on a cordial note, with General Khanh expressing appreciation for the American promises of material support.⁸

The administration moved promptly to provide additional financial support to South Vietnam. On 18 May, shortly after Secretary McNamara's return to Washington, President Johnson asked Congress for an addition of \$125 million to the \$3.4 billion already proposed for foreign assistance programs in the budget then under consideration. He designated \$70 million of these added funds for economic aid and \$55 million for military uses in South Vietnam. The President explained that since the budget was prepared, two major changes had occurred in Vietnam: Viet Cong activity had intensified, under orders from Hanoi; and the new government of General Khanh had brought "new energy and leadership and new hope for effective action." When Congress approved the foreign assistance authorizations and appropriations for FY 1965, it gave the President nearly all of what he requested.⁹

Escalation Planning Intensifies

Upon his return from Saigon, General Taylor updated the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the discussions that had taken place. He pointed out Secretary McNamara's authorization of 25 additional aircraft for the VNAF, raising its prospective total force to 150. The Chairman expressed concern over the paucity of administrative talent in the Saigon government, noting that it resulted in a heavy workload falling on General Khanh personally. In General Taylor's opinion, the situation in South Vietnam was still deteriorating, but at a rate that was slowing down.¹⁰

The Secretary of Defense had apparently received an even less favorable impression from his visit. He concluded that the Viet Cong had "shifted into high gear" in their attempt to undermine the South Vietnamese people's sense of security and confidence in Khanh's government and were making progress toward that end. In Mr. McNamara's view, the decreasing number of hamlets under Saigon's control, the rising number of Viet Cong attacks and incidents, and increasing RVNAF fatality, desertion, and weapon loss rates all indicated a worsening situation with few hopeful signs in evidence.¹¹

In the light of these findings, and of a critical turn in Laos resulting from a Pathet Lao offensive in the Plaine des Jarres, administration officials intensified their planning efforts. At President Johnson's direction, by 22 May several planning groups were at work. The first group, under the Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs to the Secretary of State, William Sullivan, with members of the Joint Staff, was preparing a three- to

six-month program for “a major stiffening of our effort in South Vietnam, essentially by marrying Americans to Vietnamese at every level, both civilian and military.” A second group, under Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) John T. McNaughton, was drafting “an integrated political-military plan for graduated action against North Vietnam” to “hurt but not to destroy,” with the aim of “changing the North Vietnamese decision on intervention in the South.” Still other groups were working on an estimate of enemy reaction to the proposed US moves and on a draft Congressional resolution approving “wider action” in Southeast Asia.¹²

On 23 May, the McNaughton group submitted a draft scenario for attacking the North, prepared with technical assistance from the Joint Staff, to be discussed the following day at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, headed by the Secretaries of State and Defense. The draft memorandum explained that because of recent communist attempts to extend control over Laos and to intensify Viet Cong pressures, and the belief that additional US efforts in South Vietnam would not arrest the deterioration, the President’s advisers had given detailed consideration to strikes against North Vietnam. The scenario presented a step-by-step sequence of political and military actions. South Vietnam’s air force would probably conduct the initial military attacks, with US aircraft possibly joining in later. The strikes would continue until there was clear evidence that the Hanoi government had stopped supporting the insurgents in the South. Military actions would begin only after Congress passed a joint resolution “supporting continued U.S. opposition to the North Vietnamese attempt to destroy the independence of South Vietnam.” Other preparatory moves would include positioning of US forces for deterrence and readiness, substantially as provided for in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64.¹³

At the meeting the following day, which General Taylor attended, all present agreed that the trend in Southeast Asia, and in South Vietnam particularly, was unfavorable. The discussion ranged widely, with much debate over the proper timing and severity of action against North Vietnam, as well as over how such action should relate to proposed measures to improve the situation in South Vietnam. Secretary McNamara expressed strong doubt that any US measures in the South would reverse the deterioration there. During the discussions, General Taylor appeared to favor a cautious approach to military action. He observed that South Vietnam “isn’t going to lose rapidly or win rapidly” and declared that the military would prefer to wait until fall before attacking North Vietnam. “Better equipment would be available in the field and the administration of our military effort would be further along.” Nevertheless, earlier action “could be taken and . . . would serve as a shot in the arm for General Khanh and possibly be useful in dealing with the situation in Laos.”¹⁴

Following this meeting, the Defense Department made some revisions of its scenario for action against North Vietnam. Recognizing that a heavy legislative calendar and the need to recess during the presidential nominating conventions would prevent early passage of a Congressional resolution, the drafters spoke instead only of “an appropriate expression by Congress of its support.” The revised paper also set forth in more detail

the preparatory dispositions CINCPAC was to make. It noted specifically that before D-Day the command would deploy the B-57 squadrons from the Philippines to South Vietnam to augment FARM GATE and initiate low-level air reconnaissance of North Vietnam "if not previously begun."

At the meeting, General Taylor had presented the Joint Chiefs' view that a sharp, strong blow, employing US aircraft from the outset, would be more effective militarily than a progressively intensifying air campaign. Other conferees, notably Secretary of State Rusk, thought the initial attacks should be limited in scale and involve only the VNAF, in order not to confront the North Vietnamese with a major loss of prestige in the eyes of the world. All those present, however, accepted the need to advance to US participation if the Hanoi government remained intransigent. Accordingly, the revised scenario called for a progressive and expanding air strike program, with respect both to starting with VNAF aircraft alone and to targets. As to the latter, the allies initially would "mine their ports and strike North Vietnam's transport and related ability (bridges, trains) to move south." Then the campaign would move to "targets which have maximum psychological effect on the North's willingness to stop insurgency." These would be composed of facilities related to North Vietnam's military power, such as POL storage, selected airfields, barracks and training areas, bridges, railroad yards, port installations, and communications, as well as industrial assets. The scenario laid out a detailed sequence of actions with relation to an unspecified D-Day. The schedule extended backward as far as D-19, the date on which General Khanh should agree to overt South Vietnamese attacks on the North in return for a US guarantee of protection against enemy retaliation.¹⁵

The President's advisers were much concerned with the question, which bore heavily on the choice of a D-Day, of whether to accept the risk that the Khanh government might collapse just as the United States committed itself to an extension of the hostilities. Or would striking the North halt deterioration in the South? William Sullivan, Chairman of the Vietnam Coordinating Committee, suggested that the question "is not whether we should move either to stiffen the position in South Vietnam or to strike against North Vietnam. The fact is that eventually we will have to do both." The issue, then, was "*which* of these two measures we should do first." Sullivan argued for setting aside the "logical Viscount Montgomery approach" of taking all measures to tidy the base in South Vietnam before going North. The United States could further intensify its efforts to strengthen the Khanh regime but should be willing to attack North Vietnam "in the face of certain uncovered risks in the South."¹⁶

On the evening of 24 May, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, General Taylor, CIA Director McCone, and McGeorge Bundy discussed with the President their day's deliberations. All present agreed that extension of the conflict northward was inevitable unless Hanoi desisted from its support of the insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam. President Johnson appeared to accept the supposition that air attacks against North Vietnam might become necessary before the end of summer 1964. He was prepared to begin briefing the Congressional leadership, touching on three points: 1) the probable necessity of carrying the war to the North; 2) the desirability of gaining a context of

international support, through action by the United Nations or the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization; and 3) the need for Congressional approval of the \$125 million increase in aid funds that he had recently proposed.

The second of his three points was foremost in the President's mind. Before taking any drastic action, he wanted to give international bodies a full chance to find a solution, preferably through a UN-sponsored peace-keeping mission. As McGeorge Bundy read the President's intent, Mr. Johnson was ready to act on the whole matter of "North Vietnamese behavior" in Laos and South Vietnam. "If he cannot get the U.N. to do so, he will follow a course of pressure, one of the later elements of which will be military action."¹⁷

A Scenario is Written

On 25 May, after further consultation among the principal advisers, Mr. Bundy produced a new version of the draft scenario, designed to fulfill the purposes the President had indicated. The draft began with the following "Basic Recommendation" to Mr. Johnson:

that you make a Presidential decision that the U.S. will use selected and carefully graduated military force against North Vietnam, under the following conditions: (1) after appropriate diplomatic and political warning and preparation, and (2) unless such warning and preparation—in combination with other efforts—should produce a sufficient improvement of non-Communist prospects in South Vietnam and in Laos to make military action against North Vietnam unnecessary.

This basic Presidential decision was recommended on three premises: first, that the United States "cannot tolerate the loss of Southeast Asia to Communism; second, that "without a decision to resort to military action if necessary," the present prospect in South Vietnam and Laos was "not hopeful"; and third, that "a decision to use force if necessary, backed by resolute and extensive deployment, and conveyed by every possible means to our adversaries, gives the best present chance of avoiding the actual use of such force."

In the best estimate of the advisers, the decision could be carried out without drawing a major military response from China or the Soviet Union. Also, if carefully handled, military action against North Vietnam should not trigger an increase in enemy attacks in the South great enough to engulf the Khanh regime. Nevertheless, the advisers recognized that the US must accept the risk of escalation toward major land war or use of nuclear weapons, as well as the possibility of a response in South Vietnam that might "lose that country to neutralism and so eventually to Communism."

Following the basic Presidential decision, the proposed sequence of actions would begin with establishment of communication with Hanoi (through a new Canadian member of the International Control Commission) and with "other adversaries of major

importance,” the USSR, France, and China. The US message would convey both firmness of determination and the limited nature of America’s objectives. The United States intended to end communist terror and subversion in Southeast Asia; but it did not seek the destruction of the Hanoi regime. Following this diplomatic step, Washington officials should hold a conference in Honolulu to reach full understanding with Ambassador Lodge, COMUSMACV, and other US Ambassadors regarding the strategy and the degree to which it should be revealed to the governments of South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand.

The next action would come at the United Nations. After describing communist aggression in Southeast Asia, using “much hitherto secret evidence proving Hanoi’s responsibility,” the United States would seek a Security Council resolution calling for a halt to Pathet Lao aggression in Laos (if the resolution also included South Vietnam, it was likely to be vetoed). This exercise would have a double objective—to give worldwide publicity to the basic problem and “to make it perfectly plain if we move to further action that we had done our best at the UN.”

Whether the resolution was passed or vetoed, at a chosen time the United States or an ally would formally pronounce that the requirements presented at the United Nations were not being met. Meanwhile, the United States would be consulting with its SEATO allies. While no support was expected from France or Pakistan, other members might join in further action, including some commitment of forces. Thereafter, the United States and allied forces would begin their first deployments toward Southeast Asia. “It is our recommendation that these deployments be on a very large scale, from the beginning, so as to maximize their deterrent impact and their menace.”

McGeorge Bundy reported that the advisers had reinstated the requirement for a formal Congressional resolution but were divided regarding its timing. All agreed that introduction of the resolution should wait until the major civil rights bill then under consideration was off the Senate calendar. The preceding stages of the scenario could proceed “in such a way as to leave a free choice on the timing of such a resolution.” Some advisers recommended that the administration secure passage of the resolution between the passage of the civil rights bill and the Republican presidential nominating convention. Others believed that delay “may be to our advantage and that we could as well handle the matter later in the summer, in spite of domestic politics.”

Once Congress passed the resolution, a further military deployment to Southeast Asia would occur. Although not advanced as a bluff, these forces might have that effect, so enlarging the picture of menace as to intimidate the leaders in Hanoi into deciding to stop supporting the insurgencies. If the North Vietnamese held firm, the allies would launch their initial strike against them.

This would be very carefully designed to have more deterrent than destructive impact, as far as possible. This action would be accompanied by the simultaneous withdrawal of U.S. dependents from South Vietnam and by active diplomatic offensives in the Security Council, or in a Geneva Conference, or both, aimed at restoring the peace throughout the area. This peacekeeping theme will have been at the center of the whole enterprise from the beginning.¹⁸

President Johnson apparently desired the fullest possible counsel and reflection before making the basic decision. Therefore, he drew the Honolulu conference from the proposed sequence and placed it first. On the evening of 26 May, he advised Ambassador Lodge that Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, General Taylor, and Mr. McCone were coming out to join Admiral Felt “for a meeting with you and a very small group of your most senior associates . . . to review for my final approval a series of plans for effective action.” Reflecting the imminent change in MACV command, President Johnson suggested to Ambassador Lodge that he bring General Westmoreland with him to Honolulu “and leave General Harkins in charge of the war.” The President hoped that the Honolulu meeting could occur as early as the following Monday, 1 June.¹⁹

On the same day, 26 May, President Johnson began consultation with selected Congressional leaders of both parties. Under Secretary of State George Ball informed Secretary Rusk, then in India for the funeral of Prime Minister Nehru, that the President “will wish the Congress associated with him on any steps which carry with them substantial acts and risks of escalation.”²⁰

The JCS in the Preparations for Honolulu

During the short preparation time for the Honolulu conference, the Joint Chiefs of Staff made several contributions. On 30 May, they responded to a requirement arising from the White House consultations for a discussion of what “telegraphing actions” the United States could take to assure that its contemplated deployments of forces to Southeast Asia had the fullest possible psychological impact on Hanoi. The Joint Chiefs advised Secretary McNamara that military movements and preparations, implying sterner measures to come, could certainly contribute to the pressures against North Vietnam. They noted that the United States, even if it wanted to, could not stage a “quiet” deployment of major forces to Southeast Asia, some of them from locations almost halfway around the world. Communist nations inevitably would detect the moves; “news media would pick them up; statements would be requested.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff cautioned that “over-exploitation” of deployments might have adverse effects, generating “irresistible demands for a premature international conference before we have accomplished our goal of causing the DRV to modify its behavior.” Although suggesting some specific telegraphing actions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized:

their view that these telegraphing actions will not, by themselves, have significant impact on causing the DRV/Chinese communists to cease their aggression in Southeast Asia. Positive offensive action must be taken to demonstrate that DRV support of the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao will no longer be tolerated.²¹

Also on 30 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted three memoranda to Secretary McNamara on aspects of the US advisory effort in South Vietnam, improvement and possible expansion of which were being considered at various levels. The Vietnam Coordinating Committee, for

instance, was studying the possible infusion of a substantial number of US civilian and military personnel as advisors at all echelons of the South Vietnamese government. The three JCS memoranda, submitted to Mr. McNamara as a basis for discussion with Ambassador Lodge and COMUSMACV, dealt solely with military advisers.²²

The first JCS memorandum concerned extension of the advisory effort to the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps. Approximately 1,000 US personnel, the Joint Chiefs concluded, could be effectively phased in as advisors at the district level to work with the territorial units. These advisers would need another 500 personnel at the province level to back them up with administrative and logistic support. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that COMUSMACV should be allowed to tailor and deploy the advisory teams to meet the particular requirements of different areas. Closely related to the first, a second JCS memorandum discussed a pilot program for placing advisers with the territorial forces in seven critical provinces, involving about 300 US personnel. A limiting factor in this program, and in the larger effort sketched in the first memorandum, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out, would be a shortage of Vietnamese language interpreters, which would require great effort to overcome.²³

The third JCS memorandum on 30 May addressed the question of assigning US military advisers to company-sized units of the ARVN. Currently, the 1,336 US advisers serving with regular Vietnamese units were fairly equally divided among corps, divisions or special zones, brigades or regiments, and battalions. The RVNAF had 525 company or company-sized units—infantry, marines, rangers, airborne, artillery, and armored. To place permanent US advisers with these units would require 1,621 personnel of all ranks. It would also be contrary to the advice of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. Both of those officers thought that an extension of the US advisory effort to the company level was neither desirable nor required.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense of these views. In addition, they noted that there were “a number of limiting factors which militate against the establishment of ... advisers at company level.” They cited “the question of acceptability of such a program to the Vietnamese, the problem of overcoming the language barrier, and the inevitability of greatly increased US casualties which would result.” The Joint Chiefs recommended that the Secretary of Defense not consider assigning US advisers below battalion level in the RVNAF.²⁴

Of greater moment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a memorandum giving their views on the central purpose of the Honolulu conference. An initial version of the memorandum went to Secretary McNamara on 31 May, before his departure for Honolulu. When General Taylor saw it, he “found that it did not entirely conform to my views” and had not yet been reviewed by all the Joint Chiefs. Hence, he directed its withdrawal from McNamara’s office “pending further consideration by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.” Nevertheless, because of the paper’s pertinence to the impending Honolulu discussions, General Taylor made it available to Secretary McNamara and Assistant Secretary McNaughton as a document “still under consideration and not approved in its existing form.” After further discussion, on 1 June the Joint Chiefs cabled an amended paper to Honolulu. General Taylor passed it to Secretary McNamara as “an agreed JCS paper, less the views of the Chairman ... which I will submit later.”²⁵

In the revised memorandum, dated 2 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed concern over what they considered to be “a lack of definition, even a confusion,” in the United States approach to the broad subject, “Objectives and Courses of Action—Southeast Asia.” The JCS believed:

that it is their first obligation to define a militarily valid objective for Southeast Asia and then advocate a desirable military course of action to achieve that objective. Based on military considerations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that the United States should seek through military actions to accomplish destruction of the North Vietnamese will and capabilities as necessary to compel the Democratic [Republic] of Vietnam (DRV) to cease providing support to the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos. Only a course of action geared to this objective can assure that the North Vietnamese support of the subversive efforts in Laos and South Vietnam will terminate.

Although the Joint Chiefs favored the aforementioned objective, they acknowledged that “some current thinking” appeared to lean toward a “lesser objective”: limited military action “which, hopefully, would cause the North Vietnamese to decide to terminate their subversive support of activity in Laos and South Vietnam.” This lesser objective was geared, not to “destruction of capability” but instead to “an enforced changing of policy and its implementation.” Such a change, if achieved, “may well be temporary in nature.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered this lesser objective to be “militarily an inadequate objective for the present situation.” Nevertheless, they would agree “as an initial measure to pursue a course of action to achieve this lesser objective.”

If the national authorities chose the lesser objective, the Joint Chiefs continued, “the implementing action should clearly be of a new order” to have a major impact on the North Vietnamese. After more than two years of effort, the United States had failed to convince a “determined enemy” to cease and desist. Thus, even within the lesser second objective:

the time for continuing a monologue of “messages” that repeat the substance or maintain the intensity of our past effort seems to us to be well past. If we mean to ... convey the determination which must be part of our national purpose (and) if we really intend to prevail in this situation, we must recognize the requirement to convey directly, sharply, even abruptly, that the situation has indeed changed insofar as the United States is concerned.

To accomplish this, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the United States select carefully “a limited number of target complexes—perhaps two in North Vietnam.” The chosen target complexes should be “directly and significantly associated” with support of enemy forces in Laos and South Vietnam. They should “represent completely valid military objectives” and be “susceptible to reasonably quick and precise destruction by air attack.” In addition, their destruction should be achievable “with minimum impact on civilian populations.” Two targets meeting these criteria, the JCS suggested, were Vinh, a major supply depot supporting the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao; and Dien Bien Phu, from which the North Vietnamese transported troops and materiel into Laos. Once the targets were selected, the United States

should begin planning and preparing to launch the bombing strikes. At the same time, “as a matter of military prudence,” the United States should be ready to accomplish the fuller objective of destroying the North Vietnamese will and capabilities, should escalation occur.

In summary, the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that there was “no basis to be hopeful about the situation in Southeast Asia until and unless North Vietnam is forced to stop supporting the insurgent activities in Laos and South Vietnam.” They repeated their view that “the best way to achieve this objective is through destruction of the North Vietnamese will and capabilities” to sustain the war. Even if the United States chose a lesser objective, it should employ new and positive military action to convey its message to the enemy. The same action would meet the important need to impress allied nations with the will and determination of the United States.

The Joint Chiefs urged Secretary McNamara to seek at Honolulu precise delineations of both the greater and lesser objectives and their supporting courses of action. At the same time, they told him that on military grounds they advocated adoption of the greater objective. Should the administration chose the lesser one, the military implementation should nevertheless be designed to signal clearly “a sharp change in US outlook and determination.”²⁶

The Honolulu Conference, 1–2 June 1964

On 1–2 June, US officials, including senior representatives of all agencies concerned with political, military, economic, intelligence, and information aspects of the counterinsurgency effort in Southeast Asia, gathered in Honolulu. Secretaries Rusk and McNamara headed the conference, with General Taylor, Mr. McCone, and other top Washington officials in attendance. Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland were present, along with Ambassador to Thailand Graham Martin and Admiral Felt and his PACOM component commanders. Counting entourages of lesser officials, more than 40 people took part in the meeting. The conference opened with a four-hour plenary session on the morning of 1 June. Thereafter, while lower-ranking attendees participated in five working groups on specific problems, a policy group of 16 principals met in a virtually continuous session through the afternoon of 2 June.²⁷

The plenary session opened with surveys of the existing situation by Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland. Ambassador Lodge characterized conditions in South Vietnam as “still generally unsatisfactory.” Although General Khanh’s government had stepped up its military activities, the Viet Cong had matched the new level, offsetting any government gains. The Ambassador repeated the familiar litany of South Vietnam’s problems: religious, ethnic, and political divisions; lack of patriotism and public spirit; and general administrative ineffectiveness. On a hopeful note, Ambassador Lodge declared that General Khanh had managed to halt the deterioration of political stability that had begun with the Buddhist disorders in May 1963 and was trying to rally the people. According to Ambassador Lodge, General Khanh had injected new vigor into the Army and was working to give strength and spirit to the territorial forces. Nevertheless, as an over-all assessment, Ambassador Lodge

thought that the situation in South Vietnam could not be expected to improve in the near future “without our introducing something new and significant into the equation.”

General Westmoreland followed with an analysis of the military and security situation, relying particularly on statistical indicators. He reported that the decline of Saigon’s control of the rural population had stopped. Pacification efforts had made some gains but still had a long way to go. General Khanh was trying to step up armed forces recruiting and improve military promotion, pay, and decoration policies. Westmoreland stated that Saigon was deploying its armed forces more effectively to support pacification and had increased the number of its military activities. However, the ARVN needed to concentrate more on clear-and-hold operations as opposed to brief sweeps through the countryside. Overall, in Westmoreland’s opinion, the military situation in South Vietnam was tenuous, but far from hopeless.

Secretary McNamara had listened with skepticism to General Westmoreland’s account of the security situation. When the general had finished, Mr. McNamara told the group that he considered the military situation somewhat worse than “tenuous.” In his eyes, it was approaching the “hopeless” category. As evidence, he pointed to the RVNAF’s high desertion rates and the failure of Saigon to meet any of the agreed force goals. Armed forces morale was very poor generally and not getting any better. The government had yet to deploy adequate forces into the key provinces to meet the critical Viet Cong situation there. To Secretary McNamara, three facts were highly pertinent: the government needed 17,000 recruits per month but was receiving only about 1,000; there was no evidence of any increase in government control of either population or area; and the administration of the pacification effort was very ineffective. Only ten or twelve clear-and-hold operations were going on, and the gist of reports on all of these was that they were making little if any progress.

The conference then heard presentations by the chief AID and US Information Agency officials. The latter, Mr. Barry Zorthian, advocated a more unified government organization in Vietnam for dealing with the news media and thereby assuring more favorable coverage of the war. After an extended discussion of the situation in Laos and Thailand, Admiral Felt’s staff took the floor with further reports on the military situation, notably a CINCPAC J-2 presentation on North Vietnam’s armed forces.

In connection with that report, General Taylor asked about the status of North Vietnam’s air defense. He was informed that it would be relatively ineffective against high-flying jet aircraft but would be a threat to piston engine planes and helicopters. General Jacob E. Smart, USAF, CINCPACAF, said that US aircraft could probably hit targets in North Vietnam with no losses in an initial attack. Elaborating on this point, Secretary McNamara declared that the North Vietnamese lacked surface-to-air missiles and simply did not have the resources to provide air defense for all their key targets. Hence, the United States could plan its air attacks to avoid well-defended areas.

In the 16-man policy group sessions that followed the plenary, General Westmoreland gave his judgment that, if existing programs were continued, the situation in South Vietnam would improve slowly to the end of 1964. Ambassador Lodge reiterated his view that introduction of some new element, such as air strikes against the North, was essential to any real improvement. But, General Taylor observed later, neither General Westmoreland nor

Ambassador Lodge believed that the United States was racing against the clock or had to take action before it was completely ready. Both officials opposed any extensive infusion of US civilians into Saigon's administrative structure such as the Vietnam Coordinating Committee had considered.

General Westmoreland presented his and the Embassy's concept for a concentrated pacification campaign in the six critical provinces surrounding Saigon, where Viet Cong influence had been increasing. The plan called for bringing the civilian and military pacification efforts in the entire region under one central South Vietnamese organization paralleled by a large American advisory structure, again combining civilian and military personnel. Each target province, for example, would receive a team of 45 US advisers, 40 military and 5 civilian. Westmoreland believed that this campaign could turn the situation in all of the provinces in the government's favor within nine months to a year. Both Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara approved the concept and directed the mission to proceed with detailed planning.²⁸

With reference to possible attacks on North Vietnam, Secretary Rusk emphasized the need to prepare public opinion before taking any action. He believed that such attacks would have to be limited to South Vietnamese aircraft until the administration obtained a Congressional resolution but feared a prolonged debate if one was sought. Secretary Rusk also suggested that the United States was not fully prepared to undertake military action in Southeast Asia that might lead to escalated hostilities. He called for more study of the logistic factors involved and a fuller assessment of the further steps that might have to be taken. Supporting his position, both Admiral Felt and General Westmoreland expressed the opinion that 1 November 1964 would be the optimum readiness date for US attacks against North Vietnam.²⁹

After the Honolulu Conference

The officials at Honolulu produced no recommendations for pronounced change in national policy. Instead, the principal result of the conference was intensified activity in furtherance of programs and planning along the lines established in NSAM 288. At no point had the conferees come to grips with the question of future operations as the Joint Chiefs of Staff had raised it to Secretary McNamara: a precise definition of objectives and their supporting courses of action. Probably the conference was too large, and the time the principals spent hearing reports from the working groups too great, for this discussion to have reached any conclusion even if it had been held.

As a result of the conference, General Taylor placed a number of requirements on the Joint Staff, particularly concerning logistical needs and readiness to support OPLAN 37-64, "Military Actions to Stabilize the Situation in RVN" and other CINCPAC plans. The staff also had to carry out instructions from the Secretary of Defense for prepositioning equipment for a ROAD³⁰ infantry brigade at Korat, Thailand. All the equipment was to be in place within 30 days, so that the brigade could be ready for combat within six days after being

ordered to move. In addition, the Secretary had directed that equipment for a ROAD brigade prepositioned on Okinawa be reconfigured within 60 days to support the unit in any of the anticipated areas of operations in Asia and the Western Pacific. CINCPAC was charged with reviewing and commenting on the various alternative concepts that had been developed for air attack on North Vietnam, including objectives, target systems, timing, weight of effort, and other factors.³¹

During June, officials continued to discuss and develop the other policy elements that had been under consideration prior to the Honolulu meeting—selection of target systems in North Vietnam, reconnaissance over Laos, action at the United Nations, contact with Hanoi through a Canadian emissary, and a possible Congressional resolution. On 22 May, before the Honolulu conference, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the YANKEE TEAM low-level reconnaissance flights over Laos be continued “on an orderly basis” at the rate of about two per week. In addition, the Joint Chiefs declared that a one-time complete low-level reconnaissance of North Vietnam should be done as soon as possible to provide accurate targeting intelligence for CINCPAC’s strike planning. They requested authorization for Admiral Felt to conduct this aerial reconnaissance on or about 27 May. The request was not granted. However, as previously recounted, the US continued low-level reconnaissance over Laos by agreement with the Royal Laotian Government.³²

On 5 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a new and more detailed recommendation for low-level reconnaissance of North Vietnam, this time for a different purpose. They proposed “meaningful surveillance” of five supply and infiltration routes leading into northern Laos and the Laotian corridor to South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs advised the Secretary of Defense that after CINCPAC had carried out complete initial coverage, further flights over portions of the routes would be required. The missions’ frequency would depend on “information obtained from the initial coverage, the risk factor, and the value of these operations from a political point of view.” On 15 June, Secretary McNamara noted the JCS recommendation and directed that plans for such a reconnaissance be kept in readiness for implementation on short notice.³³

Meanwhile, the continuing air reconnaissance over Laos had resulted in combat action. On 6 June, ground fire brought down a US reconnaissance aircraft over Laos. Armed escorts accompanied the flights the following day, but the enemy shot down one of the fighters. Friendly forces rescued the pilot. On orders from Washington, CINCPAC on 8 June transferred eight F-100s from Takhli, Thailand, to Tan Son Nhut airfield in South Vietnam. The following day, the F-100s attacked a communist antiaircraft installation at Xieng Khouang, Laos. On 13 June, the Air Force moved the fighters to Da Nang Airfield, from where they flew escort missions as needed. The 9 June attack was designed as a single sharp act of retaliation, making the point that US forces would continue reconnaissance operations and would fire when fired upon. By that date, the noncommunist armies in Laos, with US materiel assistance, were holding their own against the Pathet Lao; and there appeared to be some prospect of a negotiated settlement of that crisis.³⁴

In the pre-Honolulu consultations, President Johnson had indicated strong interest in arranging for a United Nations peace-keeping mission in Southeast Asia. The United States

did not mount a full-scale effort to obtain such a UN commitment. The US Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, did however use a Security Council meeting on Cambodian charges of South Vietnamese border incursions (for which the US and South Vietnam already had apologized) to denounce North Vietnamese aggression in Southeast Asia and declare that the United States would welcome some form of UN-sponsored border patrol force. The Security Council did much less. It merely dispatched an investigative mission to consider measures to prevent any further South Vietnamese-Cambodian border incidents and report to the Security Council within 45 days.³⁵

The mission accomplished nothing substantial but did reveal communist intransigence. The radio voice of the National Liberation Front repeatedly denounced the United Nations for listening to imperialist “slanders” against the revolutionary forces. It also broadcast a vow to oppose with force any entry of UN representatives into South Vietnamese territory. When the mission reported on 28 July, it advised the Security Council that because of Viet Cong hostility, unarmed civilian observers could not expect to function on the South Vietnamese side of the border.³⁶

Elsewhere in the realm of diplomacy, on 18 June, J. Blair Seaborn, the new Canadian member of the International Control Commission, held an extended conversation in Hanoi with the North Vietnamese Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong. As prearranged with US officials, Seaborn conveyed the message that the United States was determined to oppose North Vietnamese aggression and support of insurgency, with its corollary that the US sought no wider war and did not have the destruction of the Hanoi regime as a goal. The Canadian diplomat also declared his availability as a channel for any proposal the Hanoi leaders might wish to send to Washington.³⁷

The administration officials concerned with Southeast Asia policy generally accepted the desirability of seeking a Congressional resolution as prior sanction for the stronger measures that might become necessary. The question of optimum timing, however, was still unsettled. Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy addressed this central point in a memorandum scheduled for discussion on 15 June by key presidential advisers. Setting the scene, Mr. Bundy noted that the United States had secured continuation of escorted reconnaissance flights over Laos. “We do not expect at the present time to move in the near future to military action against North Vietnam,” he wrote, but a change in conditions—for example a marked deterioration in South Vietnam or another strong Pathet Lao offensive in Laos—might compel earlier action. The United States was engaged in negotiations over Laos, but the talks were likely to be prolonged and the outcome uncertain. Under these circumstances, the United States must find continuing means to demonstrate its firmness to Prince Souvanna, General Khanh, “and, above all, to Hanoi.” At the same time, the administration must ensure “complete flexibility in the hands of the Executive in the coming political months.” He concluded: “The action that most commends itself for this purpose is an immediate Congressional Resolution.”³⁸

Mr. Bundy set two conditions for such a resolution. First, “a formula must be devised, in consultation with the Congressional leadership, that would ensure rapid passage without extended and divisive debate.” To ensure maximum support in Congress, the resolution “must support any action required but must at the same time place maximum stress on our peaceful

objectives and our willingness to accept eventual negotiated solutions.” Second, “timing must be considered.” July and early August would be difficult because action would have to be fitted in between the Republican convention and a Congressional rush to adjourn before the Democratic convention. “We thus conclude that the only feasible time for presentation would be shortly following the conclusion of the Civil Rights debate, i.e. during the week of June 22.”

Mr. Bundy acknowledged that seeking a Congressional resolution “under present circumstances faces the serious difficulty that there is no drastic change in the situation to point to.” On the other hand, “we might well not have such a drastic change even later in the summer and yet conclude . . . that we had to act.” Therefore, the Assistant Secretary of State recommended that the President be advised to begin urgent consultations with Congressional leaders on a draft joint resolution that was attached to his memorandum. The draft stated that the protection of Southeast Asia “is required by the national interest of the United States” and included two alternative sets of language authorizing the President to use military force to that end.³⁹

The meeting of principal advisers on 15 June evidently decided against introduction of the resolution in the near future. Discussion instead turned to possible US actions to reassure South Vietnam without a Congressional resolution. The question remained active, however, since the President on 22 June asked the Department of State for an analysis of the Chief Executive’s legal authority to send US forces to South Vietnam.⁴⁰

General Taylor Defines Patterns of Attack

When the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted their memorandum on strategy to the Secretary of Defense on 2 June, General Taylor stated that he would provide his views on the subject later. He did so on 5 June, in a memorandum to Mr. McNamara. The Chairman reviewed the main points of the JCS submission, which had defined two courses of action—one a primary and recommended course and the other a lesser course. “As I understand the distinction between the two alternatives,” General Taylor wrote, “the first calls for a concurrent attack upon North Vietnamese will and capabilities in order to induce the North Vietnamese to cease their attack upon their neighbors and in addition, by destroying in large part their military capabilities, to assure that they cannot resume these attacks.” The second alternative placed more emphasis on changing the enemy’s will and less on destroying his capabilities, “although the attacks considered upon Vinh and Dien Bien Phu require hundreds of sorties and thus are not of inconsiderable weight.”

General Taylor believed that these two alternatives were not “an accurate or complete expression of our choices” and that there were three possible patterns of attack against North Vietnam. In descending order of weight, they were: 1) a massive air attack to destroy all significant military targets and render the enemy incapable of further support of the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao; 2) a lesser attack on some significant military target or targets to convince the enemy that it was in his interest to stop aiding

the insurgencies and, if possible, obtain his cooperation in calling them off; and General Taylor's additional alternative 3) "demonstrative strikes" against limited military targets to show US readiness and intent to pass to the more drastic alternatives.

General Taylor opposed launching the maximum attack at the outset. He held that it would inflict more destruction than was necessary merely to change the enemy's will and would reduce the chances of gaining Hanoi's cooperation in calling off the insurgents. The maximum pattern would pose such a challenge to the Communist Bloc as to raise considerably the risks of escalation. The Chairman favored the second pattern, but he sensed that political considerations would dispose the responsible US civilian leaders to prefer the third one. He noted that the third attack pattern could be accomplished by VNAF aircraft alone, "perhaps stiffened by FARM GATE." In conclusion, General Taylor recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a plan for the demonstrative strikes defined in his third alternative.⁴¹

On 10 June, Secretary McNamara concurred in General Taylor's recommendation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff then assigned the major planning for the third attack pattern to CINCPAC. Subsequently, this planning became merged with a broader effort at both CINCPAC headquarters and in Washington to refine the target lists for attack against North Vietnam. As will be recounted, the result, in August, was expansion of the JCS 91-target list of 30 May into a new document identifying 94 targets.⁴²

A Vision of Regional War: CINCPAC OPLAN 38-64

Meanwhile, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had received another product of CINCPAC's planning. On 1 June, Admiral Felt submitted CINCPAC OPLAN 38-64, "Military Operations to Terminate Aggression in Southeast Asia." The plan outlined US military action, primarily with air and naval forces, to counter a sudden large-scale Chinese Communist and North Vietnamese military assault. It thus responded to the interest that the Secretary of Defense had shown in this subject in February.

The plan provided for early, massive employment of US air and naval power to defend the general line of the Mekong River and to strike "punitive and crippling" blows against mainland China. On the ground, local national armies would conduct initial delaying actions and be subsequently reinforced by US and allied units. At the outbreak of hostilities, US air forces would at once attack enemy positions in Southeast Asia and South China, achieve local superiority in areas of ground action, and give close air support to friendly land forces. At the same time, naval vessels would bombard coastal areas and gain control of sea lanes. United States and allied ground forces would deploy to Thailand and South Vietnam "in the minimum strength required to conduct a definitive ground defense" of critical points along the Mekong line. Following the initial stage, the allies would conduct ground and amphibious operations against the invaders and ultimately eject communist forces from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam.

As sufficient forces became available, PACOM's air and naval units, supported by the Strategic Air Command, would deliberately intensify the conflict "by punitive and crippling offensive operations" against selected targets in China to the degree necessary to terminate the war. While making every effort to implement the plan with conventional weapons, US forces would have the capability to use nuclear and controlled fragmentation munitions on a highly selective basis if necessary to accomplish the mission. On 29 July, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved OPLAN 38-64, subject to minor modifications.⁴³

Status of Recommendations 11 and 12, NSAM 288

On 24 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again addressed the Secretary of Defense regarding the status of Recommendations 11 and 12 of NSAM 288. They reported that the responsible US commands had completed the required military planning. COMUSMACV OPLANS 98 and 98A dealt with covert and overt cross-border operations into Laos to implement Recommendation 11. CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 treated both cross-border operations and the strikes against North Vietnam called for by Recommendation 12.

The Joint Chiefs expressed concern over the general lack of progress beyond that point. Although Recommendation 11 authorized hot pursuit and ground operations into Laos under various circumstances, the State Department so far had sanctioned only limited covert intelligence collection patrols. Although the planned operations depended primarily on South Vietnamese forces, no discussions had yet been held with Saigon; and there had been no move toward combined planning and training. The same lack of consultation with Saigon restricted allied readiness to implement Recommendation 12. The Joint Chiefs recommended that Secretary McNamara seek Secretary Rusk's concurrence in opening "non-committing negotiations" with the Khanh government, looking toward the start of combined planning and training. As a collateral benefit, the Joint Chiefs observed, awareness of such activity could add to the pressures felt by the communist leaders in Hanoi.⁴⁴

As the planning went on, President Johnson restated and reaffirmed United States policy toward Southeast Asia. At a press conference on 23 June, he said:

there is danger in Southeast Asia. It is a danger brought on by the terrorism and aggression so clearly, if secretly, directed from Hanoi. The United States intends no rashness and seeks no wider war. But the United States is determined to use its strength to help those who are defending themselves against terror and aggression. We are a people of peace—but not of weakness or timidity.

The South Vietnamese were a proud people, the President continued. "The task of building their peace and progress is their own; but they can count on our help for as long as they need it and want it."⁴⁵

New Faces in Saigon and More Troops

The summer months of 1964 witnessed a turnover in the senior United States civilian and military leadership in South Vietnam. Seeking to impart greater energy to Saigon's war effort and to counter increasing Viet Cong strength and aggressiveness, the new leaders recommended a substantial increase in US military forces in Southeast Asia. President Johnson approved their proposals. By this decision, the President set in motion an American buildup that would continue throughout the rest of the year, amid controversy within the administration and among the US public about the visibly expanding American role in the war.

Changes in Command

At his news conference on 23 June, President Johnson announced that Ambassador Lodge had tendered his resignation. "I do so entirely for personal reasons," the Ambassador had written on 19 June, and he reaffirmed his support of existing United States policy. The President announced the nomination of General Taylor to succeed Mr. Lodge as Ambassador and that of U. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, a top-notch career diplomat, to the new post of Deputy Ambassador. To replace General Taylor as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the President designated General Earle G. Wheeler, USA. When General Wheeler assumed duties as Chairman on 3 July, General Harold K. Johnson succeeded him as the Chief of Staff of the Army.

These changes coincided in time with others of importance. On 30 June, Admiral Felt stepped down as Commander in Chief, Pacific, replaced by Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, USN, who had been serving as Commander in Chief, US Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT). About a week earlier, General Harkins had left Saigon for Washington

to take up his nominal post as a consultant to the Chairman, JCS. Lieutenant General Westmoreland assumed the duties of COMUSMACV. In July, at Ambassador Taylor's request, the administration sent William Sullivan to Saigon to serve on the Embassy staff. The President named Michael Forrestal to succeed Sullivan as Chairman of the Vietnam Coordinating Committee in Washington.¹

Ambassador Taylor Takes Charge

Ambassador Taylor arrived in Saigon on 7 July 1964. He assumed his new post with greater powers than had been granted to any of his predecessors. In a letter of instruction to Mr. Taylor, President Johnson, besides assigning to the Ambassador full responsibility for all US programs in South Vietnam, added the following statement: "I wish it clearly understood that this overall responsibility includes the whole military effort in South Vietnam and authorizes the degree of command and control that you consider appropriate." President Johnson left to Ambassador Taylor's discretion the means of exercising control over COMUSMACV's activities, telling him to work out arrangements that made his authority effective but did not unduly burden him in the exercise of his other functions. In exercising his authority, Ambassador Taylor had the advantage of an Embassy staff greatly strengthened by the addition of Deputy Ambassador Johnson and the assignment of other talent, such as Mr. Sullivan.²

Within a week after his arrival in Saigon, Ambassador Taylor took measures to improve the coordination among US agencies. He placed all United States activities under the direction of a newly created US Mission Council. Council members included the Ambassador, the Deputy Ambassador, COMUSMACV, the senior AID, US Information Agency (USIA), and CIA officials, and Mr. Sullivan, who served as full-time executive coordinator. The Ambassador announced that all existing committees would be surveyed with a view to consolidation, expansion, or perhaps elimination.³

Ambassador Taylor declared it his intention "to have this mission operate as a team and to present a coordinated front not only to the Vietnamese but also to Washington." To this end, he sought to cut off uncoordinated communications from US agencies in South Vietnam to their parent organizations in Washington, which in the past had produced confusion at both ends of the line and embarrassed senior officials. Ambassador Taylor required that all outgoing communications be routed through Saigon, except on very routine or technical matters. Also, all field reports were to be sent to appropriate elements of the US Mission in Saigon, which would determine the manner and means of repeating the information to superiors in Washington. This would allow the Embassy to filter and perhaps block lower level assessments that might contradict Mission reports. Finally, the Ambassador established a 44-hour work week for all US civilian agencies in Saigon. Not to be outdone, General Westmoreland decreed a 60-hour week for MACV personnel in Saigon and the field.⁴

In contrast to the contention between Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins, Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland established particularly close working relations. Facilitating smooth cooperation, General Westmoreland deferred to Ambassador Taylor as his senior in the Army who had sponsored the younger general's rapid advancement in the service. Ambassador Taylor employed General Westmoreland as what amounted to a deputy ambassador for military affairs. At Mr. Taylor's direction, the MACV commander cleared with the Ambassador all his messages to CINCPAC and Washington on major subjects. Ambassador Taylor included General Westmoreland among addressees of his messages. Discussing close-held preliminary papers for a conference in Washington, Ambassador Taylor told General Wheeler: "In this connection you should know that I have cut Westy completely into these matters and that I have his views on the ... papers." Taylor routinely included the MACV commander in his negotiations with General Khanh and often employed the MACV staff as an extension of his own, much as he had used the Joint Staff in the Pentagon. For his part, General Westmoreland later recalled, "There was never a question as to my relationship with Ambassador Taylor. He was the boss."⁵

A Major Increase in US Military Personnel

Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland worked as a team to secure additional manpower for MACV. General Westmoreland developed his requirements for reinforcements in two steps. Following the discussions in Honolulu on 1–2 June, he had obtained General Khanh's agreement to accept US military advisers at battalion level throughout the RVNAF and to extend the advisory effort in eight critical provinces down to the districts. To fill these billets, the MACV commander on 25 June submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a request for 700 officers and enlisted men above current allotments—689 from the Army and 11 from the Marine Corps.⁶

After CINCPAC concurred in this request, and after their own study of it, the Joint Chiefs recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the augmentation be approved. They noted, however, that this and other personnel assignments to MACV were becoming a drain on the Services' manpower. The Army's contribution of 689 men, for instance, was the approximate equivalent of a ROAD infantry battalion. Accordingly, the JCS requested the Secretary to give priority consideration to raising the Service manpower ceilings to accommodate these unprogrammed requirements.⁷

On 16 July, General Westmoreland submitted a broader request for additional personnel, units, and equipment to support pacification in South Vietnam over the next year. When combined with several other increments already requested and currently under review in Washington, COMUSMACV's submission set the command's total requirement for new personnel at about 4,200 officers and men, drawn from all Services—a 25 percent increase over the current authorized strength of about 16,000. When all personnel incre-

ments, either pending or already approved but not yet supplied, were added together, Westmoreland's total reinforcement requirement amounted to 4,772.

The largest single pending request from MACV was that for 700 battalion and district advisers. That increase generated substantial further requirements for administrative and logistical personnel and for helicopters and airlift support. Under the program, the number of lower-echelon field advisers would nearly double, as would the number of locations where they were stationed; and each of the latter would be at the end of communications and supply lines. Hence, General Westmoreland called for augmentation of his cargo airlift capability by one squadron of USAF C-123s and a company of 16 Army Caribou transports. Because of demand, the three C-123 squadrons already in South Vietnam consistently had overflowed their programmed 60 hours a month since the beginning of 1964. General Westmoreland pointed out that in this case, as throughout the support base, the additional advisers would impose demands that could not be met by imposing further strain on existing facilities and services.

General Westmoreland also asked for two Army airmobile companies, each with 25 UH-1B helicopters, and two airlift platoons, each with 10 UH-1Bs. When added to his existing assets, this reinforcement would come close to providing each of the nine ARVN divisions with its own supporting airmobile company, plus one company as a corps-level quick reaction reserve in III and IV Corps and another for general reserve in the Saigon and Mekong Delta area. He planned to use some of their aircraft in "an armed helicopter configuration," mainly to escort other helicopters engaged in lifting troops and cargo. General Westmoreland also sought one medical helicopter ambulance detachment, with five UH-1Bs. This would double his medical evacuation support capability, rectifying an existing shortfall and meeting the needs of the increased number of widely dispersed US advisers.

General Westmoreland observed that helicopters had proved exceedingly valuable to the RVNAF and its advisers for command, control, liaison, and reconnaissance for convoys and reaction forces. The Viet Cong struck its most damaging blows by attacking hamlets and outposts and then ambushing the relief columns. Helicopter movement could help counter this tactic. To provide timely reinforcement of positions under attack, COMUSMACV was planning, in conjunction with the RVNAF, to establish "quick reaction heliborne forces, in each division area, capable of reinforcing beleaguered friendly elements with company size forces in one hour."

As another part of his proposed reinforcement, General Westmoreland asked for expansion of his Special Forces contingent and its reorganization as a Special Forces group on a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) basis, as opposed to the temporary duty status on which the Special Forces teams already in South Vietnam were serving. The half-strength teams manning the border Special Forces camps, which had been the target of battalion-size Viet Cong attacks, especially needed reinforcements to fill out their complements. Westmoreland wanted an increase of 592 US Army Special Forces personnel, bringing their total in South Vietnam to 1,299. Organization of a Special Forces Group would ensure effective command and control over the enlarged contingent.⁸

Ambassador Taylor immediately supported Westmoreland's request. He noted on 17 July that the personnel, unit, and equipment requirements had been developed "in the light of plans to intensify pacification in certain priority areas and to improve operations throughout the country." Since Viet Cong aggressiveness and capabilities seemed to be increasing, Ambassador Taylor saw a need for substantial improvement in ARVN battalion level "counterambush" operations. The Ambassador also endorsed the introduction of a Special Forces Group on a PCS basis. This step would "improve and reinforce operations on the border, in the highlands, against the war zones and support special operations." It should make it possible "to carry on an effective offensive counter-guerrilla program—something we have done only to a limited degree in the past." Barring unforeseen contingencies, the increases now sought "should meet the US military personnel requirement for pacification operations for approximately the next twelve months." The Ambassador concluded by urging "prompt processing and action on these recommendations."⁹

On 20 July, CINCPAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he also generally supported COMUSMACV's proposals. On the same day, at a meeting with Secretary McNamara, the Joint Chiefs expressed a similar view. However, they reserved their final recommendation until more detailed justification had arrived from the field. Among the additional materials received was General Westmoreland's proposed schedule for introduction of the units, personnel, and equipment into South Vietnam. Most of the reinforcements were to arrive in October, although phase-in of some would extend into December. Introduction of the Special Forces Group would not be completed until 1 February 1965. Mr. McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assess the Services' ability to meet General Westmoreland's proposed schedule and to examine the possibility of accelerating it to complete movement of all units by 30 September 1964.¹⁰

On 4 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff replied to the Secretary of Defense. They stated that the Services could not meet portions of COMUSMACV's proposed schedule on an orderly basis. The Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a revised time table for the phase-in, noting that General Westmoreland had stated that his proposed dates should not be considered overriding if meeting them would involve sacrifices of quality or inadequate preparation. The Joint Chiefs' schedule would delay most of the unit arrivals until November or December. The JCS concluded, however, that General Westmoreland's schedule for the arrival of personnel not associated with unit movements was generally acceptable and could be met with minor exceptions. The Joint Chiefs examined in detail the effects of accelerating the program to complete all movements by 30 September. They advised the Secretary that "almost without exception, the Services can meet the desired acceleration if the costs of the serious interference with Service training, testing, and combat readiness are accepted."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff observed that the contemplated expansion of US forces in South Vietnam would require construction of additional cantonments and airfields. These would cost an estimated \$6.5 million, and construction would take five months after receipt of funds. COMUSMACV had stated that existing airbases, including main-

tenance hangars and parking areas, were already being used to capacity. The JCS suggested that the five months needed for construction “could be a critical factor, limiting accelerated introduction of the increased US effort into South Vietnam by 30 September 1964.” They implied that COMUSMACV should determine the effect of this limitation before a decision on accelerating the reinforcements was made. The Joint Chiefs recommended that MAP funds be authorized to pay for the needed construction. They also renewed their earlier recommendation that Service manpower ceilings be raised to accommodate COMUSMACV’s unprogrammed personnel requirements.

On the central recommendation of their 4 August paper, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recorded a split view. The Chairman, the Army Chief of Staff, and the Chief of Naval Operations recommended to the Secretary of Defense that authority be granted to deploy all of MACV’s requested units on the revised schedule proposed by the JCS. The Chief of Staff, Air Force, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps affirmed their support of the dispatch of “any additional US forces whose potential contribution to the war justifies their introduction.” They agreed that General Westmoreland’s reinforcement request be fulfilled, but with two critical exceptions.

The exceptions concerned air power issues. Generals LeMay and Greene declared that “COMUSMACV’s justification for introducing 77 additional helicopters and an additional CV-2B Caribou company requires further clarification.” With respect to helicopters, the Air Force and Marine chiefs raised the issue of arming the craft, long a point of contention among the Services. They observed that “there needs to be a clearer understanding as to intended utilization in a transport role as opposed to the armed configuration.” To Generals LeMay and Greene, both of whose Services were wary of rotary-wing encroachment on the traditional combat missions of fixed-wing aircraft, the fundamental question was “whether the necessary close air support can be provided by VNAF/USAF fixed wing aircraft, either presently in South Vietnam or which may be programmed therefor.” Without this information, they claimed, there was an inadequate basis for granting COMUSMACV’s helicopter request. As to the proposed Caribou augmentation, which involved Army infringement on the Air Force’s monopoly of fixed-wing transports, the Air Force and Marine chiefs wished to defer action until General Westmoreland had more fully defined the nature and magnitude of his airlift needs. Behind these arguments lay persistent Army-Air Force disagreements over the Army’s concept of airmobile operations conducted with organic Army aviation, a concept Air Force leaders considered fundamentally flawed, potentially dangerous to national security, and disruptive to established Service roles and missions.¹¹

Secretary McNamara announced his decision on 7 August. Although recognizing that an accelerated deployment schedule would cause problems for the Services, he directed that it be adopted. In view of the urgent need for additional US support of the Republic of Vietnam, he declared, “the resulting temporary reductions in U.S. capabilities, training programs and exercises are considered acceptable.” Secretary McNamara ordered that all the units, personnel, and equipment requested by COMUSMACV, with a few exceptions, be prepared for deployment to reach South Vietnam by 30 September

1964. Secretary McNamara had considered General LeMay's and General Greene's views on the additional helicopters and Caribous and had "concluded that these items should be supplied to COMUSMACV." General Westmoreland should be queried, however, regarding his ability to absorb forces on the indicated schedule; where necessary, he should designate more acceptable arrival dates. The Defense secretary authorized use of Military Assistance Program funds to meet construction requirements. He turned aside the JCS recommendation that Service manpower ceilings be raised to accommodate the reinforcements, declaring that the issue would be considered separately. During the remainder of 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff received no direct reply on the question of manpower ceilings.¹²

When queried by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Westmoreland recommended strongly against compressing the shipment of men, units, and equipment into the time remaining before 30 September. Such a rapid buildup, he said, would overload existing facilities and create administrative problems beyond his capacity to handle in an orderly manner. Ambassador Taylor and CINCPAC supported him in this objection. General Westmoreland submitted a new phase-in schedule, which the Joint Chiefs accepted. On 14 August, the Chairman informed Secretary McNamara that the new schedule called for 4,566 of the reinforcements to be in South Vietnam by 1 December 1964 and the remainder to deploy between then and 1 February 1965.¹³

Well before this, on 21 July, the Secretary of State had informed Ambassador Taylor that "highest authority has approved in principle, subject to further review of details, the requested increase in authorized military strength to about 22,000." In a further message two days later, he declared that Washington officials thought announcement of the forthcoming US reinforcement should be made initially in Saigon, perhaps through a joint statement by the Ambassador and General Khanh. This approach, Secretary Rusk suggested, "would tend to focus attention on US-GVN partnership and might go some way towards satisfying General Khanh's continuing need for evidence of our support."¹⁴

Ambassador Taylor agreed fully that General Khanh should be a party to the announcement and in fact take the lead in making it. And so it transpired. On 27 July, General Khanh announced the increase in US support in broad terms. On the basis of rounded figures and other details released in Washington, the US news media noted that the United States was increasing its military mission in Saigon by about 30 percent. The *New York Times* viewed the increase editorially as "further evidence of the deep concern in Washington about the trend of the war" but said it did not signal a US decision to "carry the war into North Vietnam or to throw American units into combat." News accounts noted that the reinforcement meant the government had definitely abandoned the goal of substantial US withdrawal from South Vietnam by the end of 1965 that the White House had announced in October 1963.¹⁵

During the rest of the year, the reinforcement for MACV gradually expanded. As of 14 August, the total of authorized US military personnel stood at 22,226. In all, with additional increments, more than 8,000 men were added to the command by the end of 1964. This brought the total US personnel commitment to 23,292—14,679 Army, 1,109

Navy, 900 Marines, and 6,604 Air Force. Owing to the rank and quality of the people assigned, this commitment had an impact on the US Services that was out of proportion to the numbers involved. At the end of 1964, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Creighton W. Abrams, remarked that the US Army had “the equivalent of about 4.8 divisions worth of majors and captains, about 3.5 divisions worth of lieutenants and about three divisions worth of master sergeants” in South Vietnam.¹⁶

Americans in Vietnam: Advisers or Fighters?

As the number of US personnel expanded and advisers deployed to the districts and to all ARVN battalions, American casualties increased. During 1964, 149 US servicemen died as a result of hostile action and another 19 were missing or captured—losses just short of twice the figures for 1963. These deaths sharpened a public controversy that had been developing since the beginning of the US military buildup in 1962 about the combat role of the Americans in South Vietnam.¹⁷

The officially stated task of the US military advisers was to counsel, assist, and instruct South Vietnamese fighting men, without themselves engaging the enemy except in self-defense. It soon became evident to the news reporters in Vietnam that a gap existed between official statements and actual practice. Helicopter crews and FARM GATE pilots were regularly firing at the enemy in the course of their missions. On the ground, unit advisers in contact with the Viet Cong found the temptation to take direct action without going through the formality of advising understandably strong, and indeed sometimes essential to survival. As Saigon officialdom persistently denied observable facts, the press corps increasingly hammered at what became known as the “credibility gap.”¹⁸

The combat role issue came to a head in April 1964. At that time, Senator Everett M. Dirksen and Representative Charles A. Halleck, Republican leaders in the Senate and House of Representatives, accused the Johnson administration of hiding the facts about US involvement in South Vietnam from the American people. They said evidence was mounting that the United States was actually fighting the war. Dirksen and Halleck cited in particular the letters of Captain Edwin G. Shank, USAF, written to his wife and released by his family after his death in Vietnam on 24 March. Captain Shank had been shot down while on a FARM GATE mission. Early in May, *US News & World Report* and *Life* magazine published the Shank letters. They contained statements that US pilots were actually doing the fighting in South Vietnam and that the Vietnamese Air Force personnel accompanying them on FARM GATE missions were basic airmen, not student pilots receiving training.¹⁹

At a conference with COMUSMACV in Saigon on 13 May, Secretary McNamara expressed concern that the Shank letters and other similar allegations would undermine public support of the US effort in Vietnam. He reaffirmed the US policy that the Vietnamese themselves were to do the fighting and declared that any exception to this policy

must be approved by the highest American authority. FARM GATE's combat role was a specific exception, Mr. McNamara noted, reluctantly approved as a temporary essential supplement to Saigon's capabilities. The Secretary of Defense ordered a speedup in the training of VNAF pilots, to ensure that they would ultimately be able to carry on the air war in Vietnam entirely on their own.²⁰

After the Secretary's return to Washington, General Taylor, then still Chairman of the JCS, informed CINCPAC: "Since the initiation of US participation in counterinsurgency action in South Vietnam, it has been the policy of the US Government that US military personnel will not take part in combat." He reaffirmed this policy, subject to an exception for FARM GATE aircraft on the condition that "they fly bona fide operational training missions against hostile targets to prepare the participating VNAF personnel for eventual replacement of US pilots." General Taylor recognized that helicopter operations would "continue to introduce US personnel into combat situations." At the same time, he emphasized that helicopters were "for use as transports and their weapons are for the protection of vehicles and passengers. Armed helicopters will not be used as a substitute for close support air strikes." As for US military advisers with RVNAF units, they were to be "exposed to combat conditions only as required in the execution of their advisory duties."²¹

In the light of the publicity given to the Shank letters, the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Armed Services launched an investigation. Under the Chairmanship of Senator John C. Stennis, the subcommittee on 24–26 June held hearings in executive session "to obtain firsthand information upon the situation in South Vietnam, the purpose and mission of the Air Force units assigned there, the contribution being made by the United States ... and related matters." After hearing testimony from eight USAF pilots who had recently returned from Vietnam and from the Secretary of the Air Force and other Air Force officials, the Stennis Subcommittee produced a classified "Summary Analysis" that caused considerable concern within the Department of Defense.

On the issue of FARM GATE's combat role, the subcommittee essentially repeated Shank's allegations. It found that, contrary to official pronouncements, USAF pilots had been engaged in combat operations and charged that as a matter of policy the administration had kept this information from the American people. The FARM GATE pilots flew actual combat missions without assistance from the Vietnamese on board and without giving any substantial training or instruction. As Shanks had claimed, the Vietnamese crewmen were basic airmen without prior aviation experience or training. The subcommittee findings also included a litany of complaints about overly restrictive rules of engagement, lack of Army-Air Force cooperation, and the fact that the USAF in South Vietnam was losing more pilots than the VNAF.²²

With Secretary McNamara's concurrence, General Wheeler on 17 July sent a copy of the subcommittee's summary to Ambassador Taylor. In his covering letter, he commented:

Other than taking the appropriate corrective action, the Chiefs are not sure just how they may be drawn into any exchange over the summary. However, to prepare ourselves, we have had the Joint Staff analyze the summary and iso-

late those areas and issues about which we should be particularly concerned It is possible that some of the operational procedures described in the summary may be, or may have been, at variance in some respects with established policy; however, we hope that sufficient corrective action has been taken to bring the procedures back into line with policy and that such positive action can be reported.²³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff dispatched a team to Saigon to investigate and report on the Senate Subcommittee's allegations. Individually, the allegations raised issues already addressed by the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Air Force, and the Secretary of the Army in testimony on the same broad subject before other Congressional committees during May and June 1964. Collectively, however, the charges implied high-level mismanagement of operations in Vietnam and deliberate suppression or misrepresentation of facts.²⁴

On 5 August, the JCS team submitted its report. The team intended its findings to "provide the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the facts and background in order that they would be able to address intelligently" the Stennis subcommittee's allegations "in the event they were called upon to do so." On the key issue of FARM GATE's combat role, the team noted that US military personnel in South Vietnam believed they were and had been in "combat operations." COMUSMACV had stated that this was the case; hence individuals received combat pay and were awarded combat decorations. However, the team claimed they had no basis for determining whether there was a policy to keep this information from the American people. They found valid the charge that USAF pilots had flown actual combat missions without assistance from the Vietnamese on board and without giving the Vietnamese training or instruction. This had been true, the team concluded, until May 1964. Since that date, all FARM GATE combat flights had been for training of bona fide VNAF student pilots. USAF pilots in the Military Assistance Advisory Group still flew combat missions while accompanying the VNAF units they advised as part of their assigned tasks.

The JCS investigators reported that USAF pilots in Vietnam operated under stricter rules of engagement than did Army armed helicopter pilots. This was true because the Air Force mission was to train VNAF pilots and observers while the Army mission was to support the South Vietnamese army in tactical operations. In the past, the team stated, Air Force-Army operational cooperation had left much to be desired, but interservice cooperation now was improving. The team offered three possible explanations of why American pilot losses were heavier than those of the VNAF, none of which was particularly reassuring: USAF pilots flew missions in T-28 and B-26 aircraft that were more vulnerable than the VNAF's armored AH1s; USAF pilots flew the majority of their missions in the Mekong Delta where aircraft damage was more frequent than in other areas; and, in the opinion of US regimental and battalion advisers, VNAF pilots did not press their attacks as aggressively as American pilots did.²⁵

CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and the Joint Staff had also submitted comments on the subcommittee's allegations, all in substantial accord with the JCS investigating team's

findings. However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had no occasion to use these reports in replying to the issues in the Stennis Subcommittee's "Summary Analysis," which did not become public.²⁶

At the end of October, Ambassador Taylor confirmed the earlier report of the JCS investigating team that USAF advisers with VNAF squadrons were flying combat missions. He declared that "since late 1961 USAF advisers have been flying single-seater VNAF aircraft on tactical missions and delivering ordnance in combat under the same conditions as the VNAF pilots of their units they advise." The only restriction was that the US pilots never attacked a target until after a South Vietnamese pilot did. Ambassador Taylor claimed that he and General Westmoreland had not known until now that American advisers were actually dropping ordnance on these missions. Warning that under current conditions, some US personnel were likely to be involved in any VNAF strike mission, Taylor recommended a quiet JCS review of the matter "to decide what, if anything should be done at this juncture."²⁷

Commenting on this issue, Admiral Sharp, CINCPAC, reported that some members of his staff had been aware that USAF advisers were flying combat missions but that the matter had not come to his attention since he assumed command. To General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp recommended that the practice be continued. "These advisers," he said, "cannot be very effective unless they fly with their squadrons and participate with them in the combat missions." If the United States suddenly grounded the advisers after three years, they would become "particularly ineffective"; and the action would cause "some publicity" and "would not be understood by the Vietnamese." CINCPAC pointed out that US helicopter crews and ground force advisers were participating in combat every day. COMUSMACV fully concurred in his views. In the end, the administration placed no new restrictions on the advisers' activities, although public controversy continued over the American combat role in Vietnam.²⁸

Accommodating the Forces

At the beginning of 1964, the United States construction policy in South Vietnam was based on the assumption that American involvement in the country was temporary and that forces would be reduced within the foreseeable future. Accordingly, the policy emphasized maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation of existing facilities. Any new construction was tailored to minimum requirements for the safety, health, and welfare of US personnel. At midyear, however, the administration's decision to expand the US military effort brought with it broad new construction requirements. In addition, facilities in South Vietnam had to be enlarged to accommodate US contingency plans and operations. By September, the Defense Department had developed and approved new programs. It also changed the source of funding for base construction from the Military Assistance Program to the US Armed Services.²⁹

In April, Secretary of State Rusk initiated discussion of what would become one of the largest new construction projects. On returning from a trip to Southeast Asia, Mr. Rusk proposed the establishment of a permanent US naval presence in South Vietnam. He declared that

There would be substantial psychological benefits to South Vietnam and a useful signal to Hanoi in maintaining a US naval presence at Tourane [Da Nang] or Camranh Bay until pacification of South Vietnam is assured. This need not involve elaborate shore installations. A carrier task force, with visible training flights over Vietnam, would underline our seriousness of purpose and make it clear that we do not intend to be pushed out of Southeast Asia. Such a presence could also have a stabilizing influence in Laos.³⁰

On 25 April, after consulting CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff commented on Secretary Rusk's proposal. They agreed that more US Navy ships and planes should be seen in the western part of the South China Sea. This naval presence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised Secretary McNamara, need not be limited to specific areas of Vietnam and need not be continuous. The Joint Chiefs recommended that Seventh Fleet units "show the flag" along the entire coast periodically and that increased numbers of small ships visit South Vietnamese ports. A carrier task group (CTG), however, should not be stationed in a particular location for any length of time, since this would restrict its mobility and place it in danger from mines. They proposed instead that a CTG move into waters near Vietnam and conduct air operations, including training flights over land areas. In addition, they suggested that US forces conduct amphibious training exercises along South Vietnam's coasts and river estuaries, thereby sending another signal to Hanoi of US determination.³¹

Commenting on the JCS proposal, Ambassador Lodge suggested that a better alternative might be to establish a skeletonized naval installation at Cam Ranh Bay, a capacious natural harbor about 200 miles north of Saigon. Located in a sparsely populated undeveloped area distant from the centers of Viet Cong activity, such a base also could serve as a US beachhead in case of emergency. The base would establish a US presence "in a way which is defensible without depending on Vietnam and without political complications or involvement of dependents." The Ambassador noted that very little construction would be needed for an austere facility and that the US could use the base as a counter in any diplomatic negotiations.³²

CINCPAC supported Lodge's proposal. He told the Joint Chiefs that any movement of a carrier task group should be deferred indefinitely, until such time as it would have immediate psychological or combat significance. He found merit in Ambassador Lodge's suggestion to establish a US Navy base at Cam Ranh Bay and recommended "that steps be taken looking to the future to ensure unrestricted operational use of Cam Ranh Bay and to obtain base rights involving the adjacent land area." In addition, Admiral Felt proposed that CINCPACFLT be directed to conduct a survey of the bay and its environs to determine its possibilities.³³

On 8 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the US make a survey of Cam Ranh Bay immediately, with a view to establishing an austere naval facility. Concurrently, the US should determine the extent of the base rights required and its naval forces should begin using the bay as an operational anchorage as soon as feasible. Establishment of the base, the Joint Chiefs asserted, would demonstrate to leaders in both North and South Vietnam the US commitment to the struggle. The base would support naval operations along the Vietnamese coast and offer a site for amphibious training and seaplane activities. The Joint Chiefs noted that the base would need security against the Viet Cong and the US would have to construct some shore installations. On 9 May, Secretary McNamara approved a survey of the Cam Ranh site and directed CINCPAC to undertake it.³⁴

Forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 November, the CINCPAC survey found the Cam Ranh Bay area suitable for a fleet anchorage and for amphibious training, with relatively good security. It also was suitable for establishing a bare bones facility ashore with ample growth potential. However, CINCPAC identified no current operational need for a shore installation. He recommended in December that further action be held in abeyance until requirements for a US presence in the area were established. In the meantime, the United States had obtained clearance from the South Vietnamese government to use both Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang harbor for naval operations. These tentative steps laid the ground work for what would become, as the war expanded, a major US port and supply depot.³⁵

As more US personnel and equipment arrived in Vietnam, the need for expanded facilities, particularly airfields, became more acute. In November, CINCPAC sought approval to build a new jet-capable airfield at Chu Lai in southern I Corps and to add a second runway at Da Nang. He declared that existing facilities, given their increased use by forces already in South Vietnam, could not accommodate the deployments called for in CINCPAC OPLANs. In December, Secretary McNamara approved these projects. These were the first major installations programmed for support of US units not directly associated with a military assistance and advisory mission.³⁶

In July, COMUSMACV called attention to the lack of adequate American hospital facilities in Saigon. After approval in Washington, he requested from the South Vietnamese government land for the new hospital near Tan Son Nhut Air Base. By November, MACV had obtained both consent for the land use and authority from Washington to begin construction, but completion of the hospital would take about ten months. At year's end, American officials were considering stop-gap medical support measures, including Ambassador Taylor's suggestion of using a hospital ship.³⁷

The Search for “More Flags” Begins

In April 1964, Secretary of State Rusk returned to Washington after visiting South Vietnam and participating in a Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) Council of

Ministers meeting in Manila. From the United States viewpoint, the SEATO meeting had been particularly successful. In the concluding communiqué, the Foreign Ministers of seven nations joined in expressing “grave concern about continuing Communist aggression against the Republic of Vietnam.” They declared that defeat of this aggression was “essential” to the security of Southeast Asia.³⁸

Upon his return, Secretary Rusk recommended to the President a list of measures to improve the counterinsurgency effort in South Vietnam. The first item, a proposal to seek more assistance from other countries, undoubtedly reflected the encouragement he had received at Manila. Rusk told the President:

It is important to engage more “flags” in South Vietnam, both on political and practical grounds. There is reason to believe that more help could be obtained from Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. An effort also should be made to increase aid from such non-SEATO countries as Japan, West Germany, Nationalist China and others. Assistance of all types should be welcomed: military units and personnel, economic, technical and cultural.³⁹

In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 25 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred in Rusk’s recommendation. They noted, however, that “direct participation by SEATO or other third country combat units in military counterinsurgency operations in South Vietnam is not considered practical or desirable under present circumstances.” On the other hand, advisory personnel, supplies, and equipment from other nations “could make significant contributions to the over-all advisory effort while at the same time lending an international character to our involvement.” Third-country engineer, medical, and transportation units could be used effectively in a civic action role. The Joint Chiefs urged that the number of personnel contributed by any one nation should be limited. The organizational arrangements for their employment “should be calculated to ensure that US control of the total advisory effort is not jeopardized, and confusion is not introduced as a result of differing military doctrines.”⁴⁰

Third countries already were engaged in South Vietnam. The United Kingdom, France, Japan, and West Germany had been providing commodity aid and technical assistance for some time. In 1962, Australia had deployed a 32-man army training team and had integrated it with the US advisory effort. As of early 1964, Chinese Nationalist forces were giving covert support to OPLAN 34A operations and to a pacification program in the Mekong Delta.⁴¹

At a press conference on 23 April, President Johnson briefly expressed hope that “we would see some other flags in there” in South Vietnam, in a united attempt to stop the spread of communism. The President’s remarks hardly indicated the scope of the campaign that the United States then was launching to obtain more third country assistance. On 1 May, the State Department instructed all US embassies on the matter. Meanwhile, at the request of the United States, the South Vietnamese government prepared a “shopping list” of the types of assistance it needed. The State Department circulated a summary of

that list to 27 US embassies for action early in July. At the same time, Saigon, with US encouragement, appealed for aid to a still larger number of nations.⁴²

The Government of the Republic of Korea, one of the first to reply to the appeal, offered to send combat units to South Vietnam. Washington and Saigon declined the offer with appreciation. They pointed out that South Vietnam had not asked the United States to introduce ground combat forces. The difficulties of employing foreign troops were apparent; even South Vietnamese forces had little success in distinguishing the Viet Cong from the local population. In the end, South Korea dispatched a mobile surgical hospital and ten tae kwon do instructors.⁴³

Other assistance began to come in. On 20 July, New Zealand deployed a military engineer team and a surgical team for assignment to civic action projects. The following month, Australia increased its support by sending a detachment of six transport aircraft and 74 personnel. The Philippines contributed two medical teams and a number of civic action and psychological warfare specialists, 34 people in all. Thailand provided 10,000 galvanized iron sheets and 100 tons of cement.⁴⁴

In early October, in connection with continuing the US encouragement of third country assistance, officials in Washington worked out a method for funding the effort. The United States would urge each nation to bear as much as it could of the cost of its contribution but would not insist on this so firmly as to cause the donor to withdraw the offer. When a nation clearly could not pay the whole cost, the difference would be made up by a combination of Military Assistance Program funds, payments from the Saigon government's budget, and at the last resort payments from the United States.⁴⁵

On 3 October, in preparation for a visit of Philippine President Diosdado Macapagal to Washington, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided higher authorities with a list of additional contributions Manila might make to the war effort. It included a special forces company; engineer and medical units; and signal, ordnance, transportation, and maintenance technicians. In November, during subsequent military consultations in Manila with MACV representatives participating, the allies evolved a plan for a Filipino tri-service task force for Vietnam. The 1,800-man force would include security troops for protection along with engineer, medical, and other units. The Philippine government appeared to be considering in earnest a contribution of this size.⁴⁶

In early December, President Johnson decided to intensify the effort to obtain commitments from other Free World nations. In advising South Vietnamese leaders of the new program, Ambassador Taylor said that the United States had no desire to internationalize the war along the lines of the Korean conflict. However, it did want to make Free World support "concretely evident" in South Vietnam. In support of this endeavor, the US revised its funding policies. It was now prepared to pay all costs incurred by other countries in providing units to South Vietnam.⁴⁷

On 18 December, the State Department suggested to the Embassy in Saigon that it set up a combined US-South Vietnamese-Third Country organization to "provide policy and coordinate varied activities of participating nations." Once general policies had been defined, COMUSMACV would coordinate day-to-day military operations and support

activities. The United States Operations Mission (USOM) or other appropriate agencies would look after nonmilitary contributions.⁴⁸

Four days later, General Westmoreland established a special staff element in MACV headquarters to handle military coordination with the third country allies. Initially called the International Military Assistance Office, the organization later was renamed the Free World Military Assistance Office (FWMAO). Ambassador Taylor considered that “Third Country Aid” implied that the other participating countries were on a lower plane than the United States, whereas “Free World Assistance” had a connotation of equality. As the war and the allied contingents expanded, the FWMAO’s main task became defining command relationships between the Free World forces, MACV, and the South Vietnamese.⁴⁹

By late 1964, the US buildup, decided upon in mid-year to strengthen the war effort in South Vietnam, was nearing completion. By that time also, a series of dramatic events had moved the United States further along the road to war against North Vietnam.

Going North: Tonkin Gulf and Its Effects

During July and August 1964, the Johnson administration took major steps toward escalation against North Vietnam. In part, those actions were a continuation of planning already under way. They also were driven, however, by new “Go North” agitation by General Khanh and by a shooting encounter between US Navy vessels and North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin.

General Khanh Calls for a Move North

Beginning in mid-July, General Khanh and other members of his government engaged in assertive and unpredictable behavior that disturbed US officials. In the first such instance, at a news conference on 14 July, South Vietnamese military officials, without prior coordination with COMUSMACV, charged that infiltration from the North was increasing at a rapid rate. Apparently trying to create the impression of a major invasion, they told the press that North Vietnam now was sending organized regular military units into South Vietnam. (In reality, as recounted in chapter 1, Hanoi was preparing to do just that.) At a press briefing set up by Ambassador Taylor, the MACV Chief of Staff denied that there was any evidence of infiltration by organized units; and in fact the US command as yet possessed no such evidence. Ambassador Taylor reported to Washington that he was at a loss to understand General Khanh’s motives in permitting such public statements “which are not borne out by intelligence which presumably is the same as that available to us.”¹

General Khanh followed up this incident with a more drastic step. On 19 July, at a rally marking the tenth anniversary of the Geneva Accords, General Khanh told a Saigon crowd that the accords, “born of Communist-Colonialist collusion,” had divided

the Vietnamese nation. Vowing that South Vietnam would not again allow its freedom to be bartered away in the negotiations of others, the general then launched into the “March Northward” theme, claiming that all his people supported a strategy of attack. In an anniversary proclamation the following day, General Khanh declared that if Viet Cong aggression continued, his government would “intensify the war to achieve total victory in order to liberate all the national territory.” At the same time, his Secretary of State called for a “March North.” On 21 July, South Vietnam’s Deputy Prime Minister again sounded the “March North” theme in an address concluding the observance of “Shame Week,” as the government had now officially designated the anniversary period.²

Immediately following Khanh’s first address, Secretary Rusk reminded Ambassador Taylor that it was important to keep General Khanh “as far as possible on the same track as ourselves regarding possible action against [the] North.” If the United States should find it necessary to strike North Vietnam in response to significant escalation by Hanoi, it wanted to be in the position of responding to new aggression rather than appear to be carrying out previously planned and publicized offensives.³

Additional disturbing incidents followed the end of “Shame Week.” Students, evidently with government permission, staged anti-French demonstrations and attacked the French Embassy compound. Khanh’s government continued to furnish distorted stories to correspondents, and Saigon newspapers accused the United States of hiding the facts about North Vietnamese infiltration. In the most egregious incident, on 22 July, General Nguyen Cao Ky, the VNAF chief, revealed that his planes already were going north, dropping sabotage teams into North Vietnam. He thus publicly acknowledged operations under OPLAN 34A. General Ky added that the VNAF was prepared to bomb North Vietnamese cities at any time and had been training for that mission for three years. Adding to the worries of American officials, reports from various sources indicated that General Khanh had declared that his country was tired of war, that pacification would take too long, and that the issue must be resolved promptly, either by attack on the North or by negotiation. He was said to be determined to “incite” the United States to action. General Ky, in turn, purportedly believed that South Vietnam must make its own decisions, since the presidential election campaign was paralyzing the Americans’ will.⁴

On the morning of 23 July, Ambassador Taylor and his Deputy, Alexis Johnson, confronted General Khanh and his principal aides regarding Khanh’s “March North” remarks and General Ky’s effusions. Ambassador Taylor emphasized that the VNAF commander’s statements to the press could cause great damage, giving aid to the enemy’s propaganda by acknowledging Saigon’s responsibility for the OPLAN 34A activities. By alerting North Vietnam, the Ambassador claimed, General Ky’s revelations could make future operations more difficult. In addition, General Ky’s aggressive tone would certainly alienate some of the third countries from which South Vietnam was seeking support. General Khanh conceded that General Ky might have given a propaganda advantage to Hanoi, but he argued that the other side had gained no operational advantage since they already knew perfectly well what was going on. After discussion, the South Vietnamese agreed to issue a formal “clarification” dissociating the government from General Ky’s remarks.

The Ambassador furnished a suggested draft statement. However, when the Ministry of Defense issued the communiqué later in the day, it used its own wording as a show of independence from the United States.⁵

At the morning meeting, Ambassador Taylor also brought up the more serious matter of General Khanh's public calls for an attack on North Vietnam. He told General Khanh that recent events gave the appearance of a South Vietnamese campaign to push the US Government into a course of action it was not ready to adopt. General Khanh replied that he had no thought of bringing pressure on the United States; he had promised to be a loyal ally and would behave as one. Combining the French Indochina war in with the current one, he eloquently articulated the weariness of his people after twenty years of a conflict that had no end in sight. The war must be won soon, he believed, because South Vietnamese patience had its limits. Citing the recent capture of native North Vietnamese draftees among enemy infiltrators, General Khanh insisted that the United States must recognize that the war had entered a new phase to which "we should respond with new measures." General Khanh did not specify what new measures he had in mind, but Ambassador Taylor wrote to Secretary Rusk, "I am sure he was thinking of reprisal bombings."⁶

State Department officials speculated that General Khanh's actions might merely be an expression of frustration over recent military difficulties. In that case, Ambassador Taylor should be able to exert a steadying influence upon the general sufficient to restore his resolution in pursuing the pacification program. The Department saw a more disturbing possibility, however. In advocating action against the North, General Khanh might be reacting to pressures from neutralist opinion, which might be an indication that this attitude was on the rise. The Department asked Ambassador Taylor to watch carefully for evidence of growing neutralist sentiment in Saigon and for any hint of North Vietnamese contact with dissident military and civilian personalities or with exile groups. Also, despite the recent difficulties, Ambassador Taylor was to make every effort to reassure Vietnamese circles that the United States continued to support General Khanh.⁷

Ambassador Taylor Proposes Combined Planning

In an extended assessment on 25 July, Ambassador Taylor said that General Khanh appeared to have launched a deliberate campaign to associate the United States with increased military pressures on North Vietnam, disregarding the embarrassment it would cause his ally. Possibly, General Khanh had given his "March North" speech merely to whip up public enthusiasm and aid recruiting. More likely, in Ambassador Taylor's opinion, General Khanh was trying to commit the United States to a program of reprisal bombing as a first step in escalating hostilities against North Vietnam. It was even possible that General Khanh meant literally to launch a military offensive to reunify Vietnam as soon as he felt that the United States was inextricably involved. In Ambassador Taylor's view, General Khanh, after nearly six months in office, had concluded

that “the frustrating and ineffective instruments of government at his command are not adequate to master the Viet Cong by counterinsurgency means alone.” He and his colleagues had decided they could defeat the Viet Cong only by “bringing direct pressure to bear on the North.” If they failed to get the Americans directly involved, Ambassador Taylor noted, “it is difficult to judge at this stage how strong pressures would become within the GVN to seek a negotiated solution.”⁸

In a follow-up message on the 25th, Ambassador Taylor emphasized the dangers of this situation and proposed a means of at least partially defusing it. The more strongly the United States sought to dissuade General Khanh from his “March North” line of thought, Ambassador Taylor warned, the more unpredictable his actions might become. And it could not yet be judged how deeply the “March North” fever had taken hold outside General Khanh’s administration. “One maverick pilot taking off for Hanoi with a load of bombs,” the Ambassador wrote, “could touch off an extension of hostilities at a time and in a form most disadvantageous to US interests.”

To the Secretary of State, the Ambassador suggested an approach to containing the South Vietnamese leaders’ frustrations and channeling their fervor into a more useful effort. He suggested that the United States offer to engage in combined contingency planning with the Saigon government for various forms of military action against North Vietnam—a proposal already under discussion within the Johnson administration. Such planning activity would force South Vietnamese officials to confront the realities of implementing General Khanh’s slogan; it also could provide a basis for any military action the United States might subsequently choose to take against the North. Further, it would give US officials an opportunity to probe more deeply the thought of General Khanh and his associates on this subject. In proposing combined planning, Ambassador Taylor emphasized, the United States must make absolutely clear that it was assuming no commitment to carry out the plans.⁹

On 25 July, in a joint message, the State and Defense Departments authorized Ambassador Taylor to propose combined planning to General Khanh at the Ambassador’s discretion. However, he was to tell General Khanh that the planning must be closely held, with only a “small and select joint group” involved. There must be absolutely no security leak. Further, the Washington authorities believed Ambassador Taylor should not put this offer in writing but should make his point orally, underscoring that the United States assumed no commitment to carry out the plans when made.¹⁰

Armed with discretionary power to propose combined planning, Ambassador Taylor conferred with General Khanh on 27 July. The South Vietnamese leader turned the discussion again to the need for pressure against North Vietnam. “It came out clearly,” the Ambassador reported, “that he is thinking about reprisal tit-for-tat bombing rather than a movement north with land forces or massive bombing to effect total destruction of Hanoi and all its works.” General Khanh wanted to strike the North in order to encourage his people and to push Ho Chi Minh toward ending his support of the Viet Cong and halting insurgent activity in the South.

Using the opening created by this line of talk, the Ambassador brought up the proposal for combined contingency planning. General Khanh appeared pleased but surprised to receive it, and he asked for several days to think it over. General Khanh also stated that he intended to declare a “state of emergency” within a short time but agreed to consult Ambassador Taylor before doing so. On 7 August, General Westmoreland and members of his staff met with General Khanh and his senior military subordinates and made arrangements to begin the combined planning.¹¹

The Joint Chiefs Recommend Additional Action

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were drawn into the Washington deliberations over how to respond to General Khanh’s “Go North” exhortations. At an NSC meeting on 25 July, General Wheeler received instructions to have the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepare, as a matter of urgency, a list of military actions that would: 1) “reduce the frustration and defeatism of the RVN leaders by undertaking punitive measures against the enemy outside the borders of the RVN”; 2) contribute militarily to the success of the counter-insurgency effort in South Vietnam; 3) entail minimum risk of counter escalation by the enemy; and 4) require minimum US participation in a combat role.¹²

After a quick study, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a memorandum to Secretary McNamara on 27 July, identified three courses of action that met all the NSC’s criteria. They suggested air strikes against the Laotian infiltration routes into South Vietnam; cross-border ground operations against the infiltration trails; and selective bombing of prime military targets in North Vietnam using non-US, unmarked aircraft. The Joint Chiefs analyzed each of these three courses of action and furnished detailed supporting data.

Air strikes, including armed reconnaissance missions, against communist installations and traffic in the Laos panhandle, would reduce but not stop the flow of support to the Viet Cong. Such actions would, however, “signal sharply to Hanoi and Peking that they must pay a higher price to continue the subversion effort.” While South Vietnam’s Air Force could conduct these strikes alone, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that FARM GATE resources should be added to increase the pressure. In addition, inclusion of FARM GATE aircraft would “ensure effective US direction of this sensitive operation in both planning and execution.”

As for the second course, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary that reconnaissance and punitive ground operations into Laos could locate, harass, and perhaps destroy enemy installations and troop formations. Even moderate success would increase the enemy’s already sizable problems in supplying men and materiel to the Viet Cong and would reinforce the signal to Hanoi. The Joint Chiefs suggested a range of activities, from intelligence probes and raids by South Vietnamese Special Forces and Rangers to overt attacks by RVNAF Airborne Brigade units of up to battalion size. To achieve worthwhile results, however, the Joint Chiefs believed, US advisers must accompany the South Vietnamese units.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff viewed the third course of action as an extension of the operations that had been going on since February 1964 under OPLAN 34A. As conducted thus far, this had been “a modest, covert, psychological and punitive campaign” against North Vietnam in which no air strikes had yet been mounted. The Joint Chiefs said that air missions by unmarked aircraft with non-American crews “to mine selected harbors and rivers and to strike prime military targets” could punish the enemy and, again, “signal sharply” to Hanoi and Peking.

Since these actions had been chosen as unlikely to trigger a communist escalation of the Southeast Asian conflict, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not recommend moving US combat units into South Vietnam or nearby at the present time. They observed that “the introduction of US combat forces which would sit idle could well have a psychological impact on both friends and enemies the reverse of that desired.”

The Joint Chiefs advised Secretary McNamara that the three courses of action they had described could prove militarily and psychologically beneficial to the war effort in South Vietnam, provided they did not siphon off needed resources or distract the Saigon leaders from their main mission—winning the counterinsurgency battle. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, nevertheless, that “these actions would not significantly affect communist support of Viet Cong operations in South Vietnam.” They noted that some of the actions might have politically counterproductive results in Laos. In conclusion, they recommended that Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland be “queried as to the feasibility and desirability of undertaking the foregoing measures.”¹³

As the Joint Chiefs had requested, copies of their memorandum went to Ambassador Taylor, COMUSMACV, and CINCPAC. In addition, Secretary of State Rusk and various White House officials reviewed it. Michael Forrestal considered the Chiefs’ memorandum “a very significant step forward, since it gives their tentative approval to the very limited kinds of actions which we may want to use in the event Hanoi steps things up, or in the event we need a low key military accompaniment to our diplomatic activities concerning Laos.” Before further consideration of the Joint Chiefs’ proposals, however, enemy military action changed the circumstances.¹⁴

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident

Since late 1962, US Navy destroyers under CINCPAC’s command had conducted occasional patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin, under the code name DE SOTO, to collect various forms of electronic intelligence about North Vietnam. Frequently, the patrolling ships came under communist air or surface surveillance. The most recent DE SOTO patrol had been run in early March 1964. In July, CINCPAC recommended that another patrol be scheduled to investigate North Vietnamese coast defense activity. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved, directing that the patrol begin not later than 31 July. The DE SOTO missions had no direct connection with OPLAN 34A maritime operations, which occurred in the same coastal areas, although information gained from the patrols at

times supported the raids. North Vietnam, however, made no distinction between the two forms of activity; by late July, its navy of fast gunboats and torpedo boats was becoming increasingly aggressive in pursuing the South Vietnamese raiders. A major OPLAN 34A raid occurred the night of 30–31 July, just as the DE SOTO patrol was beginning. During the ensuing days, US signal intelligence picked up an increasing volume of North Vietnamese traffic indicating preparations to attack the patrolling destroyer, which the communists connected with the 34A raids.¹⁵

The attack came on 2 August. On that day, the destroyer USS *Maddox* was carrying out its intelligence mission in international waters off the North Vietnamese coast. Toward mid-afternoon, local time, the ship's radar detected three torpedo boats approaching at high speed. When the boats closed to 9,000 yards with apparent hostile intent, the *Maddox* fired three warning shots and when these were disregarded opened fire with its 5-inch battery. The North Vietnamese boats pressed their attack, launching two torpedoes and firing machine guns. The *Maddox* evaded the torpedoes but was hit by one bullet, which was recovered, providing physical evidence of the attack. Meanwhile, the destroyer's guns had scored a direct hit on one enemy boat. Within fifteen minutes of the start of the engagement, four aircraft from the carrier USS *Ticonderoga* joined the action and attacked the torpedo boats, two of which retreated toward shore while the third lay dead in the water and burning. Both Americans and North Vietnamese initially reported the burning vessel as sunk, but its crew managed to restart their engine and limp back to shore with four dead and six wounded men on board out of the complement of twelve. The *Maddox* retired southward to rendezvous with the destroyer USS *C. Turner Joy*.¹⁶

First reports of the engagement reached Washington shortly after four o'clock in the morning on the US east coast. At 1130 on 2 August, President Johnson discussed the incident at the White House with Secretary Rusk, Under Secretary of State George Ball, Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance, General Wheeler, and intelligence experts. After reviewing the latest reports, including intercepted enemy communications, the officials concluded that a local North Vietnamese commander rather than the Hanoi government had probably initiated the attack. Hence, they decided against retaliation. However, they also determined to continue the DE SOTO patrols with two destroyers instead of one and to send a strong protest to North Vietnam.¹⁷

At 1225 Washington time, General Wheeler instructed Admiral Sharp, CINCPAC, to continue the patrols and to maintain air cover over the ships during daylight. The destroyers were to keep a minimum of 11 miles from the North Vietnamese coast and were to stay away from areas where OPLAN 34A maritime operations were going on. Admiral Sharp was to warn his local commanders to be "extremely watchful" for any hostile action "including possible submarine activity" either against the patrol or against the *Ticonderoga* task force. Later on the 2nd, General Wheeler directed that "In the event US vessels are attacked in international waters (11 miles offshore or more), you will seek to destroy the attacking forces." However, "pursuit into hostile waters or air space is not authorized."¹⁸

On 3 August, the State Department transmitted to Hanoi through the International Control Commission its official protest concerning the Tonkin Gulf incident. The US Government announced that it took an “extremely serious view” of this “unprovoked attack” on a US naval vessel operating on the high seas. It warned the North Vietnamese regime of “the grave consequences which would inevitably result from any further unprovoked offensive military action against United States forces.” On the same day, at an impromptu press conference, President Johnson publicly announced the instructions he had given the US Navy to continue the DE SOTO patrols and to destroy any force attacking American ships in international waters.¹⁹

The *Maddox* and *C. Turner Joy* maintained their patrol on 3 August without incident. On the evening of 4 August, however, while the destroyers were near the center of the Gulf, about 65 miles from land, they received a report from a signal intelligence station at Phu Bai warning of a possible North Vietnamese attack on the ships that night. A short time later, the ships began picking up radar contacts that appeared to be enemy torpedo boats closing for attack. For the next two hours, the destroyers maneuvered and fired against targets located only on radar, although some crew members later reported fragmentary glimpses of torpedo wakes and other indications of enemy presence. Aircraft from the *Ticonderoga* arrived to support the destroyers, but their pilots sighted no targets due to a low cloud ceiling. When the apparent attack ended, the *C. Turner Joy* claimed one boat sunk by its guns and another damaged. An intercepted enemy radio message seemed to confirm this claim. Neither destroyer was hit, and there were no US casualties.²⁰

During the years since the incident, it has been established that the 4 August attack never occurred. Far from pursuing the destroyers, the North Vietnamese navy spent 3–4 August salvaging the vessels damaged in the fighting of the 2nd. US commanders on the scene were misled by false radar returns, questionable sonar reports, eye witnesses bewildered by weather (low clouds and thunderstorms) and darkness, and misinterpreted and mishandled signals intelligence. At the time, however, President Johnson and his senior advisers, after reviewing the evidence available to them, concluded that a second attack had indeed taken place. They acted on that assumption.²¹

In the highest councils in Washington, there was never any doubt that US retaliation must follow any second North Vietnamese attack on US warships in international waters. At 1000 EDT on 4 August, upon receipt of the first alert (from intercepted radio transmissions) that attack on the DE SOTO patrol might be imminent, Secretary McNamara assembled an ad hoc group consisting of the Deputy Secretary; the Director, Joint Staff; the Director J-3; and several J-3 officers to consider possible action. Using the existing list of targets in North Vietnam, the group developed options for retaliatory attacks. They paid particular attention to installations directly related to the hostile action, namely, North Vietnamese torpedo and gun boat bases and their supporting fueling facilities.

Reports that the destroyers were actually engaging the enemy reached the group at about 1100. The discussion shifted to a meeting of the Secretary of Defense with

the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also attended by the Secretary of State and McGeorge Bundy from the White House. When Secretaries Rusk and McNamara departed the Pentagon about 1145 for a scheduled National Security Council meeting, they were prepared to recommend to the President retaliatory action in the form of air strikes against the North Vietnamese boat bases and associated POL storage facilities. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were to send detailed recommendations to the White House as quickly as possible. In further deliberations, the Joint Chiefs agreed to recommend that the United States strike hard on 5 August against several listed bases and the POL tanks in the port city of Vinh. At lunch with Secretaries Rusk, McNamara, and other senior advisers after the NSC meeting, President Johnson directed a retaliatory strike along the lines the Joint Chiefs had proposed.

At 1500, Secretary McNamara met again with the Joint Chiefs. He brought word that the President had approved their target list with some modifications. He had added two base areas but had decided that, except for striking the storage tanks, the US attacks would be mounted against the boats only, not against the bases or port facilities. Later that afternoon, the NSC convened again to confirm the decision and discuss plans for a public announcement by the President.²²

At 1715 EDT (2115 in Southeast Asia) on 4 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to conduct a one-time maximum effort attack at first light on 5 August against the petroleum storage facilities at Vinh and against gunboats and torpedo boats located at five bases in North Vietnam. In addition, he was to attack any enemy boats found at sea beyond the 3-mile limit. Carrier aircraft only were to be employed, with all planes avoiding China's Hainan Island and keeping at least 50 miles away from the Chinese border. No USAF aircraft were involved because the Thai government had not given its permission for US planes based in Thailand to fly missions against North Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also directed continuation of the DE SOTO patrols but deferred all OPLAN 34A activities for 24 hours. The retaliatory operation received the code name PIERCE ARROW.²³

Less than four hours after issuing the attack order, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC and other commanders to conduct a series of air, sea, and ground force deployments and issue movement alerts drawn from OPLAN 37-64 for defense of Southeast Asia. The deployments were designed to advance American forces toward or into Southeast Asia in order to discourage enemy reaction to PIERCE ARROW and to improve United States readiness for immediate operations against North Vietnam if necessary. In perhaps the most significant of these movements, two B-57 jet bomber squadrons deployed from the Philippines to Bien Hoa in South Vietnam, where they remained after the immediate emergency had passed.²⁴

Late on the evening of 4 August in Washington, President Johnson addressed the American people by radio and television. He reported that the North Vietnamese had made a second deliberate attack and declared that such acts of violence against the US armed forces "must be met not only with alert defense but with positive reply." That reply, he said, "is being given as I speak to you tonight. Air action is now in execution

against gunboats and certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam which have been used in these hostile operations.” The President expressed confidence that this latest act of communist aggression would cause all Americans to redouble their determination to fulfill the US commitment to the people and government of South Vietnam. “Yet,” he concluded, “our response, for the moment, will be limited and fitting . . . We still seek no wider war.”²⁵

The President actually spoke at a time between the launching of strike aircraft from the *Ticonderoga* (050243Z) and the *Constellation* (050500Z) and before any of them had reached the target areas. Navy A-1 Skyraiders, A-4 Skyhawks, and F-8 Crusaders flew 64 sorties²⁶ in PIERCE ARROW against four boat bases (strikes on the fifth were diverted due to unfavorable weather) and the POL facility at the port city of Vinh. According to bomb damage assessments, 90 percent of the latter target was destroyed, along with 8 gunboats and torpedo boats. Twenty more vessels suffered various degrees of damage. These results came at a cost. North Vietnamese antiaircraft gunners shot down two US planes. One of the Navy pilots was killed. The other, Lieutenant Everett Alvarez, Jr., became the first US airman captured by North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese, who claimed to have downed 8 US aircraft, subsequently proclaimed the 5 August action a great victory and adopted the date as their Navy Day.²⁷

The Joint Congressional Resolution

In response to the Tonkin Gulf incidents, the administration decided to seek Congressional endorsement of military action in Southeast Asia. Such a resolution had been under discussion in the President’s councils for some months, with the remaining issue being the legislative timing. In the light of the incidents, the President decided to seek Congressional support immediately in case further military action became necessary. On 4 August, the President met with Congressional leaders of both parties, explained the administration’s planned military operations, and obtained pledges of quick action on a resolution of support.²⁸

In a message to Congress the following day, Mr. Johnson reviewed the 10-year history of the US commitment in Southeast Asia, including its SEATO obligations, and the military responses he had been compelled to make to communist attacks on American forces. Now, he said, “I have concluded that I should . . . ask the Congress, on its part, to join in affirming the national determination that all such attacks will be met, and that the United States will continue in its basic policy of assisting the free nations of the area to defend their freedom.” President Johnson reiterated that the United States “intends no rashness, and seeks no wider war.” Nevertheless, the United States was “united in its determination to bring about the end of Communist subversion and aggression in the area.” The President declared that the United States sought the “full and effective restoration” of the Geneva agreements of 1954 with respect to South Vietnam, and the

Geneva agreements of 1962 regarding Laos. He recommended that the Senate and House of Representatives pass a resolution:

expressing the support of the Congress for all necessary action to protect our Armed Forces and to assist nations covered by the SEATO Treaty. At the same time, I assure the Congress that we shall continue readily to explore any avenues of political solution that will effectively guarantee the removal of Communist subversion and preservation of the independence of the nations in the area.

As still another reason for passing the resolution, President Johnson reminded Congress that “we are entering on 3 months of political campaigning. Hostile nations must understand that in such a period the United States will continue to protect its national interests, and that in these matters there is no division among us.”²⁹

Immediately introduced, the resolution, after a preamble reviewing recent events, closely followed the text that the President’s advisers had discussed in earlier months. As ultimately passed, its operative sections declared that Congress “approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” The resolution affirmed that the United States regarded as “vital to its national interest and to world peace” the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia. To that end:

Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

The resolution was to expire when the President determined that the peace and security of Southeast Asia were “reasonably assured by international conditions,” except that “it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.”³⁰

On the morning of 6 August, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, accompanied by General Wheeler, testified together in support of the resolution before a joint meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees. Secretary Rusk described the purpose of the resolution and noted its similarity to the Formosa resolution of 1955, the Middle East resolution of 1958, and the Cuba resolution of 1962, all of which had authorized and been followed by military action. Rusk, however, did not “suggest that any of these actions may serve as a parallel for what may be required in Southeast Asia.” Secretary McNamara described the two Tonkin Gulf attacks in detail and insisted that there was no connection between the DE SOTO patrols and 34A operations. General Wheeler stated the Joint Chiefs’ unanimous endorsement of the retaliatory raids, which they considered appropriate under the circumstances. The Senators’ questions centered

on what had happened in the Gulf and on whether the resolution represented an appropriate delegation of power to the President. The Committees overwhelmingly endorsed the resolution and reported it to the full Senate.³¹

On the Senate floor, Senator J. William Fulbright (D) of Arkansas, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, took the lead in explaining and supporting the resolution. He recommended “prompt and overwhelming endorsement,” declaring that passage would make clear to the communist powers “that their aggressive and expansionist ambitions, wherever advanced, will meet precisely the degree of American opposition which is necessary to frustrate them.” Specifically, “the intent is to prevent the continuing aggression that now exists against South Vietnam.”

The critical question, to which Senators returned repeatedly in the debate, was whether the Southeast Asia resolution constituted an advance authorization and approval for the deployment of US combat forces, perhaps in large numbers, to South Vietnam. Senator Fulbright found nothing in the wording that contemplated or encouraged such a course, which he personally considered “unwise under any circumstances.” On the other hand, he admitted that “the language of the resolution would not prevent” such a deployment, since it authorized whatever action the President as Commander in Chief found necessary. Senator John Sherman Cooper (R) of Kentucky asked Senator Fulbright whether “if the President decided that it was necessary to use such force as could lead us into war, we will give that authority by this resolution?” Senator Fulbright replied, “That is the way I would interpret it.” Senator Fulbright expressed the hope, which he said the President fully shared, that the combined effect of the resolution and the military action already taken would deter North Vietnam from further aggression.

While some Senators expressed misgivings about the resolution’s grant of power to the President, two—Wayne Morse (D) of Oregon and Ernest Gruening (D) of Alaska—opposed it outright. They thought it embodied a dangerous and unnecessary enlargement of presidential authority, and Morse in addition challenged the veracity of the administration’s account of the Tonkin Gulf incidents. Senator Morse called the resolution “a predated declaration of war”; Senator Gruening said it authorized “escalation unlimited.” The Congress did not agree with them. On 7 August, the House of Representatives approved the Southeast Asia Resolution by a vote of 416 to 0. The Senate voted 88 to 2 (Morse and Gruening) for the resolution, with all 10 of the absent Senators announced as favoring it.³²

The United Nations and Communist Response

On 5 August, before the United Nations Security Council, Ambassador Adlai Stevenson charged North Vietnam with deliberate aggression against US naval forces. He defended the PIERCE ARROW attacks as an act of self-defense fully consonant with international law and the United Nations Charter. As directed by the State Department, he sought no specific Security Council action but dwelt instead on the ultimate goal of

the United States in Southeast Asia: “nothing more, and nothing less, than the assured and guaranteed independence of the peoples of the area.” This end could be readily achieved whenever the Hanoi regime ceased its aggressive support of insurgency and agreed to abide by the Geneva Accords and Agreements. “Any time that decision can be put in enforceable terms,” Ambassador Stevenson said, “my Government will be only too happy to put down the burden that we have been sharing with those determined to preserve their independence.” The Security Council debated further but took no action.³³

Although not a UN member, the Hanoi regime made its views known through various channels. The North Vietnamese acknowledged attacking the *Maddox* on 2 August. They alleged that the ship had intruded within their claimed 12-mile territorial limit and had been providing protective cover for a South Vietnamese naval raid on the night of 30–31 July. United States officials denied that the DE SOTO patrol bore any relationship to “whatever may have been going on” along the North Vietnamese coast. As for the second attack on 4 August, Hanoi denied its occurrence (truthfully, as is now known), charging that the United States had fabricated the incident to justify the “illegal” strikes against the North Vietnamese naval bases.³⁴

Both Hanoi and Beijing issued threats of grave consequences. North Vietnam continued to carry out the Politburo decisions of early 1964, preparing to expand the main force war in the South. The most observable communist action was continued improvement of North Vietnam’s air defenses. On 7 August, the United States determined that 36 MIG 15 and 17 jet fighters had arrived at Phuc Yen airfield. According to North Vietnamese accounts, these aircraft belonged to the *921st Air Force Fighter Regiment*, the nation’s first unit of modern jets, which had just completed “a period of training in a foreign country.”³⁵

The View from Saigon

Through a message delivered by Ambassador Taylor, President Johnson informed General Khanh of the US intention to mount the PIERCE ARROW operation. The President declared: “The measures I have ordered are intended to make unmistakably clear to the Communist leaders in Hanoi that the United States defends its rights and that our commitment to assist your country in preserving her freedom and independence cannot be shaken” Ambassador Taylor outlined for Khanh the force movements and alerts, including the deployment of the B-57 squadrons to South Vietnam that the United States was undertaking to strengthen its position in Southeast Asia. General Westmoreland met with General Khanh and his senior commanders regarding preparations to counter any enemy retaliation in the South and, as noted previously, initiated combined planning for action against North Vietnam. General Khanh was greatly heartened by the American action. He responded by declaring that the United States need not seek permission to send its forces into his country, particularly if time was pressing.³⁶

The Embassy assessed the reaction of the South Vietnamese people to the United States attacks on the North as highly favorable. To many, the action indicated a stronger US commitment to Southeast Asia than they had formerly believed existed. Spokesmen for the major religious and political factions hailed the event. But as the weeks passed with no further direct US action, Embassy observers sensed a let-down. The Vietnamese public did not readily grasp that the United States had intended the raid as a measured and specific response to an attack on its own forces, rather than as the opening round in continuing hostilities against North Vietnam.³⁷

On 7 August, General Khanh seized the occasion to declare a state of emergency in South Vietnam. He issued decrees warning of imminent attack from the North and instituting drastic measures for control of the population. The decrees suspended many of the normal rights of citizens and gave the Military Revolutionary Council extraordinary powers of search and arrest, as well as banning strikes and certain demonstrations and public meetings. Any violation of public order or of “national security” came under the jurisdiction of military courts. The US Embassy reported that “terrorists, people who indulge in sabotage, speculators harmful to the national economy, caught red-handed, will be sentenced to death” without right of appeal. Further intensifying the atmosphere of crisis, South Vietnamese officials announced the beginning of an air raid shelter program in Saigon.³⁸

The date of the decrees, 7 August, marked the end of Ambassador Taylor’s first month of service. By that time, he had gained a full appreciation of the pressures and uncertainties under which General Khanh was working. He had learned that General Khanh’s three civilian Vice Premiers, as well as factions among the RVNAF generals, were either disloyal to General Khanh or jockeying for power among themselves. General Khanh, Ambassador Taylor reported, had suggested that the Ambassador could help him by doing two things: spreading the word that the United States opposed any further coups, and talking with the factious generals about the undesirability of partisan politics within the armed forces. Ambassador Taylor had promised to do what he could on both counts. He observed to Washington that General Khanh “was and is our boy for the cold-blooded reason that we see no substitute leader capable of carrying forward the pacification campaign.”³⁹

By early August, Ambassador Taylor also could point to some progress. As he had promised earlier, General Khanh had designated government officials with responsibilities paralleling those of particular members of the US Mission Council, with whom they would consult directly and continuously. General Westmoreland and the South Vietnamese had made a start on combined planning for military pressures against North Vietnam. Combined planning, which Ambassador Lodge had instituted as one of his last actions, for comprehensive pacification of the critical provinces around Saigon had been in progress since July. By 10 August, this plan was well advanced, named HOP TAC (Cooperation) by the Vietnamese and PICA I (Pacification Intensification in Critical Areas) by the Americans. It called for a civilian-military effort by Americans and Vietnamese working within a single specially created organization to spread “oil spots”

of government control outward from secure areas. The US Mission hoped that the planning and implementation of HOP TAC would exercise General Khanh's government in a way that improved its functioning; that effective social, economic, and administrative services would be developed in the affected areas; and that "some pragmatic military successes" would be achieved that would raise morale and drive the Viet Cong from the nation's heartland.⁴⁰

On 10 August, Ambassador Taylor provided his Washington superiors with a general survey of the situation. He noted that US advisers in the field held a more favorable view of the military situation than did US officials in Saigon. RVNAF and territorial personnel strength had begun to rise slowly and the trend was continuing. By January 1965, the Ambassador predicted, their total number would come close to the year-end target strength of 446,000. The US advisers judged more than 90 percent of ARVN battalions to be at least "marginally effective." South Vietnam's Air Force was receiving A-1H aircraft on schedule; three squadrons would be combat-ready by 30 September and a fourth by December.

But the Viet Cong had also shown improvement. The Ambassador wrote, "In terms of equipment and training, the VC are better armed and led today than ever in the past." Infiltration was continuing, both from Laos and Cambodia; and the Viet Cong showed "no indication" of having difficulty in replacing losses in men and equipment. "However," Ambassador Taylor continued, "there is no reason to believe that in the coming months, they will wish to risk their past gains in an overt military confrontation with GVN forces" Ambassador Taylor believed that the Viet Cong would continue their tactics of terrorism and harassment with the aim of demoralizing South Vietnam to the point of accepting a political settlement favorable to the insurgents. Rather than seeking to conquer by conventional military means, the enemy looked to neutralization and a coalition government as the road to domination.

The South Vietnamese government remained the most variable and uncertain element in the equation. Ambassador Taylor observed that the Khanh government "has lasted six months and has about a 50/50 chance of lasting out the year, although probably not without some changed faces in the cabinet." General Khanh and many of his colleagues "are finding it very difficult to face up to the long years of slow hard slugging which is all they see ahead under the present rules of operational conduct." In the coming months, Ambassador Taylor predicted, "we may expect to face mounting pressures from the GVN to win the war by direct attack on Hanoi, which, if resisted, will create frictions and irritations." These could lead some politicians to "serious consideration of a negotiated solution" or soldiers to "a military adventure without US consent."

Ambassador Taylor concluded his report of 10 August by recommending that during the coming months the United States: 1) do everything possible to bolster the Khanh government; 2) improve the pacification program by concentrating on critical areas such as the provinces around Saigon; 3) undertake "show-window" social and economic projects in secure rural and urban areas; 4) keep the public informed of what the United States Government was doing and why; and 5) prepare to implement contingency plans against North Vietnam, with optimum readiness by 1 January 1965.⁴¹

The last of these points repeated a recommendation the Ambassador had made the previous day, in a message devoted more specifically to military measures. In that message, Ambassador Taylor noted that all OPLAN 34A activities would remain under suspension until further notice from Washington. In deciding whether to resume the OPLAN 34A raids, the United States must take into account the appearance of MIG 15s and 17s in North Vietnam; but since the planes presumably lacked all-weather or night interception capabilities, the Ambassador believed that the United States could accept the risk of nighttime operations and daylight activities in international waters. Ambassador Taylor recommended continuing the DE SOTO patrols and conducting air sweeps over international waters with authority to attack enemy boats and aircraft under relaxed rules of engagement. He thought this measure justified by the recent attacks on US vessels.

Ambassador Taylor recommended that the United States begin armed reconnaissance over the Laos Panhandle, progressively attacking the most clearly identified infiltration facilities. Pilots should have authority to strike specific fixed targets, to attack road traffic in delimited areas, and to conduct fire suppression attacks against anti-aircraft positions. The Ambassador recommended finally that the United States prepare to undertake some of the air strikes against North Vietnam provided for in CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64. This should be done after completing the following actions: 1) publicize effectively the evidence of continuing infiltration and control of the insurgency from North Vietnam; 2) accomplish combined planning with Saigon; and 3) establish evidence of sufficient pacification progress in the provinces around Saigon to warrant undertaking a new military commitment. Allowing time for completion of this program, Ambassador Taylor estimated that 1 January 1965 should be the target date for beginning the bombing of North Vietnam. In effect, he called for implementation of some of the actions listed under Recommendations 11 and 12 of NSAM 288.⁴²

Continued Policy Deliberations in Washington

Ambassador Taylor's recommendations arrived in Washington during extensive Executive Branch consultations about the next steps to be taken in Southeast Asia. At a White House meeting of the President and his senior advisers on 10 August, Secretary of State Rusk urged that the US "hold up" on OPLAN 34A actions, DE SOTO patrols, and "any additions to our present course," so as to keep responsibility for escalation on the other side. The President took a more aggressive stance. He expressed his "basic satisfaction" with "what had been accomplished in the last week." He warned, however, that "if we should do nothing further, we could find ourselves even worse off than before this last set of events Instead of letting the other side have the ball, we should be prepared to take it." President Johnson asked the officials present for "prompt study and recommendations as to ways this might be done with maximum results and minimum danger."⁴³

Following this meeting, General Wheeler informed his JCS colleagues that the Secretaries of State and Defense had undertaken to pursue three key questions: 1) what, if any, actions should be undertaken in the Laos Panhandle? 2) should the tempo of Operation Plan 34A activities be increased? and 3) should we initiate a tit-for-tat program of retaliation, or should we do something more, against North Vietnam? If so, what and when? The Joint Chiefs of Staff began preparing their views; but before completing this major exercise, they responded to two other initiatives: a draft policy paper by Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs William P. Bundy, and a troop request from General Westmoreland.⁴⁴

In his paper, "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," dated 13 August, Secretary Bundy laid out in detail the steps to be taken over the remaining months of 1964. He identified the next ten days or so as a "short holding phase," during which the United States should avoid any measures that could be considered provocative or that would obscure responsibility for escalation of hostilities should the North Vietnamese turn to stronger action. DE SOTO patrols and new OPLAN 34A activities, for instance, should be suspended. Thereafter, toward the end of August, the United States should take more active measures.

Mr. Bundy pointed out three problematic elements in the situation confronting the United States. First, Mr. Bundy concluded on the basis of Ambassador Taylor's reports that "South Vietnam is not going well." In particular, the morale of General Khanh and other Saigon leaders was shaky. US retaliation in the Tonkin Gulf had lifted South Vietnamese spirits temporarily, but the effect would be lost if the Viet Cong had successes and the United States did nothing further. Second, progress along the "negotiating track" in Laos now was running too fast for US interests. If a movement toward an international conference on Laotian problems gained greater momentum, the United States might have to refuse to participate, in order to avoid a seriously unfavorable impact on Saigon's morale.

The third element was the attitude of the communist leaders in Hanoi and Beijing. Secretary Bundy opined that the Tonkin Gulf retaliation had discouraged them from any further attacks on US forces. The other side, however, "are certainly not persuaded that they must abandon their efforts in South Vietnam and Laos"; and they might still doubt that the United States would take stronger action in response to increases in infiltration or Viet Cong activity. Therefore, Mr. Bundy wrote:

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 the idea of getting out. Negotiation without continued military action will not achieve our objectives in the foreseeable future. But military pressure could be accompanied by attempts to communicate ... provided always that we make it clear both to the Communists and to 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.

Secretary Bundy then listed certain limited pressures that the United States could apply against North Vietnam from late August through December. These included continuation of OPLAN 34A activities and possible open acknowledgement and justification of them by Saigon. The United States could press on with combined planning with the South Vietnamese while deliberately leaking word of it to North Vietnam. Training of VNAF pilots in jet aircraft could be speeded up and publicized. The United States could resume DE SOTO patrols while carefully dissociating them from the OPLAN 34A raids; and it could mount specific retaliatory bombing or mining actions in response to any major Viet Cong or North Vietnamese provocation, such as a terrorist attack on American dependents. Lastly, the allies could conduct cross-border operations into the Laos panhandle on a limited scale. The VNAF might strike selected targets in the infiltration areas, while the United States continued its own aerial reconnaissance, possibly with suppressive missions added. Secretary Bundy ruled out ground operations, however. To be successful, those would require greater forces than South Vietnam could spare from the pacification effort; and, in Mr. Bundy's view, employment of US or Thai forces should not be considered at present.

Admittedly, Secretary Bundy wrote, these limited actions did not add up to "a truly coherent program of strong enough pressure either to bring Hanoi around or to sustain a pressure posture into some kind of discussion." Hence, "we should continue absolutely opposed" to any international conference on Vietnam. All the proposed measures fell short of systematic military action against North Vietnam. The United States might decide to move on to such action at some time during the remaining months of 1964, in response to some incident or because of deteriorating conditions in South Vietnam. If not, planning should continue aimed at the starting date suggested by Ambassador Taylor, 1 January 1965. As to specific measures, "our present thinking is that systematic action against the DRV might start by progressive attacks keyed to the rationale of infiltration routes and facilities, followed by other selected military-related targets."⁴⁵

On 14 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff delivered their comments on the Mr. Bundy memorandum to the Secretary of Defense. They expressed general agreement with Bundy's proposed policy and courses of action, provided that the more serious military pressures were applied, "as necessary," along with the limited ones. Repeating some of the language of their 2 July submission, they emphasized that attacks on North Vietnamese targets should have the objective of "destroying the DRV will and capabilities" to continue supporting the insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs believed that the recent strikes in response to the Tonkin Gulf attacks had "conveyed to both friend and enemy the measure of US resolution in Southeast Asia. The sudden advantage gained by this military action must be retained." The actions proposed, if promptly pursued, should sustain the US advantage and maintain the higher morale that had been generated among South Vietnam's leaders. Referring to the study begun on 10 August, the JCS informed Mr. McNamara that they were preparing as a matter of urgency fuller recommendations on military courses of action.⁴⁶

Even as the Joint Chiefs pondered their new recommendations, they responded tepidly to one from General Westmoreland. As additional US aircraft units arrived at South Vietnamese bases in the post Tonkin Gulf deployments, the MACV commander saw them as tempting targets for communist retaliation for any future allied attacks on North Vietnam. Conceivably, the enemy could strike the air fields, especially Da Nang in the north, with their new jet force. Much more probable were infantry and mortar attacks by the Viet Cong, possibly reinforced by infiltrated North Vietnamese regulars. The South Vietnamese Army, responsible for defending the American bases, could guard against such attacks only by diverting troops from the pacification campaign, thereby risking “serious loss of government control over sizeable areas and their populations.”

Anticipating this eventuality, on 15 August General Westmoreland suggested the deployment of US ground troops—specifically a Marine Expeditionary Brigade and either the 173rd Airborne Brigade from Okinawa or a brigade from the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii—for base defense at Da Nang and the Tan Son Nhut/Bien Hoa complex. Already alerted as part of the post Tonkin Gulf actions, these brigades should move at once to South Vietnam “in the event of an attack on Da Nang judged by COMUSMACV to be beyond the capability of the RVNAF to handle or a decision to execute operation plans ... likely to cause retaliatory actions against SVN.” Against the air threat, Westmoreland called for the immediate deployment of one Marine and two Army antiaircraft missile battalions to Da Nang, Saigon, and Nha Trang. To support these contingency forces, as well as those already in South Vietnam, General Westmoreland asked for the deployment of a small Army logistic command, an engineer group, and a signal battalion. Admiral Sharp endorsed Westmoreland’s proposals, and Ambassador Taylor declared them to be precautions that should be taken before any additional attacks on North Vietnam.⁴⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff declined to endorse most of the proposed deployments. They noted that the requested Marine and Army brigades already were prepared for rapid deployment in emergencies; the Marine brigade actually was afloat as an amphibious force in readiness. They promised only to give “full consideration” to General Westmoreland’s recommendations if the United States launched any major new escalation. The Joint Chiefs rejected outright COMUSMACV’s request for additional support troops. Pointing to an armed forces wide shortage of logistical units, they declared it “inadvisable” to assign any to Vietnam solely in anticipation of possible future deployments of combat forces. Only the request for antiaircraft battalions met a favorable response from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense. Preparation for this deployment began in September. General Westmoreland made no further request for combat units; but he persisted in pressing for augmentation of his support forces, which he considered necessary to solve existing logistical problems as well as to prepare for contingencies.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, administration officials continued their consideration of William Bundy’s paper. On 14 August, the State Department passed it to Ambassador Taylor with a request for his judgment on whether the program Mr. Bundy outlined would maintain the morale of the Saigon leaders. By that date, also, the administration was planning to bring Ambassador Taylor back to Washington near the end of August for important

consultations. Ambassador Taylor drafted his comments on the Bundy memorandum just as a new political upheaval was beginning in South Vietnam, triggered by an attempt by General Khanh to restructure the government. The ensuing turmoil and deterioration of the Saigon regime would influence the Johnson administration's deliberations on further steps in Southeast Asia.⁴⁹

US Action Awaits Stability in Saigon

By mid-August 1964, the Johnson administration had taken tentative steps toward bringing military pressure to bear on North Vietnam to cease its support of the Viet Cong. At the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both Pacific Command and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, had drafted contingency plans for various levels of air attack on the north. MACV had commenced combined planning with the South Vietnamese for such operations. Under close supervision from Washington, MACV had begun implementing the OPLAN 34A series of small covert South Vietnamese airborne and amphibious raids north of the Demilitarized Zone; and US planes were flying limited reconnaissance and strike missions in Laos. After Hanoi's torpedo boats attacked a US destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin on 2 August and were believed to have attacked again on the 4th, American aircraft conducted a one-time reprisal bombing of North Vietnamese boat bases and oil installations. On 7 August, President Johnson secured from Congress a resolution that authorized him to take "all necessary steps, including the use of armed force," to assist any Southeast Asian country facing Communist aggression. The concerned headquarters continued planning for escalation even as additional US air and naval forces positioned themselves for intervention in Southeast Asia.

For the next four months, however, the administration took no additional major escalatory steps. The President sought to balance his commitment to his domestic "Great Society" program with his desire not to lose South Vietnam to Communism, and he wanted above all to maintain his "peace candidate" image in the election campaign. Hence, he took care to avoid dramatic military action in Southeast Asia until after November. In addition, a new political crisis developed in South Vietnam, as the regime of General Khanh ran into difficulties largely of the general's own making. The senior US officials in Saigon urged the administration to hold off major action against North Vietnam, which might provoke enemy retaliation in the South, until they could stabilize

their ally's political situation. In view of all these factors, President Johnson held back from further escalation, in spite of repeated urging from the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he take decisive military action.

The Khanh Regime Stumbles

Since his coup of 30 January 1964, General Khanh had ruled as South Vietnam's Premier and strongman, with the full support of the United States. Early in August, he proposed a new provisional constitution, which he claimed would reorganize the government for more effective action and constitute a "logical follow-up" to the emergency powers he had assumed on 7 August during the Tonkin Gulf crisis. Under General Khanh's proposed constitution, the Military Revolutionary Council (MRC), the body of generals that had governed since the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem, would be replaced by a legislative assembly. The assembly would have 150 members, 60 appointed by military officers, 60 elected by provincial councils, and 30 appointed by Saigon politicians. The constitution would establish a President as the single executive, eliminating the existing Chief of State and Vice Premier positions. General Khanh, of course, expected to be chosen President.

Ambassador Taylor reluctantly recommended that the US acquiesce in General Khanh's arrangement even though it was likely to be viewed as an "unduly permanent formalization of [a] military takeover." "Whether we like it or not," the Ambassador wrote, "this is the constitutional form which the MRC fully intends to impose and we see no alternative but to make the best of it." The Department of State approved this course of action.¹

On 16 August, the Military Revolutionary Council proclaimed the new constitution and elected General Khanh President of the Vietnamese Republic. While declaring that the new constitution was a move toward the fuller practice of democracy, General Khanh reserved virtually absolute powers to the presidency for the duration of the emergency he had already proclaimed as premier.

Far from creating a more effective government, General Khanh's maneuver set off a prolonged political crisis in South Vietnam. The powerful, militant Buddhists, along with university students and other groups, took to the streets of Saigon and Hue to protest against the new charter and General Khanh's arbitrary elevation. Amidst continuing riots and demonstrations, the MRC on 25 August withdrew the Khanh constitution, although the general continued as premier. The administration in Washington publicly reaffirmed United States support of General Khanh, while Ambassador Taylor consulted with the South Vietnamese leader, who became increasingly depressed by the failure of his plan. On 29 August, General Khanh, reportedly suffering a "breakdown," temporarily relinquished his post in favor of a civilian acting premier.²

On 3 September, after additional political maneuvering, General Khanh returned to the capital and resumed the premiership. He did so under an agreement with the

Buddhists that amounted to a substantial capitulation by General Khanh. Accepting a Buddhist formula, General Khanh pledged that the government would be reorganized during a two-month transition period. By the end of October, the military leaders would be prepared to withdraw from government and devote themselves to directing the war effort. An entirely civilian administration then would take control. This compromise brought temporary political peace, but left General Khanh much weakened in power and prestige.³

This agreement notwithstanding, political turmoil continued in South Vietnam. On 13 September, the commanders of the ARVN IV Corps and 7th Division attempted a coup, their troops occupying Saigon. The coup quickly collapsed when the rest of the armed forces declined to join it. A group of young generals promoted by General Khanh after the January coup—notably General Nguyen Cao Ky, the Vietnamese Air Force commander—played a critical role in suppressing the uprising. Known as the Young Turks, these officers emerged from the incident as the dominant faction in the military leadership and constituted a new political power group in Saigon.⁴

Less than a week after the coup attempt, new trouble flared up. On the night of 19–20 September, the Montagnard Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) rebelled at four camps in South Vietnam's central highlands. The CIDG was composed of mountain tribesmen under ethnic Vietnamese officers, with US Special Forces teams and advisers attached. Resentful of a long history of treatment as inferiors by the Vietnamese, the Montagnards planned to murder their officers and attack the Darlac province capital. At the outset of the revolt, the mutineers killed about 40 Vietnamese personnel. In response, ARVN forces blocked roads in the area and took positions to assault the rebellious camps. Thanks to the efforts of the US Special Forces personnel attached to the CIDG, US advisers with the ARVN units, and Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland, the tense standoff ended without further bloodshed or a disastrous permanent breach between the Montagnards and the government.⁵

While all this went on, General Khanh assumed for himself the additional position of Minister of Defense and began work on the promised transition to civilian rule. In late October, after much wrangling, the Military Revolutionary Council established a High National Council (HNC) of civilian notables to draft a provisional constitution and set up a new government. By the 1 November deadline, the HNC had installed a more or less constitutional regime headed by an elderly politician, Phan Khac Suu, as chief of state and Tran Van Huong, a former mayor of Saigon, as premier. General Khanh, however, retained power behind the scenes as Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council and armed forces commander in chief. This arrangement left General Khanh, the militant Buddhists, and the Young Turk generals all dissatisfied to varying degrees. Attempting to shore up his position, General Khanh increasingly allied himself with the Buddhists.⁶

Throughout these events, US officials in Saigon and Washington consistently reaffirmed their support of General Khanh and his efforts to stabilize the government. However, they gradually lost confidence in their man's prospects of success. For example, Ambassador Taylor, in an assessment made during the Montagnard revolt, declared

that South Vietnam had “demonstrated a faster rate of deterioration of governmental processes than I would have predicted.” Aside from General Khanh, no one else in the Saigon government had emerged as a strong figure. General Khanh had become particularly vulnerable to pressure groups because of the pattern he had established by giving in to the Buddhists and the students and because of the “lame duck” status he had assumed by pledging a military withdrawal from government by 1 November. The growing Buddhist influence on General Khanh was especially troubling to United States officials because the leading monks leaned toward a neutralist, anti-American position. In spite of these misgivings, the Johnson administration for the time being remained committed to upholding General Khanh while urging the South Vietnamese to resolve their political disputes and get on with the war.⁷

Ambassador Taylor on Escalation

While watching anxiously the course of South Vietnamese politics, the Johnson administration continued its internal discussion of action against North Vietnam. The center of deliberations was William Bundy’s paper of 13 August. Mr. Bundy had outlined a program of pressures that the United States could apply against North Vietnam during the period from late August through December while preparing for stronger action—systematic air attacks—with a target date of 1 January 1965.

Ambassador Taylor entered the debate on 18 August. Commenting on Bundy’s paper, Ambassador Taylor started from the assumption that the existing counterinsurgency programs were not sufficient to maintain the Saigon government’s morale or to offer reasonable hope of defeating the Viet Cong. “Something must be added in the coming months,” the Ambassador wrote. At the same time, however, Ambassador Taylor cautioned his Washington superiors against becoming deeply involved in a course of action “until we have a better feel of the quality of our ally.” If possible, the United States should avoid hostilities with North Vietnam “if our base is insecure and Khanh’s army is tied down everywhere by the VC.”

Ambassador Taylor outlined two possible courses of action, which he labeled A and B. Course A corresponded to Mr. Bundy’s recommendations. It called for actions extending over several months and rising to a critical level only after the first of the year. Under it, the United States would inform the General Khanh government that it was willing to plan for, and ultimately undertake, major military action against North Vietnam provided that General Khanh first met certain conditions. General Khanh must stabilize his government and make measurable progress in “cleaning up his operational backyard.” By this, the Ambassador meant successful implementation of the initial phases of the HOP TAC pacification plan for clearing the Viet Cong from the provinces surrounding Saigon. Saigon also should make sufficient overall pacification progress to allow the earmarking of at least three division equivalents for defense against North Vietnamese attack in South Vietnam’s northernmost provinces (I Corps tactical zone).

While waiting for the South Vietnamese to meet these conditions, the United States should immediately resume its DE SOTO patrols in the Tonkin Gulf and restart OPLAN 34A activities with emphasis on maritime operations. The United States also should resume U-2 reconnaissance flights over all of North Vietnam and initiate air and ground strikes against infiltration targets in Laos. Timing of the latter operations would depend on completion of combined planning with Khanh's government and, if possible, the obtaining of Laotian premier Souvanna Phouma's consent. Ambassador Taylor stated that some form of tit-for-tat bombing of the North might be considered, but that such operations carried the risk of escalating military reaction from both sides, with unpredictable results. Hence, he recommended that this option be held in reserve.

Before mounting actions more severe than those listed above, Ambassador Taylor urged the United States to raise its military readiness in South Vietnam by taking a number of the measures that General Westmoreland had proposed on 15 August. These comprised deploying air defense missile units at Da Nang and Saigon, landing Marines to defend the Da Nang airfield, and expanding MACV's logistic support base. Ambassador Taylor believed these reinforcements could be in place by late autumn, by which time it should be possible to assess General Khanh's progress.

By the end of the year, if General Khanh had performed satisfactorily but Hanoi's leaders had given no indication of changing their policy, the United States should ratchet up the pressure. It would then be time to embark upon a "carefully orchestrated" program of air attacks on North Vietnam, aimed primarily at infiltration-related military targets. Vietnamese Air Force and US FARM GATE aircraft would perform these missions, supported by US aerial reconnaissance. Additional US Air Force aircraft might participate if necessary. Before beginning these attacks, the Ambassador suggested, it might be desirable for the United States to open direct diplomatic communications with Hanoi.

Such was Ambassador Taylor's Course A. Course B assumed that General Khanh's government might collapse before the end of the year. In that case, to avoid the consequences of a disintegration of South Vietnamese national and governmental morale, the United States 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." Under Course of Action B, the sequence of operations would be the same as under Course A, but their execution would be accelerated, the timing depending on US readiness rather than the condition of the Saigon government. US forces would predominate in conducting the attacks. Accordingly, Ambassador Taylor warned, American involvement in ground action would become increasingly likely.

In conclusion, Ambassador Taylor recommended that the US government commit itself to Course of Action A. "However," he added, "we should always bear in mind the fragility of the Khanh Government and be prepared to shift quickly to Course of Action B if the situation requires."⁸

The JCS Recommendations of 26 August

On 26 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued their recommendations in response to Mr. Bundy's 13 August paper. Their proposals took into account Ambassador Taylor's recommendations of 18 August and were influenced by the reports of public disturbances and governmental changes in South Vietnam. In a 25 August telephone conference with General Westmoreland immediately after the Military Revolutionary Council withdrew General Khanh's constitution, the Joint Chiefs received a pessimistic report on the prospects for an early return to stability in Saigon. General Westmoreland estimated that the MRC "despite some disenchantment" with General Khanh would continue to support him as head of government, but that the Buddhists would persist in pressing their demands, probably with success. The MACV commander predicted that unsettled conditions would continue for several months, allowing little progress in the pacification effort. "Indeed, there is a distinct possibility of progressive deterioration."⁹

The Joint Chiefs were heavily influenced by General Westmoreland's assessment as they reached final agreement on their recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. COMUSMACV's report had deepened General LeMay's long-held conviction that the United States must take forceful action as soon as possible against North Vietnam. "I do not believe," the Air Force Chief of Staff told his colleagues, "that we can afford to risk the possible collapse of our position in Asia. There is too much at stake." General LeMay was "convinced that direct US offensive operations are necessary, that they entail far less risk to the US than continuing on our present course, and that they have every prospect of success."¹⁰

In their memorandum of 26 August to Secretary McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed Ambassador Taylor's Course of Action B, an accelerated process of graduated pressure. They held that, given the recent political deterioration in South Vietnam, Course B was "more in accord with the current situation" and that the accelerated program of actions it listed was "essential to prevent a complete collapse of the US position in Southeast Asia." The Joint Chiefs argued against delaying deeper United States involvement because of doubts about the quality of its South Vietnamese ally, declaring:

The United States is already deeply involved. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that only significantly stronger military pressures on the DRV are likely to provide the relief and psychological boost necessary for attainment of the requisite governmental stability and viability.... Failure to resume and maintain a program of pressure through military actions could be misinterpreted to mean we have had second thoughts [about the Gulf of Tonkin response], and could signal a lack of resolve.

Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the United States continue in the increased readiness posture attained by the post-Tonkin Gulf deployments and should pursue the following lines of action: 1) improve pacification efforts in South Vietnam, emphasizing the HOP TAC plan; 2) interdict North Vietnam's lines of communi-

cation to the Viet Cong by air and ground operations in the Laos panhandle and by strict control of the waterways leading into South Vietnam from Cambodia; 3) deny the VC its Cambodian sanctuaries through hot pursuit operations across the South Vietnamese border; and 4) increase military pressure on North Vietnam through resumption of DE SOTO patrols and OPLAN 34A missions. Thus far the Joint Chiefs had merely echoed Ambassador Taylor's proposals. However, going beyond the Ambassador, they urged the US to be ready to mount air strikes and other operations against military targets in North Vietnam as "prompt and calculated responses" to any notable actions by the Viet Cong in South Vietnam or the Pathet Lao in Laos. They differed with Ambassador Taylor on their willingness to execute the tit-for-tat retaliation. They were ready to execute it immediately, while the Ambassador wanted to hold it in reserve.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that all the military actions mentioned so far be implemented at once. They believed, however, that the proposed actions would not necessarily produce the decisive results that the US was seeking. The Chiefs declared: "The military course of action which offers the best chance of success remains the destruction of the DRV will and capabilities as necessary to compel the DRV to cease providing support to the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos." Hence, they advocated preparations to complete the US force deployments necessary to carry out CINCPAC's OPLAN 37-64 (the contingency plan for the air campaign against North Vietnam) and to commence "a United States air strike program against targets in North Vietnam in accordance with current planning."

In conclusion, the Joint Chiefs struck a note of urgency:

In light of recent developments in South Vietnam and the evaluations furnished by COMUSMACV, the Joint Chiefs of Staff conclude that accelerated and forceful action with respect to North Vietnam is essential to prevent a complete collapse of the US position in Southeast Asia. They consider that a decision as to specific actions and the timing of these actions is urgent¹¹

The 94 Target List

On 24 August, coincident with their recommendations for strong action against North Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff furnished to the Secretary of Defense a revised list of air attack targets in that country. Commonly referred to as the 94 Target List, this document was to figure prominently in the consultations of Washington policymakers during the ensuing months.

The list was a refinement and development of one the JCS had provided to Secretary McNamara in May 1964. It identified the 94 targets most critical to North Vietnam's support of the southern insurgency and to Hanoi's military and industrial capabilities. The targets were grouped in five categories: airfields; lines of communication (bridges, railroad yards, and railroad shops); military installations (barracks, headquarters,

ammunition and supply depots, POL storage, and communications and port facilities); industrial installations; and route armed reconnaissance (attacks on moving vehicles and other targets of opportunity). Attached to the list was a detailed analysis of each fixed target, examples of possible weapon and sortie requirements to achieve the desired level of damage, and a list of available attack forces.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved the 94 Target List as a data base for use in current military planning. At Department of Defense direction, CINCPAC was using the list to develop strike plans for four levels of attack against North Vietnam. In ascending order of severity, they were: demonstrative strikes against a few military targets to show US readiness and intent to move to the higher alternatives; an attack on some significant part of the military target system in hopes of convincing the enemy to stop aiding the VC and Pathet Lao (PL) and help shut down the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos; an air campaign against “significant” military targets “with the objective of destroying them and, with them, the DRV capabilities to continue military support to the VC and PL”; and finally a “full-scale air campaign” against “significant military and industrial targets,” with the objective of “destroying them and, with them, the DRV will and capabilities to continue assistance to the VC and PL.” For each level, the list specified the forces to be applied, which could range from VNAF aircraft only up to the full resources that might be deployed under CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64.

The Joint Chiefs informed Secretary McNamara that air operations could be conducted against any of the targets on the list. “The intensity can range from selective strikes in ascending order of gradually increasing military pressure to a full-scale air campaign against significant military and industrial targets.” The Joint Chiefs then reiterated their professional preference for swift, heavy action:

From a military standpoint, it is considered that the most effective application of military force will result from a sudden sharp blow in order to bring home the penalties for violating international agreements and the intent of the United States to bring a cessation of DRV support of the insurgency in Laos and [South Vietnam].¹²

A Split over Going North

On 31 August, during a discussion with the JCS, Secretary McNamara asked for a program of action with regard to South Vietnam, with an estimate of its outcome. In effect, the Secretary of Defense was requesting a more detailed exposition of the Chiefs’ recommended course of action of 26 August. In response, the Joint Staff produced a draft reply, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff took under discussion on 4 September. In this discussion, Generals Johnson and LeMay, who had clashed previously over service roles and missions issues, revealed a significant Army-Air Force disagreement over the utility of bombing North Vietnam.¹³

Commenting on the draft, the Army Chief of Staff questioned the Joint Chiefs' oft-repeated assertion that the military course of action with the best chance of success was the destruction of North Vietnam's will and capability to support the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos. General Johnson called attention to a growing body of evidence indicating that "the VC insurgency in the RVN could continue for a long time at its present or an increased intensity even if North Vietnam were completely destroyed." Therefore, General Johnson declared, although he believed that attacks on "appropriate targets" in North Vietnam "in appropriate phrasing" could have a "deleterious effect" on the enemy in the south, "I also believe that the war against the insurgency will be won in South Vietnam and along its frontiers." General Johnson recommended deletion from the draft reply to Secretary McNamara of a sentence repeating the previous JCS opinion. Rather than saying attacks against North Vietnam would offer the best chance of success, he would substitute language that called them "one of the essential elements of the program." General Johnson wished to place at least equal emphasis on cross-border operations into the Laos panhandle, conducted on a scale sufficient to destroy "all VC/PL depots, staging areas, and way-stations on the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex" and stop "the flow of men and materiel into Southern Laos and the RVN."

General Johnson also declared that the full program of attacks on North Vietnamese targets outlined in the draft reply "should not be applied except in the event of DRV and/or CHICOM armed intervention against RVN or in Laos." He thought this proposition followed inescapably from a further statement in the draft to the effect that if the US implemented the bombing program in full, the North Vietnamese or Chinese were "more than likely" to respond with large-scale aggression. General Johnson said that if moderate pressures did not induce North Vietnam to stop supporting the Viet Cong, "it is illogical to conclude that ... more severe pressures would have any other effect but to increase and intensify the support of the VC insurgency."¹⁴

In comments submitted on the same day, General LeMay took an opposite view to General Johnson's. The Air Force Chief of Staff urged the Joint Chiefs to repeat their opinion that the best chance of success lay in the destruction of North Vietnamese will and capability. Going further, General LeMay urged his colleagues to add a positive recommendation that "the specific course of action designed to achieve this objective, the destruction of 94 targets in North Vietnam, be implemented immediately." As for possible enemy reaction, General LeMay asserted that "large-scale CHICOM aggression as a result of actions taken to destroy the DRV will and capability ... is unlikely provided the action of the US reflects determination, strength, and resoluteness." He thought the Chinese were likely to react only if "the US actions reflect an intention to introduce and employ substantial ground forces in a defensive type action." If the United States gave evidence of willingness to meet the Chinese Communists on the ground in Southeast Asia, General LeMay reasoned, this would tend to encourage them to attack.¹⁵

Confronted with these conflicting strategic approaches, the Joint Chiefs of Staff temporized. In meetings on 4 September, the Chiefs decided to have the Joint Staff prepare a Talking Paper for the JCS to use in discussions, scheduled for 8 September,

with Secretary McNamara and Ambassador Taylor (who was returning to Washington for consultations). The paper would be based on the draft document under discussion and on comments to be submitted by the Services. The Talking Paper would not have the status of an approved JCS position. The Joint Chiefs would try to reach agreement on their formal reply to Secretary McNamara's 31 August request for a military action program later, after the conference with Ambassador Taylor. Finished on 7 September, the Talking Paper reiterated the JCS position already on record. In appendices, the paper laid out detailed programs for military pressures against North Vietnam, cross-border operations, and intensified action within South Vietnam. The appendices also addressed possible enemy responses and the counteractions available to the US.¹⁶

While temporarily smoothed over, the Johnson-LeMay exchange was significant for two reasons. First, it was an example of the inter-Service disagreements that often weakened the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their dealings with Secretary McNamara. Second, it brought into focus two quite different strategic approaches to Vietnam. General Johnson took the position that the war would be won or lost in South Vietnam and its immediate surrounding areas. By implication at least, United States military power, if employed, should be applied on the ground. For his part, General LeMay rejected US ground intervention in Southeast Asia. He insisted that the road to victory lay through Hanoi and that air power concentrated against North Vietnam should be America's weapon of choice. These conflicting approaches would persist throughout the planning and execution of United States military intervention in Southeast Asia. Never choosing definitively between them, a succession of presidential administrations and Joint Chiefs of Staff would apply both in varying combinations, never with complete success.

Ambassador Taylor Calls for Action

Just before he left for Washington for consultations, Ambassador Taylor sent ahead of him a review of the situation in South Vietnam. He intended the review to be a "basic document" for use in his discussions with the President and his advisers. His assessment was far from optimistic.

The Ambassador declared that the United States must revise downward its expectations regarding the Saigon government. With good luck and strong American backing, a regime might emerge that could continue to hold off the Viet Cong but not decisively defeat them. Taylor feared that the Saigon politicians would seek more and more to have the United States take over the major responsibility for fighting the Viet Cong and North Vietnam. "The politicians in Saigon and Hue feel today," he noted, "that the political hassle is their appropriate arena: the conflict with the VC belongs to the Americans." "Only the emergence of an exceptional leader could improve the situation," Ambassador Taylor wrote, "and no George Washington is in sight." This gloomy prospect notwithstanding, Ambassador Taylor considered an American defeat in Vietnam strategically

unacceptable; if necessary to avoid it, the United States must assume an increased active responsibility for the outcome of the war.

In the light of the political deterioration in South Vietnam, Ambassador Taylor moved closer in his views to the Course of Action B of his message of 18 August—the course that the Joint Chiefs of Staff favored. The Ambassador now held that the United States could not hold out for a strong, stable Saigon government as a prerequisite to starting direct military pressures against North Vietnam. It must be satisfied merely to have a viable government, showing some promise of permanence as well as an ability to enforce order in the cities and resume the pacification program at something like its past limited level. While waiting for such a regime to materialize, Ambassador Taylor recommended that the US take measures—resuming DE SOTO patrols and OPLAN 34A activities and undertaking modest cross-border operations—to maintain South Vietnamese morale and keep North Vietnam on notice that the United States was not lessening its resolve.

Ambassador Taylor believed that the United States should concentrate its efforts until about 1 December 1964 on setting up a viable Saigon government while bolstering South Vietnamese morale and keeping the enemy in check. During this period, the United States should make ready to carry out attacks, on short notice, on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and against North Vietnam under CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64. The United States should also be ready to exploit any opportunities presented by the Communists, similar to the Tonkin Gulf attacks, to initiate military pressures against North Vietnam under favorable conditions of world opinion. By 1 December 1964, provided a reasonably stable Saigon government had been attained, the United States would be ready to escalate its pressure against North Vietnam, aimed at giving heart to the South Vietnamese and at creating conditions for a negotiated termination of hostilities on favorable terms. Before beginning these pressures, US and allied military forces should be deployed to counter possible Chinese Communist or North Vietnamese ripostes. The attacks on Laotian infiltration routes and appropriate targets in the North then would begin, mounted largely by US aircraft, with the VNAF striking only targets out of range of the enemy MIG interceptors. “The attacks,” Ambassador Taylor said, “should be orchestrated in such a way as to produce a mounting pressure on the will of the Hanoi High Command, designed to convince the latter to desist from further aid to the VC ... and to agree to cooperate in calling off the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos.”

In conclusion, Ambassador Taylor promised no quick solution in Southeast Asia. During its operations against the North, Ambassador Taylor declared, the United States could expect little help from the South Vietnamese government other than ground defense of its own territory. Even if Hanoi’s leaders ultimately withheld their support of the insurgents, serious problems would remain in South Vietnam and that country would need US assistance for a long time. Ambassador Taylor saw “no quick and sure way to discharge our obligations honorably in this part of the world.” His forecast, he acknowledged, “is fairly grim but the alternatives are more repugnant. We feel that we

should take the offensive generally along the lines recommended herein and play for the international breaks.”¹⁷

A Presidential Decision: NSAM 314

Upon his arrival in Washington, Ambassador Taylor held meetings on 7 and 8 September with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, General Wheeler, and other officials. Their consensus, which Assistant Secretary of State Bundy recorded in a memorandum for the President, was very similar to the views in Ambassador Taylor’s recent message. The conferees agreed that General Khanh would probably continue to lead the South Vietnamese government and that he might make some headway during the next two or three months in restoring its effectiveness. “The best we can expect,” however, “is that he and the GVN will be able to maintain order, keep the pacification program ticking over (but not progressing markedly), and give the appearance of a valid government.” During that period, the Saigon government would be too weak to participate in any major deliberate escalation by the United States or to deal with any new threat arising from such escalation. Nevertheless, the United States must maintain a level of action that would demonstrate to the Communists its continuing resolve to prevail in Southeast Asia.

To that end, the group of advisers recommended that the United States resume DE SOTO patrols immediately and OPLAN 34A operations shortly thereafter. “Limited GVN air and ground operations” should be launched into the Laotian supply corridors “in the near future,” together with air strikes by the Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) “as soon as we can get Souvanna’s permission.” The United States should be prepared to retaliate against North Vietnam for any attack on US units or any “special” North Vietnamese or Viet Cong action against South Vietnam. Retaliation in the first instance should follow the model of the post-Tonkin Gulf strikes, being directed against targets related to the means the enemy had used in his attack. In the second instance, the response should be “aimed at specific and comparable targets.” The aim of all these actions outside South Vietnam “would be to assist morale in SVN and show the Communists we still mean business, while at the same time seeking to keep the risks low and under our control at each stage.”¹⁸

General Wheeler had joined in the consensus recorded by Mr. Bundy. He discussed the proposed measures with his fellow Chiefs when they met later on 8 September to establish a collective position for General Wheeler to take to a White House meeting scheduled for the following day. The Chairman recorded the resulting views in a memorandum addressed to Secretary McNamara.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted the general course of action outlined on 8 September but commented on some details. They urged that DE SOTO patrols be resumed soon after Ambassador Taylor returned to Saigon, under rules of engagement allowing pursuit and destruction of any North Vietnamese attacker. The US vessels should complete their first patrol and clear the Gulf of Tonkin before the South Vietnamese resumed OPLAN

34A maritime operations (MAROPS) along the North Vietnamese coast. The Chairman differed from the other JCS members on the handling of MAROPS thereafter. The four Service Chiefs believed that OPLAN 34A operations should remain covert until they had become so “intertwined” with the DE SOTO patrols that the two were properly associated, “or until the US is prepared openly to support MAROPS militarily.” For his part, General Wheeler favored a formula developed during the consultations with Ambassador Taylor: The South Vietnamese would resume MAROPS and, upon Hanoi’s first public condemnation of their occurrence, openly acknowledge the raids and justify them by publishing the facts on VC infiltration and supply by sea. Either way, once the 34A operations were openly acknowledged, the United States and South Vietnam would enjoy more freedom in conducting them and in the routing of DE SOTO patrols and would face fewer inhibitions upon retaliation for any future attack on American forces in the Gulf.

With regard to operations in Laos and the grounds for retaliating against North Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took a slightly more aggressive position than the consensus view. They urged that the United States begin attacks in Laos soon “against the VC LOC (Lines of Communication) in the Laotian corridor to include . . . staging bases and infiltration routes,” supplemented by US armed reconnaissance flights. Also, the United States should attempt to arrange for Thai forces to join in ground action against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Joint Chiefs urged that the United States ensure that its grounds for retaliation not be “interpreted to limit too narrowly our response to an attack on US units or any specific DRV/VC action against SVN.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded by declaring that the pacification plan in South Vietnam, together with the limited additional actions thus far contemplated, were not sufficient to maintain South Vietnamese morale or to “offer reasonable hope of eventual success.” “Military action by GVN and US forces against the DRV will be required.” The Chiefs differed, however, on the timing of such action. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the Commandant of the Marine Corps believed that “time is against us and military action against the DRV should be taken now.” The United States should seize upon the “next significant incident” to “commence a retaliatory GVN and US air strike program against the DRV in accordance with the 94 target plan. In this regard, they consider that a battalion-size VC attack on South Vietnam should be construed as ‘significant.’” General Wheeler, joined by the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Chief of Naval Operations, agreed that “we must respond appropriately” against North Vietnam “in the event of an attack on US units.” However, they did not recommend making that the occasion for launching a program of attacks against the full 94 Target List.¹⁹

The White House meeting of 9 September brought together President Johnson, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Central Intelligence Agency Director John McCone, General Wheeler, and Ambassador Taylor. All the principals endorsed the four actions recommended in the 8 September memorandum—resumption of DE SOTO patrols, reinstatement of OPLAN 34A operations, limited air and ground attacks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and preparation for tit-for-tat retaliation against North Vietnam. All present took for granted that additional US action was necessary and would come once the

Saigon government attained a measure of stability. Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler both reported to the group that Generals LeMay and Greene favored immediate extensive US air strikes against North Vietnam. General Wheeler noted that he and the Army and Navy Chiefs “were persuaded by the argument of Ambassador Taylor—the man on the spot—that it was important not to overstrain the currently weakened GVN by drastic action in the immediate future.” After an inconclusive discussion of measures to strengthen the Saigon government, the President asked if anyone in the room differed from the recommendations under consideration; no one did.

Concluding the meeting, the President directed that the four agreed courses of action be pursued. He emphasized that “money was no object” in the effort to bolster South Vietnam. President Johnson asked General Wheeler to “explain to his colleagues in the JCS that we would be ready to do more, when we had a base.” Mr. Johnson “did not wish to enter the patient in a 10-round bout, when he was in no shape to hold out for one round. We should get him ready to face 3 or 4 rounds at least.”²⁰

On 10 September, the President’s decisions were promulgated in National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 314. The memorandum directed that US naval patrols in the Tonkin Gulf resume “promptly after Ambassador Taylor’s return.” The patrols—two to three destroyers with carrier air cover—would operate initially well beyond the 12-mile limit and be “clearly dissociated” from OPLAN 34A maritime operations. After completion of the first DE SOTO patrol, the South Vietnamese would restart their OPLAN 34A operations, with priority to maritime activities. “We should not consider air strikes under 34A for the present.” Regarding Laos, the NSAM called for prompt discussions with the Vientiane government of plans for “limited” South Vietnamese ground and air operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, together with RLAF air strikes and possible US aerial armed reconnaissance. “On the basis of these discussions, a decision on action will be taken.” Finally, the United States should “be prepared to respond as appropriate against the DRV in the event of any attack on US units or any specific DRV/VC action against SVN.”

In addition to these military measures, the President called for economic and political actions that would have immediate impact in South Vietnam, such as pay raises for civilian personnel and demonstration projects in the cities and selected rural areas. Emphasizing a point he had made in the 9 September meeting, the President declared that “no activity of this kind should be delayed in any way by any feeling that our resources ... are restricted. We can find the money which is needed for all worthwhile projects in this field.”

The final paragraph of NSAM 314 pointed to at least the possibility of additional more drastic US action:

These decisions are governed by a prevailing judgment that the first order of business at present is to ... help to strengthen the fabric of the Government of South Vietnam; to the extent that the situation permits, such action should precede larger decisions. If such larger decisions are required at any time by a change in the situation, they will be taken.²¹

Beyond resumption of DE SOTO patrols and OPLAN 34A operations, NSAM 314 called for no immediate actions, only continued consultation and preparation. The directive left the time for “larger decisions” indeterminate, ignoring Ambassador Taylor’s proposed 1 December deadline. The course adopted was essentially a holding operation. It was based on the assumption that the United States should avoid initiating military action against North Vietnam, except in retaliation, until it was assured that a reasonably stable government was functioning in South Vietnam. A delay to allow time for Khanh to strengthen his regime was acceptable to President Johnson and his advisers, the more so since the administration thus could avoid dramatic, controversial actions during the US election campaign. At the same time, the administration kept open the option of striking North Vietnam.

DE SOTO Patrols: Start and Stop

On 10 September, pursuant to NSAM 314, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to conduct a three-day DE SOTO patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin, beginning on 15 September, Saigon time. The patrol would follow rules of engagement recommended by the Joint Chiefs. In the event of a hostile attack, the patrol ships and supporting aircraft were to “fire upon the ... attacker with the objective of insuring destruction.” The ships could pursue the enemy to the internationally recognized three-mile limit of North Vietnam’s territorial waters. Aircraft could pursue surface vessels inside territorial waters and could go as far into hostile airspace (North Vietnam, Hainan Island and mainland China) as necessary to bring down identified attacking planes. Nevertheless, ships and aircraft “will confine their actions to the attacking ships and/or aircraft.”²²

After weather delays, the destroyers USS *Morton* and USS *Edwards* got under way on the first DE SOTO patrol and proceeded uneventfully until the night of 18 September. The two destroyers were steaming in column in the darkness when radar sightings indicated fast-closing contacts on both bows. Although without visual sighting of any enemy craft, the *Morton* and *Edwards* opened fire to repel the apparent attack. Carrier aircraft joined them shortly but were unable to locate any targets. The destroyers fired more than 100 rounds before the radar images broke up or disappeared.²³

When the first reports of this action reached Washington, the Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately pressed CINCPAC for confirmation that an attack had actually occurred and began planning for a military response. The Joint Chiefs directed Admiral Sharp to prepare to conduct air attacks during daylight hours on 19 September against five specific targets in North Vietnam, selected from the 94 Target List. To mount the estimated 80 strike sorties required, Admiral Sharp could employ any available US air resources except the FARM GATE counterinsurgency unit in South Vietnam. However, an exhaustive search of the engagement area at first light on the 19th failed to locate any debris or other evidence that the DE SOTO patrol had actually been attacked. Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs first deferred the prospective retaliatory strikes until 20 September

and then cancelled them altogether. Meanwhile, the *Morton* and *Edwards* concluded their patrol without further incident. On 19 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Admiral Sharp to await further instructions before scheduling another patrol, in effect suspending the operation.²⁴

On 20 September, General Wheeler requested Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland to furnish him their views on the worth of the DE SOTO patrols. Both commanders strongly defended the operations, citing their value as a source of technical and other forms of intelligence on North Vietnamese procedures and capabilities. Admiral Sharp added that the patrols asserted “our right to go any place we desire on the high seas . . . a right we must never give up.” General Westmoreland hoped that the resumption of the patrols would not be delayed by an extended reassessment of their value. If they were delayed, he warned, the result would be an “exhuming of US paper tiger image privately if not publicly in the eyes of interested parties in this part of the world.” In spite of these endorsements, the administration did not resume DE SOTO patrols for the rest of the year.²⁵

Operations in Laos

Under NSAM 314, the United States initiated discussions with the Government of Laos concerning limited South Vietnamese air and ground operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. While Ambassador to Laos, Leonard S. Unger, carried forward his part of this task in Vientiane, the Joint Chiefs of Staff developed recommendations for the prospective military operations, which they forwarded to Secretary McNamara on 30 September. The JCS recommended that the Secretary seek approval for immediate implementation of an air strike plan that would employ Royal Laotian Air Force T-28 aircraft and US YANKEE TEAM²⁶ flights, without any South Vietnamese participation. The Joint Chiefs argued that VNAF and FARM GATE resources were already fully committed in South Vietnam and should not be levied upon except for support of the cross-border ground operations. Of the 22 proposed targets in Laos, the RLAF should attack 17 and YANKEE TEAM planes should strike 5 bridges. US aircraft also should fly flak suppression missions for the RLAF and provide high cover against any interference by enemy air forces.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also submitted, and requested authority to implement, a plan for ground incursions into the Laos corridor. South Vietnamese troops would perform the missions and penetrate into Laos no deeper than 20 kilometers. The forces employed would not exceed two company equivalents in any one of the three designated operational areas. The South Vietnamese Air Force could be relied upon for air support, reinforced by FARM GATE or other US air resources in an emergency exceeding VNAF capabilities. Attaching one important condition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that successful execution of the program was possible only if US advisers were allowed to

accompany the South Vietnamese units. Otherwise, “no further consideration should be given to the conduct of ground operations.”²⁷

Ground operations in Laos remained in the planning stage throughout October, but aerial action began. During the month, the US and Laotian governments reached agreement on a program of strikes by RLAFF T-28s against targets in the panhandle from the JCS proposed list. The United States declined a Lao suggestion that American planes attack an additional four heavily defended targets, but it provided US combat air patrols for the Lao aircraft. In spite of JCS efforts to broaden their role, US aircraft on these missions would only provide high cover and would not be used to “suppress or retaliate to ground AAA.”²⁸

On 16 October, Ambassador Unger reported that the RLAFF would probably complete strikes against the first thirteen targets in the corridor by 23 October. In a memorandum to Secretary McNamara on the 20th, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the targets remaining beyond those thirteen were militarily the most significant. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that US air forces join in attacking them, as the Lao had requested. Secretary McNamara replied on 29 October that the Joint Chiefs’ memoranda on cross-border operations had been provided to the State Department and would be kept under constant review, but he promised no early decision.²⁹

The JCS Consider Additional Actions

Following the issuance of NSAM 314 on 10 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff turned to further development of their own position on courses of action in Southeast Asia. At a meeting on 14 September, they directed the Joint Staff to examine possible actions, both within South Vietnam’s borders and beyond, that might be added to the list the Joint Chiefs had recommended to the Secretary of Defense on 26 August. As this study progressed, the Army-Air Force disagreement on strategy again surfaced.³⁰

On 25 September, for example, the Army Chief of Staff recommended to his colleagues that they broaden their advice to the President by giving more attention to political courses of action in South Vietnam. General Johnson considered this necessary because “the communist ‘war of liberation’ being fought against ... South Vietnam is in very large measure a political struggle—a struggle for the loyalty and support of the population.” While General Johnson would press implementation of all military measures already approved, particularly the cross-border operations into Laos, he wished the Joint Chiefs to address the problems of lack of governmental stability, low leadership morale, and inadequately trained civil service in South Vietnam. Solution of such problems was “critical to the eventual termination of the insurgency.” Among other actions, General Johnson suggested that the United States conclude a mutual security treaty with South Vietnam. “Such a treaty, on the order of the treaty with Korea, would provide the needed legal base to commit the Government of South Vietnam to a closer identification with

United States objectives and also provide the necessary foundation for subsequent agreements on combined operations beyond the frontiers of South Vietnam.”³¹

The Air Force Chief of Staff took a quite different tack. While he shared General Johnson’s concern over governmental deterioration in South Vietnam, General LeMay did not believe that the problem “is one to be resolved by political actions or by the combination of political/economic/psychological/military actions proposed by the Army.” In LeMay’s view, the Army position represented “a considerable dilution of the firm stand the Joint Chiefs of Staff have taken” in all their previous recommendations of military action against North Vietnam. The Air Force chief dismissed “waiting for the more secure political base” in the South as “a lost cause and ignores the necessity for positive military action now to insure establishment of a secure political base.”

General LeMay took particular exception to General Johnson’s assertion that the military policies and actions currently being pursued within South Vietnam were “probably the optimum that can be provided.” LeMay cited various restrictions that could be lifted, notably the fact that the United States was not employing its B–57 and F–100 aircraft based in South Vietnam in support of the counterinsurgency effort. At that time, the Air Force Chief of Staff already had before his colleagues a memorandum suggesting that they recommend to the Secretary of Defense the use of at least the B–57s against the Viet Cong, in carefully defined circumstances.³²

The US commanders had been discussing for some time the use of the jet aircraft that had been deployed in South Vietnam as part of the post-Tonkin Gulf buildup. On 29 August, General Westmoreland had recommended employing the B–57s and F–100s in a sustained campaign against the Viet Cong. Admiral Sharp had reserved judgment on the proposal pending further study. “We must remember,” the admiral advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 31 August, “that it would be immediately obvious that US jet aircraft were in use against the VC. This would be a step in escalation.” Given the instability of the government in Saigon, Admiral Sharp questioned whether the United States was ready to commit its forces to the extent General Westmoreland proposed. Ambassador Taylor endorsed the CINCPAC’s view. Responding to such advice, on 9 September, in a decision not included in NSAM 314, President Johnson decreed that for the present the American jets would not be used against the Viet Cong.³³

Discussion of employment of the aircraft continued. Answering a JCS inquiry a week after the President’s decision, Admiral Sharp said that from a military point of view, use of the B–57s and F–100s was desirable to remedy a shortage of fixed-wing air support in South Vietnam. To minimize political consequences, the CINCPAC suggested limited employment of the B–57s, possibly as part of FARM GATE. Older aircraft due for retirement, the B–57s had been retained in PACOM only because they were deemed suitable for the type of operations occurring in Southeast Asia. Use of the still first-line F–100, on the other hand, “could imply a marked increase in US involvement.” In his 6 October recommendations, General LeMay adopted Admiral Sharp’s views. After discussing these proposals, the JCS referred them to the Joint Staff.³⁴

During the first ten days of October, the US intelligence community delivered two evaluations that had a marked impact on the Joint Chiefs' deliberations. The first, Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) 53-2-64, dated 1 October, concluded that the situation in South Vietnam had deteriorated further since early September. Conditions were unfavorable for the development of a viable government in Saigon. Instead, the drafters of the estimate looked forward to a "further decay of GVN will and effectiveness," leading toward defeatism and paralysis of leadership and attended by increasing friction between South Vietnamese and US officials. They doubted that the restoration of civilian government scheduled for late October would improve the picture. Moreover, a coup by a "disgruntled South Vietnam military figure" could occur at any time. As governmental effectiveness declined, the war effort would dwindle on all fronts, and Saigon might seek a political accommodation with the enemy. The Viet Cong's current terrorist and guerrilla tactics were well designed to exploit the trend toward anarchy, leading ultimately to a neutralist coalition government that the Communists could dominate.³⁵

In the second estimate, SNIE 10-3-64, dated 9 October, the intelligence community analyzed "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US/GVN Courses of Action." The estimators presumed that the leaders in Hanoi and Beijing had noted the same trends favorable to them in South Vietnam that the earlier SNIE had sketched. Accordingly, it would be to their interest to avoid any action that might change the favorable cast of the situation. In addition, the Chinese Communists were believed to have an underlying aversion to engaging in direct hostilities with the United States. According to the intelligence analysts, the two Communist countries, nevertheless, would be willing to continue supporting the Viet Cong, even at the risk of provoking limited US retaliation against North Vietnam, "probably on the calculation that victory is near in the South and that they could through political counteraction prevent prolonged or expanded US attacks in the North."

If US retaliation came, in the form of gradually intensifying aerial bombing of North Vietnam, the leaders in Hanoi would have to decide whether to stop their support of the Viet Cong or suffer major damage to their military and industrial facilities. The Communist leaders might suspend their aid to the VC, probably with the intention of renewing it later. Or, they possibly might launch an all-out attack on South Vietnam, believing that the United States was unwilling to fight a major ground war in Southeast Asia and confident that, if the Americans did come in, Communist forces could defeat them with the same tactics they had used against the French. "In a situation involving so many levels of possible escalation we cannot make a confident judgment as to which course the DRV leaders would choose," the intelligence experts concluded. They did not consider the possibility that the leaders in Hanoi might already have made their choice, anticipating American action and determined to endure and counter it while they marched on to victory in the South.³⁶

On 12 October, General LeMay brought the first of these two intelligence reports to the attention of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In his customarily forthright manner, the Air Force chief called the SNIE of 1 October "as clear a forecast of impending disaster as

we can expect to receive from the intelligence community.... Unless we can, without delay, define and initiate some positive course of action to counter the present trend, we must accept what looms before us as an inevitable consequence.” General LeMay noted that the JCS had submitted proposals for positive action on 2 June and 26 August, but the administration had held back from implementing them, citing the need first to achieve a stable political base in South Vietnam. “SNIE 53-2-64 proves again that time is not on our side,” General LeMay asserted. “It suggests strongly that additional delay can have disastrous results.” He called upon the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review urgently their previous recommendations and provide current advice to the President and Secretary of Defense, within 72 hours if possible.³⁷

As if to reinforce General LeMay’s warning that time was running out, Ambassador Taylor transmitted a still graver view of the situation in South Vietnam. In three successive messages from Saigon, the Ambassador called attention to a “definite step-up” in North Vietnamese infiltration, particularly in South Vietnam’s northern provinces, and reported that among the infiltrators an increasing number of northern-born conscripts were being identified. General Khanh’s government was claiming to have proof that organized North Vietnamese units were entering the South. Ambassador Taylor declared that the US “must soon adopt new and drastic methods to reduce and eventually end such infiltration if we are to succeed in South Vietnam.” He also reported that the Viet Cong had taken full advantage of the unsettled politics in Saigon to enlarge their territorial control, expanding from the mountains to the piedmont and encroaching upon the heavily populated, fertile coastal plain. In some areas, they had gained positions from which they could extend control to the coast, where they could establish beachheads to support still more extensive infiltration.³⁸

On 21 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided Secretary McNamara with a preview of the direction of their thinking. Forwarding to Secretary McNamara an Army study of US actions in Southeast Asia to date, the Joint Chiefs observed that “the very nature of guerrilla warfare, with its hit and run tactics, provides the insurgent with the initiative as long as he is not separated from his source of direction, personnel, and supplies.” They noted that their recommendations for operations to force North Vietnam to stop supporting the insurgency had not yet been implemented. Referring to SNIE 53-2-64, the Joint Chiefs said the estimate “clearly indicates that we are fast running out of time in Southeast Asia.” They advised Secretary McNamara that they would shortly submit recommendations on additional courses of action in that region.³⁹

The JCS Recommendations of 27 October

During intensive consultations on 23 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reached final agreement on recommendations to the Secretary of Defense, which they forwarded in a memorandum on 27 October. Citing Ambassador Taylor’s recent messages as well as SNIE 53-2-64, the Joint Chiefs began by declaring that “in view of the recent estimate

of the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam . . . , strong military actions are required now in order to prevent the collapse of the US position in Southeast Asia.” They acknowledged that political instability, low morale among the Saigon leadership, and the poorly trained civil service in South Vietnam required “primarily political” solutions. Nevertheless, the Joint Chiefs also believed that political and military actions were related so that military success could be exploited politically and vice versa. Accordingly, the JCS had developed “a program of military and supporting political actions” for South Vietnam “on the basis that US withdrawal from the RVN or Southeast Asia is not an acceptable course of action.”

The Joint Chiefs envisioned “the requirement now for accelerated and forceful actions both inside and outside of the RVN” to support a fourfold strategy of:

- a. Depriving the Viet Cong of out-of-country assistance by applying continuously increasing military pressures on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to the extent necessary to cause the DRV to cease support and direction of the insurgency.
- b. Depriving the VC of assistance within the RVN by expanding the counterinsurgency effort—military, economic, and political—within the RVN.
- c. Continuing to seek a viable effective government in the RVN based on the broadest possible consensus.
- d. Maintaining a military readiness posture in Southeast Asia that:
 - (1) Demonstrates the US will and capability to escalate the action if required.
 - (2) Deters a major communist aggression in the area.

To implement this strategy, the Joint Chiefs presented a menu of courses of action in two appendices, one for actions within South Vietnam, the other for actions beyond its borders. In each appendix, the actions were listed in ascending order of severity. The Joint Chiefs of Staff prefaced the appendices by repeating their established opinion that “the military course of action which would contribute most to defeating insurgencies in Southeast Asia remains the destruction of the DRV will and capabilities as necessary to compel the DRV to cease providing support to those insurgencies.” They suggested that implementation of the entire program might be required to achieve this objective. However, in a concession to the administration’s preference for gradualism, they noted that the lists were arranged “so that any of the actions may be selected, implemented, and controlled, as required, to produce the desired effect while analyzing and estimating the communist reaction.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff derived their estimate of probable communist reaction from the SNIE of 9 October. They declared that there was “not a high risk” of intervention by Chinese ground forces “unless major US/RVN ground units had moved to occupy areas of the DRV or communist held territory of northern Laos, or possibly, the Chinese communists had committed their air and had subsequently suffered attacks on their bases.” The Joint Chiefs added that “because of the present favorable balance of power it is within the capability of US forces to deal with large-scale aggression.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff requested authority to implement immediately the first six of the seven courses of action in Appendix A (within South Vietnam) and the first eight of the sixteen courses in Appendix B (outside South Vietnam). Within South Vietnam, they wanted to: 1) influence the Saigon government to increase pressure on the Viet Cong and continue pacification, with emphasis on HOP TAC; 2) begin a vigorous civil affairs effort; 3) apply more stringent population control measures, such as curfews, checkpoints, and identification and detention procedures; 4) encourage recruitment of uniformed district and village policemen from the Popular Force territorial troops; 5) support South Vietnamese operations to cut off VC supply from Cambodia via the Mekong-Bassac river system; and 6) employ US fixed-wing aircraft (presumably the B-57s and F-100s) for day and night air strikes within South Vietnam.

Outside South Vietnam, the JCS proposed that the US and South Vietnam: 1) resume DE SOTO patrols; 2) intensify OPLAN 34A operations, adding VNAF air strikes against selected targets; 3) maintain the current forward deployments of US combat units in Southeast Asia; 4) permit South Vietnamese forces to pursue and destroy Viet Cong units retreating into Cambodia; 5) launch appropriate retaliatory attacks in response to North Vietnamese/Viet Cong actions as prescribed in NSAM 314; 6) conduct low-level US aerial reconnaissance of North Vietnam; 7) resume and expand both air and ground cross-border operations against infiltration through the Laos panhandle; and 8) with US, FARM GATE, and VNAF aircraft, attack lines of communication in North Vietnam close to the Laos border that connected with the infiltration routes in Laos.

Going beyond these recommendations, members of the JCS proposed various combinations of more drastic measures. Generals Wheeler and Johnson and Admiral McDonald requested authority to implement additional actions from Appendix B: deployment of a US Army brigade and two F-100 squadrons to Thailand and a Marine expeditionary brigade to Da Nang in South Vietnam and commencement of air strikes against “infiltration associated targets in the DRV.”

Generals LeMay and Greene urged still more immediate and extreme action. They believed that “if indeed, time has not run out, it is fast doing so” and that “unless we move now to alter the present evolution of events, there is great likelihood of a VC victory.” The Air Force and Marine Corps chiefs saw “no useful alternative to initiating action against the DRV now through a planned and selective program of air strikes.” Accordingly, they recommended that this course of action be implemented “now” against a wide range of North Vietnamese targets. This air campaign should begin in response to the next “significant” Viet Cong action in South Vietnam, defined as a battalion size VC attack, a VC terrorist strike against US personnel, or confirmation of the presence of organized North Vietnamese units in South Vietnam.

Beyond these courses of action, Appendix B contained six more proposals, of increasing severity: aerial mining of Haiphong and other North Vietnamese ports after a diplomatic notice to other countries; a “naval quarantine/blockade” of North Vietnam and Cambodia; “attacks of increasing severity” on targets in North Vietnam; “all-out” air assault on the North, striking the entire 94 Target List; amphibious and airborne opera-

tions to seize one or more lodgments on the North Vietnamese coast; and commitment of US and Allied ground forces into Southeast Asia “as required.” Appendix A contained one more action within South Vietnam beyond the six recommended for immediate implementation. Course of action 7 called for deployment of US troops to the South to carry out CINCPAC OPLANs “to assist actively in fighting the insurgency ... or to defeat communist aggression as necessary.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that these measures “be implemented as required to achieve US objectives in Southeast Asia.” By recommending these measures, the Joint Chiefs of Staff showed themselves willing to contemplate a level of US engagement beyond what they had suggested two months earlier, including the possible ultimate commitment of American ground combat troops in mainland Southeast Asia.⁴⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff closed their memorandum of 27 October by requesting that, “in view of the grave implications” involved, their views be provided to the President “at the earliest feasible time.” Secretary McNamara displayed less urgency. On 29 October, he informed General Wheeler that he had “noted” the JCS views and provided them to the State Department. Since Ambassador Taylor “has expressed concern about initiating a program of pressure on North Vietnam before we have a responsible set of authorities to work with in South Vietnam,” Secretary McNamara intended to obtain Ambassador Taylor’s comments on the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposals “as soon as possible.” Once the Ambassador’s views were received, “a proposal accompanied by your views can be presented to the President very soon.” In short, Joint Chiefs of Staff pressure notwithstanding, the administration would temporize a while longer.⁴¹

The Bien Hoa Attack and the US Reaction

During the month of November, the pace of events quickened. A new civilian government took office in Saigon. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, implementing the decisions of the Ninth Plenum, continued to strengthen their combat forces; they showed increasing aggressiveness in assaulting government units and outposts. US military planning intensified, spurred by a destructive Viet Cong attack on Bien Hoa airfield, which also led to new demands by officials in Saigon and Washington for reprisals against the North. Yet until the end of the month, the Johnson administration held back from drastic actions, even though its leaders recognized that the time for major new policy decisions was at hand.

The Suu-Huong Regime Takes Office

By late October, the South Vietnamese were well into the process of establishing their new civilian government. On 24 October, the High National Council (HNC) unanimously elected Dr. Phan Khac Suu as Provisional Chief of State. This decision came as a surprise to Ambassador Taylor, who had not been consulted on it. Ambassador Taylor called on Dr. Suu the next day and told the supposedly sovereign head of the South Vietnamese state “with some deliberate anger” that the United States could not countenance the HNC making important decisions without consulting the US Embassy in advance. Dr. Suu offered to resign at once if the United States wished him to. Brushing aside this offer, Ambassador Taylor informed Dr. Suu that he could not expect United States support unless he and the HNC informed US officials before nominating candidates for Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and other key posts. These nominees must be satisfactory to the United States.¹

In reporting these developments to the President, Ambassador Taylor characterized the new charter drawn up by the HNC as “reasonably satisfactory.” However, he said the Embassy was “not too happy” over the choice of Dr. Suu. Admittedly, he was a respected man of high principles, an agricultural expert who had opposed the Diem regime; but he was judged to be a weak leader and clearly lacking in physical stamina. Fortunately, after making the initial appointment of Prime Minister, Dr. Suu would probably have only a nominal role in the government.²

Suitably chastened, the South Vietnamese proceeded to complete their new government. On 26 October, General Khanh submitted to Dr. Suu his resignation as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. Three days later, presumably after consulting with Ambassador Taylor, Dr. Suu called on Tran Van Huong, the Prefect (Mayor) of Saigon, to serve as Prime Minister and assemble a cabinet. Complicating Mr. Huong’s task, several candidates were reluctant to join a government they considered temporary; two key appointees withdrew at the eleventh hour, apparently owing to Buddhist pressure. Nevertheless, by 4 November Mr. Huong had completed his cabinet slate, which he reviewed with Ambassadors Taylor and Johnson. At the same time, the premier and his American overseers agreed to appoint General Khanh as armed forces Commander in Chief. Until election of a National Assembly as provided in the charter, the High National Council was to exercise legislative functions, including the power to remove the Prime Minister by a no confidence vote.³

Mr. Huong began his attempt to govern in difficult circumstances. Instead of an initial surge of popular favor and tolerance, his regime seemed to have only critics and opponents, with no important faction rallying to its support. The Vietnamese press was almost unanimous in denouncing it. When the cabinet selections were publicly announced, the Buddhists declared their opposition, claiming that too many of the appointees had been associated with the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. On 6 November, student leaders organized a rally opposing the Huong government because it “has not answered the people’s desire for freedom and democracy.” The press joined in criticism of the cabinet list. Responding firmly to the furor, Prime Minister Huong declared that antigovernment demonstrations would be suppressed and that General Khanh had assured him of the military’s support. In public, General Khanh remarked only that the military would not try to resume power “unless the situation demands it.”⁴

In an assessment dispatched to Washington at the end of the new government’s first week, Ambassador Taylor called attention to the remarkable fact that the South Vietnamese had carried out their decision of two months earlier to return political control to civilian hands. Much was still uncertain, including what form the Buddhist opposition would take, the true political strength of Mr. Huong, the ability of his cabinet as a whole, and whether General Khanh and other officers would keep their promise to stay out of politics. Ambassador Taylor anticipated that the next critical turn in the political situation would come when Mr. Huong proposed the legal provisions for electing the National Assembly.⁵

In a milder version of General Khanh’s “go north” agitation, Prime Minister Huong on 10 November expressed to the Ambassador disappointment that the United States

was limiting its actions against North Vietnam. He cited the lift to southern morale that the US retaliation to the Tonkin Gulf incidents had given. Ambassador Taylor replied that “reciprocal responsibilities were involved.” Saigon must demonstrate strength to meet its current responsibilities and to withstand any Viet Cong counteraction that increased pressure on North Vietnam might provoke. “Huong indicated his complete understanding of the situation,” the Ambassador reported.⁶

US Military Planning Moves Forward

While the South Vietnamese worked out their new government, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Pacific Command continued to develop their OPLAN 34A operations and contingency plans for attacking North Vietnam. On 30 September, the Johnson administration instituted new procedures for approving OPLAN 34A activities. Henceforth, at the beginning of each month, a special interdepartmental panel would review a proposed schedule of maritime operations prepared by the JCS. The panel would consist of Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance, McGeorge Bundy of the White House, and Llewellyn Thompson of the State Department. Upon their endorsement, the document would become the approved schedule for planning purposes for the coming month. However, the same three officials would have to approve in advance the mounting of each individual operation. Then a further approval step was required. After the Joint Staff drafted the executing message, it would have to be initialed before dispatch by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), Mr. Bundy, and Mr. Thompson. Under these procedures, the schedule for October received its first round of approval on the first day of that month.⁷

Late in October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted the basic OPLAN 34A schedule for November to Secretary Vance. However, on 14 November they followed it with detailed recommendations for adding VNAF air strikes to the program. In support of their proposal, the Joint Chiefs cited “stimulus to the new government leadership of Vietnam” as one of the benefits from the expansion of OPLAN 34A activities. The Office of the Secretary of Defense withheld action on this recommendation pending the outcome of White House consultations on overall Southeast Asia strategy that were to take place at the end of the month. The system for approval of OPLAN 34A operations remained in effect, however, in the following months.⁸

During September and October, commanders and staffs in Washington and the field further developed plans for both retaliatory strikes and a more extended air campaign against North Vietnam. The most notable change was the higher levels of desired damage written into the objectives. On 22 September, in the wake of the most recent Tonkin Gulf incident four days earlier, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that punitive strikes against North Vietnam in response to attacks on DE SOTO patrols should seek maximum feasible damage to the targets. While the strike missions would be selected from the 94 Target List, the Joint Chiefs of Staff divorced them from the list’s damage

criteria. Commenting on this decision, the Air Force Chief of Staff noted that the sortie requirements in CINCPAC's retaliation plan needed to be increased to achieve the higher levels of destruction.⁹

After exchanges with Admiral Sharp and further consideration, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 7 October informed CINCPAC that, when responding to North Vietnamese attacks on US forces, the reprisal "should be of such a magnitude as to inflict the maximum feasible levels of damage on the specific targets selected commensurate with the capability of available US forces, rather than the damage levels in the 94 Target study." When a DE SOTO patrol was in progress, PACOM forces should maintain readiness to conduct air strikes with the least practicable delay when ordered from Washington.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided CINCPAC with two levels of response, each of which in turn included two target options. The first level, reprisal for attacks causing little or no damage to the DE SOTO patrol, had an Option A of five targets, including the enemy MIGs and their supporting facilities, wherever located. The second option, I B, though listing six targets, was a less severe response, which higher authority might prefer at the time of decision. The second level was the response to attacks resulting in significant damage or loss of life in a DE SOTO patrol unit. Under it, Options II A and II B both called for a two-day attack, hitting all Option I A targets plus five others. The additional targets included port facilities as well as railroad and highway bridges. In these attacks, CINCPAC could employ all US air resources except FARM GATE. He would have permission to use optimum ordnance, including napalm and cluster bombs; and to provide combat air patrol (CAP), suppressive fire, photo reconnaissance, and search and rescue as needed. Whenever directed to execute any of the options, Admiral Sharp's command should be prepared to conduct air strikes on the remainder of the 94 targets. On 28 October, CINCPAC adjusted his draft mission orders to conform to this directive.¹⁰

With the suspension of DE SOTO patrols after the 18 September incident, the revised orders never were carried out. Work continued, however, on the damage criteria of the 94 Target List itself. On 2 October, PACOM officers briefed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the general plan for air strikes on North Vietnam, which CINCPAC had incorporated as an annex to OPLAN 37-64. General LeMay advised his colleagues that, while the plan responded fully to the JCS guidance provided in July, "I do not consider this, nor do I suppose that CINCPAC considers it, an optimum application of available force to the 94 target task—to destroy the DRV will and capability to support the insurgency in SVN and Laos." General LeMay noted that conditions had changed since July. The situation in Southeast Asia had deteriorated; CINCPAC's air resources had been increased; and there was reason to expect that the political restrictions of mid-year "may well be invalid by December 1964." The Air Force Chief of Staff considered that CINCPAC should redirect his planning to achieve maximum feasible levels of damage. The Joint Chiefs agreed that the Chairman would present this view to the Secretary of Defense during a second briefing by the PACOM officers on 5 October.¹¹

After hearing the PACOM briefing with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense said that during the next DE SOTO patrol, two aircraft carriers should be so

stationed that they could launch immediate retaliatory strikes against North Vietnam if directed. Apparently, the Secretary did not object to the higher damage criteria the Joint Chiefs were considering. In a message to CINCPAC on 13 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the changes in the situation and directed him to revise OPLAN 37-64 under additional guidance. Admiral Sharp was to “use the available forces in PACOM as deemed necessary by you,” to include at least two aircraft carriers and to “identify any essential or desired augmentation.” He was to include in his plans provision for fighter CAP “as required to meet the current air threat.” In all attack options overtly employing US air, he was to give first priority to airfields, aircraft, and POL storage facilities. Finally, strikes “should be of such magnitude as to inflict the maximum feasible levels of damage on the specific targets, commensurate with the capability of available forces.”¹²

As Southeast Asia problems multiplied, CINCPAC had generated a continually expanding series of OPLANS treating various contingencies. As early as May 1964, the desirability of consolidating some of these plans had come under consideration; and Admiral Felt, before leaving PACOM, had submitted a scheme for doing so. After Admiral Sharp assumed command in late June, he conducted further study and on 2 August recommended a somewhat different consolidation of plans. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the undertaking five days later.¹³

Admiral Sharp intended to make CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 the single master plan for all types of action designed to counter or terminate North Vietnam’s support of the wars in Laos and South Vietnam. That plan stemmed originally from the Presidential decisions of NSAM 288 and its original title was “Actions to Stabilize the Situation in RVN.” The admiral wanted the expanded OPLAN 37-64 to allow for implementation in stages, with flexibility to accommodate any future variants that might be developed. On 19 November 1964, Admiral Sharp issued the revised version, CINCPAC OPLAN 37-65, now titled “Military Actions to Stabilize the Situation in RVN and/or Laos.” It incorporated four previously effective OPLANS, all directed against North Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved OPLAN 37-65, subject to certain modifications, on 10 March 1965.¹⁴

OPLAN 37-65 existed alongside two other related CINCPAC contingency plans. One of them, OPLAN 38-64, provided for a US military response, primarily with air and naval forces, to sudden large-scale Chinese Communist and North Vietnamese aggression in Southeast Asia. Another plan, OPLAN 32-64, constituted CINCPAC’s basic program for defense of the Southeast Asia mainland in circumstances short of general war.¹⁵

On 5 September, Admiral Sharp promulgated one further plan. In response to a JCS directive of late June, he submitted CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65, for operations to forestall or halt aggression by China and its allies in Southeast Asia, South Korea, or elsewhere. As directed, the plan placed primary reliance on US air and naval operations, holding US ground force involvement on the Asian continent to a minimum. “Its key is the cessation of aggression by striking the Asian Communist heartland.” Emphasizing flexibility and a range of actions, the plan offered US policymakers a number of options. Phase I of the plan consisted of deployments for deterrent effect. Phase II provided for pre-emptive

action on the basis of strategic warning of impending aggression, as well as for full-scale action against an aggression already launched.¹⁶

On 21 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65, noting that it still was undergoing further development. Among the modifications that the Joint Chiefs of Staff required was a slight alteration in the title, which became simply “Contingency Plan for CHICOM Aggression.” The Joint Chiefs also made a significant change in the plan’s statement of mission. Instead of calling for deployment of forces to “damage” the military, logistic, and economic structure of Communist China, and “as required,” that of North Vietnam and North Korea, the Joint Chiefs of Staff inserted “destroy” as the active verb. The purpose of US action would be “to deter, prevent, or cause cessation of large-scale aggression or attacks by Communist China.”¹⁷

The Enemy Press Their Offensive

While US officials made and re-made their plans, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong methodically implemented the decisions of late 1963 to expand their military effort in South Vietnam. During 1964, according to MACV estimates, the enemy’s full-time regular “main force” units expanded in strength from about 27,000 to more than 40,000 men. The Viet Cong guerrillas and hamlet militia grew in proportion. By mid-year, MACV had confirmed the presence of native North Vietnamese among the infiltrators who kept coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Weapons and equipment also flowed down the trail or entered South Vietnam by coastal shipping. By late 1964, Viet Cong regular units were receiving new mortars, machine guns, anti-tank rocket launchers, and recoilless rifles of Communist bloc manufacture. Most ominous for the allies was the appearance in South Vietnam of the AK-47 automatic assault rifle, a small arm superior to those carried by the ARVN.

Following Politburo directives, enemy units from platoon to battalion size sought battle with South Vietnamese regular and territorial forces. Operating at times in multi-battalion strength, they frequently attacked small government outposts and strategic hamlets, then ambushed and bloodied relieving columns. In some rural areas, notably the piedmont and coastal plain of I and II Corps, Communist local forces and guerrillas, backed by main force elements, completely cleared out government troops and officials, allowing Viet Cong political cadres to exercise open control of the people.¹⁸

During September and October, the Politburo in Hanoi, after reviewing the progress of the campaign, reaffirmed its commitment to expanded large-unit warfare. Viewing South Vietnam’s continued political disarray, the leaders were convinced that only the RVNAF stood between them and victory in the South. Hence, they decided to mobilize all their resources “to bring about a massive change in the direction and pace of expansion of our main force army on the battlefield, to launch strong massed combat operations on the campaign level, and to seek to win a decisive victory within the next few years.” To this end, the North Vietnamese dispatched to take command in the South Senior General

Nguyen Chi Thanh, a Politburo member and Deputy Secretary of the Central Military Party Committee. General Thanh was accompanied by “many high-level cadre with experience in building up main force units and in leading and directing massed combat operations.” With him also came full regiments of the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN), which in October started their march to the south. These troops, along with the Viet Cong, were to launch a campaign during the winter and spring of 1964–1965 “aimed at destroying a number of puppet regular army units and expanding our liberated zones.”¹⁹

Besides expanding their operations in rural areas, the enemy in 1964 used small elite units of sappers and commandos to attack targets in government-held zones, including US bases. Among other strikes, the Viet Cong sank the aircraft transport USS *Card* at the Saigon port and attempted unsuccessfully to kill Secretary McNamara during his May visit to the South Vietnamese capital. In November, one such attack sent the Johnson administration into a new flurry of policy deliberations.²⁰

The Bien Hoa Attack and US Reaction

Just after midnight, in the first minutes of 1 November, a Viet Cong force slipped by the South Vietnamese security troops at Bien Hoa Air Base, twelve miles northwest of Saigon. The enemy set up mortars and in a 39-minute attack fired approximately 60 rounds at the crowded flight line, runway, control tower, and bivouac area before escaping unscathed. The shelling killed four US servicemen and wounded or injured 72. Besides other US and VNAF aircraft damaged, the attack destroyed five of the B-57s deployed to Bien Hoa after the August Tonkin Gulf incident and damaged thirteen, putting out of action half of the total force of 36 bombers. Aircraft sent to South Vietnam as a deterrent and a signal to Hanoi had become simply targets. In an early message, Admiral Sharp called the enemy action “a well executed attack and psychologically well timed.” Staged on the South Vietnamese holiday celebrating the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem, the bombardment appeared to be a deliberate affront to the new Huong government and perhaps related to the US national election of 3 November as well.²¹

Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland all viewed the incident from the first as precisely the type of enemy action against US forces that senior officials recently had identified as grounds for retaliation. In his first substantive message on 1 November, Taylor called the Viet Cong attack “a deliberate act of escalation and a change of the ground rules under which they have operated up to now.” He continued:

It should be met promptly by an appropriate act of reprisal against a DRV target, preferably an airfield. Since both US and GVN have been victims of this attack and since ultimate objective should be to convince Hanoi to cease aid to VC (and not merely to lay off US), the retaliatory action should be made by a combined US/VNAF effort. Immediate objective would be to reduce probability of similar attacks on other crowded US facilities such as Da Nang and Tan Son Nhut and to offset the depressive effect of this action on the new government.

Ambassador Taylor thought the retaliation should be launched within 48 hours at the latest, and preferably within 24. He was preparing target recommendations and requested authority to consult with Premier Huong and General Khanh toward agreement in principle on combined reprisal action. In a message of his own, General Westmoreland endorsed the Ambassador's call for retaliation.²²

Within a few hours, Ambassador Taylor expanded upon the US Mission's views. He repeated that the retaliation should be a combined US-GVN action on a tit-for-tat basis, following the provocation as closely as possible in time. The target in North Vietnam comparable to Bien Hoa was clearly the Phuc Yen airfield outside Hanoi, current location of the enemy MIG force. The presence of those aircraft and the field's strong antiaircraft defenses ruled out VNAF participation in the attack. Nevertheless, Taylor believed Phuc Yen should be struck first, before the MIGs could disperse to other bases. The next most suitable targets, he said, were two barracks and an ammunition depot, all close together in lower North Vietnam and within the VNAF's range and capabilities. A US attack on Phuc Yen and a US/VNAF strike on the barracks and ammunition depot would be "the combination of maximum effect."

Ambassador Taylor told Washington officials that if they decided that day (the 1st), to attack Phuc Yen, the 2nd Air Division²³ could launch the strike at first light on 3 November with forces already in South Vietnam. Taylor strongly urged that "any strikes approved be viewed as the inauguration of a new policy of tit-for-tat reprisals ... for major Viet Cong depredations." He recommended that, immediately following the strikes, the United States and the South Vietnamese government announce jointly that retaliation would thenceforth be the rule against any major acts of sabotage, terrorism, destruction of industrial facilities, or interruption of rail and highway communications.²⁴

Even before these exchanges, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had taken action. They directed CINCPAC to move the embarked Marine special landing force (SLF) toward Da Nang and there to hold it offshore and out of sight of land. In line with General Westmoreland's earlier recommendations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also ordered Admiral Sharp to prepare to deploy Army and Marine units by air from Okinawa to reinforce security in the Saigon area and at the two adjacent airbases, Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut. Finally, the Joint Chiefs requested CINCPAC's recommendations for reprisal action.²⁵

In reply, Admiral Sharp named three targets, all barracks or military camps. Attacking them would be an appropriate reprisal for the American casualties suffered in the bivouac areas at Bien Hoa. If the administration desired heavier retaliation, strikes could be launched at Phuc Yen airfield and any other targets listed in CINCPAC's revised order of 28 October. Admiral Sharp closed by observing that "failure to establish the fact now that attacks such as that on Bien Hoa will result in prompt and heavy retaliatory action can only result in a serious blow to our prestige and serve to invite further attacks at places and times of [the enemy's] choosing." "As a minimum," the Admiral recommended bombing the three barracks areas.²⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff met early on the morning of 1 November to formulate their recommendations for a military response to the Bien Hoa attack. General Wheeler

presented their views orally to the Secretary of Defense that day and reaffirmed them in writing on 4 November. The Joint Chiefs urged a course of action considerably stronger than any recommended by Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC, or COMUSMACV during the 48 hours following the mortar bombardment at Bien Hoa.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff viewed Bien Hoa as more than an incident requiring reprisal in kind. Agreeing with Ambassador Taylor's characterization of the attack as "a deliberate act of escalation," they considered that it marked the time when the United States must undertake systematic military action to cause North Vietnam to desist from its support of the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao. Besides launching immediate retaliation, the United States should institute a program of progressive attacks against the targets of the 94 Target List. Specifically, the Joint Chiefs recommended that within 24 to 36 hours, PACOM forces should conduct air strikes against five barracks, supply areas, and bridges in Laos. At the same time, Admiral Sharp should conduct low-level reconnaissance of infiltration routes and of targets in North Vietnam south of 19 degrees north latitude (roughly the lower third of North Vietnam). These operations would provide an immediate response, employ forces already in place, and divert the enemy's attention from the preparations and deployments necessary for the stronger actions to follow. The preparations would include dispatching the Marine SLF to Da Nang and airlifting Army or Marine units from Okinawa to the Saigon area. The airlift transports then could be used to help evacuate the more than 1,700 US dependents from South Vietnam—a move that the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed should begin concurrently with the air strikes against North Vietnam.

While these activities went on, US forces would prepare for the following operations:

- a. Within 60 to 72 hours, 30 SAC B-52 aircraft from Guam conduct a night strike on Phuc Yen airfield.
- b. At first light thereafter, PACOM carrier- and land-based aircraft conduct a follow-up strike against Phuc Yen and strikes against POL storage at Hanoi and Haiphong and against the Gia Lam and Cat Bi airfields at those two cities.
- c. Also at first light, VNAF aircraft strike the Vit Thu barracks.

While the above operations would have the appearance of reprisal, the JCS believed that they should be merely the first steps in a sustained program of attacks. The following steps should be: armed reconnaissance of infiltration routes in Laos; air strikes against infiltration routes and targets in North Vietnam; and progressive destruction by SAC and PACOM forces of the targets of the 94 Target List. To carry out the program, the Joint Chiefs recommended that the US obtain authority to use bases in Thailand as necessary.²⁷

Within 24 hours of the raid on Bien Hoa, Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff all had gone on record in favor of strong US retaliation. Yet within the same period, it became clear that the Johnson administration was not going to strike back immediately. In an early indication of the trend of events, the State Department, replying to Taylor's first message, instructed him not to approach South Vietnamese leaders regarding a reprisal. He should hold back pending the outcome of a high-level meeting in Washington scheduled for noon on 1 November.²⁸

Following the noon meeting of senior officials, General Wheeler advised Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland that a White House meeting to discuss courses of action was scheduled for the afternoon of the 2nd. At the noon meeting, General Wheeler advised, “concern was expressed that proposed US retaliatory/punitive actions could trigger North Vietnamese/CHICOM air and ground retaliatory acts.” The Chairman reported that “highest authority” wanted to consider, “in conjunction with US military actions, increased security measures and precautionary moves of US air and ground units to protect US dependents, units and installations against North Vietnamese/CHICOM retaliation.”

General Wheeler requested comments from the three addressees on actions being considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They were: withdrawal of US dependents before launching air strikes against the North; landing the Marine SLF at Da Nang and moving two Army or Marine battalions to the Saigon area to provide local security; deployment of a Marine HAWK antiaircraft missile battalion from California to South Vietnam; augmenting land-based and carrier air resources for higher effectiveness in any attacks on North Vietnam; and forward movement from the United States or within PACOM of ground, sea, and air units to the western Pacific and alerting additional units in the US “as might be required to implement appropriate portions of CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64 and/or CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65.” The Chairman reported also that the Joint Chiefs were considering the “military utility” of using US aircraft against the Viet Cong within South Vietnam, in support of the VNAF and FARM GATE.²⁹

Before Ambassador Taylor and the other addressees could reply to this message, the Saigon Embassy received another, dispatched after the noon meeting, which in effect ruled out an immediate reprisal. The joint State-Defense communication declared that Taylor’s initial dispatches after the Bien Hoa attack had received careful thought. “There is no doubt here that this event adds considerably to cumulative factors pointing toward much harder policy in near future.” Nevertheless, the officials in Washington would “find it hard” to portray the Bien Hoa raid as a major act of escalation in itself, “since it differs only in degree and extent of damage” from previous similar incidents. Further, the administration was “reluctant to give any appearance of reacting only when US personnel [are] affected.” These considerations argued against a “one-shot retaliatory treatment.”

In addition . . . , all of us here, including the JCS, are negative on a tit-for-tat policy as basis for real action against the North. Not only is it hard to define such a policy, but all our studies and war games have indicated that in the end it conveys a weak signal to Hanoi and also has maximum disadvantages in [the] wider international sphere.

With a specific reprisal thus tentatively rejected, Washington officials saw the Bien Hoa attack as significant chiefly for bringing “measurably nearer point of decision on systematic wider actions against [the] North.” They recognized, nevertheless, that some action to support South Vietnamese morale might be called for, such as release of US aircraft for overt missions against the Viet Cong. While this move would appreciably

increase allied military capabilities, it had the disadvantage of assuming an explicit US combat role for the first time. Also, sooner or later, US planes would probably attack innocent civilians by mistake, with unfortunate repercussions. Officials also were considering deployment of US security battalions to Bien Hoa, Da Nang, and Nha Trang. This move could have the desirable appearance of “securing the decks for action,” but it was unclear how much it would really improve security; and the commitment would “add to our casualties and general exposure.” State and Defense asked the Ambassador and COMUSMACV to comment.³⁰

In a “literally eyes only” message to Ambassador Taylor, Secretary Rusk pointed out an additional reason for not taking action:

In this one case we are inevitably affected by election timing. Quick retaliation could easily be attacked as [an] election device here, and this would play back to Hanoi and greatly weaken intended signal. More basically, we believe such action would in practice commit us to some form of tit-for-tat policy that could only be effective if leading rapidly to [a] more systematic campaign of military pressures on north with all [the] implications we have always seen in this course of action. Such a decision is not one to be lightly taken nor is it wise or perhaps even proper for [the] administration to take it in closing two days of campaign while awaiting firm mandate from [the] people.³¹

Ambassador Taylor disagreed with the administration’s reasoning of 1 November. The following day, he declared that “from the Saigon end of [the] line, the Bien Hoa attack looks quite different from the view set forth” in the joint State-Defense message. “It was unique as an attack directed specifically against US units and equipment,” under circumstances unrelated to the day-to-day advisory effort, in which US forces expected to take losses. The Bien Hoa attack resembled the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, except that the enemy was the Viet Cong (whom the US held to be agents of North Vietnam); the event took place on land; and US forces suffered losses while the enemy escaped unscathed.

Finally, it demonstrated a new tactic, the employment of surprise attack by massed mortar fire, with such success that the US B-57 capability in this country was knocked out in about 15 minutes. Hence, we cannot view it as a VC aggression which is merely an improved version of similar past conduct. It is clear that Hanoi also views this as something special and expects something from us.

With regard to the views of South Vietnamese officials on the incident, Ambassador Taylor assessed that, if anything, they were less concerned than they ought to be. The event had occurred during a holiday when few newspapers were published, and the general public had scarcely reacted. General Khanh had issued a press release understating the damage and then left town without attempting to consult the Ambassador. “For the moment,” Ambassador Taylor wrote, “I believe no action needs to be considered purely for impact on local morale. However, if there is no US reaction, our prestige is going to sag, both with friend and enemy.”

As to the use of US aircraft in South Vietnam and the deployment of US troops for base defense, Ambassador Taylor saw no advantage in either course. The existing VNAF/FARM GATE force was ample to hit the available lucrative targets, and the number of VNAF aircraft would double by December as the last of the four A1H squadrons completed its training. The placement of US battalions to guard bases “is likely to convey [a] message that [the] US intends to continue to limit its actions to SVN and to defensive measures—a note I hope we will not strike.” On balance, Ambassador Taylor recommended against this measure “under the circumstances presently in mind. My opinion might be different if we were embarked on an escalating program of pressures against [the] DRV.”³²

The Ambassador’s views notwithstanding, officials at the White House meeting of 2 November, which General Wheeler attended, reaffirmed their decision against immediate retaliation for Bien Hoa. In a message to Admiral Sharp shortly after the meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff summed up the consensus as “appropriate response to Bien Hoa attack is in order but such response need not be immediate. However, another similar VC attack would require immediate action by US forces . . .” Officials at the meeting had expressed concern over the adequacy of security measures around air bases and other sensitive US installations in South Vietnam. The Chairman had assured them that General Westmoreland was pursuing this matter vigorously with South Vietnamese military officials.³³

Addressing the administration’s concern, Admiral Sharp declared that General Westmoreland would continue to do all within his power to make US installations secure; but he noted that they were “inherently vulnerable.” Most of them were situated in the midst of populated areas and could be made safe only if the South Vietnamese government instituted rigid population controls—a time-consuming process at best. Admiral Sharp stated that the Viet Cong had possessed the capability to attack any of the US air bases for some time. He believed that the enemy had refrained in the past from fear of strong US retaliation and had recently decided deliberately to risk a new level of hostilities. Now, with the lack of a determined US response, they would be encouraged to launch further attacks.

Under these circumstances, Admiral Sharp recommended some redistribution of US forces in and around South Vietnam. “Since the air bases in Vietnam are congested, clearly insecure and without dispersal facilities of any kind,” CINCPAC wrote, “we should not expose any more airplanes and American personnel on these bases than are necessary for the immediate mission. Aircraft can be moved readily in and out of RVN as requirements dictate.” In addition, with no major US action against the North in immediate prospect, Admiral Sharp advocated reducing the number of US carriers off Vietnam from three to one, with a second stationed in the South China Sea within 48 hours steaming distance. There should be no further augmentation of Air Force strength in South Vietnam.³⁴

At the White House meeting on 2 November, General Wheeler presented the JCS views that he had given orally to the Secretary of Defense the previous day. On 4 Novem-

ber, the Joint Chiefs of Staff put their position in writing in a memorandum to Secretary McNamara. They repeated their recommendation of the following specific operations: strikes against five targets in Laos and low-level air reconnaissance over part of North Vietnam; after preparation, a strong B-52 night attack on Phuc Yen airfield, followed the next morning by restrike and concurrent attacks on POL and airfields at Hanoi and Haiphong, plus a VNAF strike at Vit Thu barracks. These should be followed by continuing armed reconnaissance over infiltration routes in Laos, air strikes against infiltration routes and targets in North Vietnam, and “progressive PACOM and SAC [Strategic Air Command] strikes against targets listed in the 94 Target Study.”

In justification, the Joint Chiefs cited both general and specific considerations. Referring to their previous conclusion that the current level of effort was not sufficient to stabilize the situation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that “there now appears to be a South Vietnamese Government that can provide at least an initial basis for a more positive program of US actions,” aimed at causing North Vietnam to cease its support of the insurgents. Specific justification lay in the Viet Cong raid on Bien Hoa, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff joined Ambassador Taylor in characterizing as “a deliberate act of escalation and a change of the ground rules under which the VC have operated up to now.” This enemy escalation called for a prompt and strong response:

Undue delay or restraint on our part could be misinterpreted by our allies in Southeast Asia, as well as by the DRV and Communist China. Such misinterpretation could encourage the enemy to conduct additional attacks, including acts of terrorism, against US personnel and their dependents.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed any declaration committing the United States to tit-for-tat reprisals. This approach they held to be unduly restrictive, in that it would concede the initiative to the enemy and impose inflexibility on both the nature and level of the US response. Rather than reprisal against comparable targets, they recommended undertaking the full program of operations they had listed.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff addressed the issue of evacuating the 1,700 US Government dependents and 3,100 other US nationals from South Vietnam. Such an evacuation, desirable from the security standpoint, raised the danger of demoralizing the government and people of South Vietnam, who would view the exodus as a sign the Americans were abandoning them. The Joint Chiefs suggested that if the evacuation occurred in conjunction with strikes against the North, favorable reaction to the increased US military activity would more than offset the adverse morale impact.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff closed their memorandum of 4 November with a pointed summary of their beliefs:

- a. We have reached a major decision point in Southeast Asia;
- b. The United States should continue to pursue its stated objective of keeping Laos, Thailand, and SVN free from communist domination. Military actions such as recommended herein are necessary contributions to this objective; and

c. Early US military action against the DRV would lessen the possibility of misinterpretation by the DRV and Communist China of US determination and intent and thus serve to deter further VC attacks such as that at Bien Hoa.³⁵

A New Study Group Is Formed

Although the President and his senior advisers had decided against immediate retaliation for the Bien Hoa attack, the event did set in motion a round of critical and comprehensive deliberations within the administration. The further consultations regarding US courses of action in Southeast Asia occupied the next four weeks. They culminated late in November in meetings that included Ambassador Taylor, who had returned to Washington for policy discussions.

At the White House session on 2 November, President Johnson set in motion another interagency policy study. He directed the formation of a National Security Council Working Group, subsequently referred to on occasion as the Executive Committee or ExCom. Chaired by Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy and made up of officers at assistant secretary level or its equivalent from the JCS, CIA, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the White House, the group was to prepare a policy paper considering all possible US courses of action in Southeast Asia. Vice Admiral Lloyd M. Mustin, USN, Director of Operations of the Joint Staff, represented the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the committee.

The Working Group held its first meeting on 3 November, after which Assistant Secretary Bundy prepared a project outline and assigned topics from it to various members of the group. In perhaps the most critical part of the outline, Section III, "Southeast Asia and the Broad Options," Bundy presented three policy options to be considered. They were:

- A. Continue on present lines.
- B. Present policies plus a systematic program of military pressures against the north, meshing at some point with negotiation, but with pressure actions to be continued until we achieve our central present objectives.
- C. Present policies plus additional forceful measures and military moves, followed by negotiations in which we would seek to maintain a believable threat of still further military pressures but would not actually carry out such pressures to any marked degree during the negotiations.

Working on the basis of this outline, the group met frequently during the following two weeks. They developed draft sections of the paper, considering proposals and previously prepared views of different agencies, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff.³⁶

JCS Positions, mid-November

During the Working Group's deliberations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff contributed two major statements of their views. The first concerned possible North Vietnamese or Chinese Communist military reactions to air strikes against the North. At the 2 November meeting, General Wheeler received instructions to make a detailed examination of this issue. As the Chairman described the purpose for the Joint Staff later in the day, "this paper would be designed to anticipate enemy reactions, lay out our response to such reactions and define in detail the preparatory measures which we should undertake prior to mounting an attack so that we could respond in a timely, effective fashion to any enemy initiative."³⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided their views on enemy reaction to Secretary McNamara on 14 November. They repeated their action recommendations of 4 November, quoting the paragraphs of that memorandum outlining the program of military operations they favored. "Although these actions were recommended for the attack on Bien Hoa," the JCS declared, "they comprise an option equally applicable and available for immediate implementation in the event of other serious provocations in Southeast Asia."

The Joint Chiefs anticipated "no significant logistic or transportation deficiencies" that would obstruct attacks on the 94 Target List but noted that certain additional deployments would be necessary at the time of decision. These included movement from the United States to Southeast Asia of two USAF tactical fighter squadrons and additional reconnaissance and tanker aircraft, as well as bringing the number of attack carriers in the area up to three. (CINCPAC had recommended all of these actions during the exchanges following the Bien Hoa raid.)

In assessing probable North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist reaction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not differ notably from their earlier review of the question on 27 October. They believed that Hanoi and Peiping would "make every effort through propaganda and diplomatic moves" to halt any US attacks on North Vietnam. Although North Vietnam would "take all actions to defend itself," the communist nations would be "unlikely to expand the conflict." The Joint Chiefs of Staff were convinced that China would be "very reluctant" to engage directly in the fighting in Southeast Asia for fear that the US would seize the opportunity to attack the Chinese mainland. As the severity of US attacks on North Vietnam increased, the Chinese might feel compelled to take some action short of direct confrontation with American forces, perhaps a deployment of ground troops into northern Laos. Nevertheless, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the Chinese "probably would not openly engage US forces unless they felt it was necessary to prevent collapse of the communist regime in North Vietnam." Hence, there would "not be a high risk" of Chinese air and ground forces joining the battle unless major US or South Vietnamese units moved to occupy areas of North Vietnam or communist-held territory in Laos or the US bombed air bases in China in response to a commitment of Chinese air or naval power. Admittedly, however, "there is always a chance that Peiping

might intervene either for reasons that seem irrational to us or because they miscalculated the objectives of US moves and US resolve to remain in the area.”

In an appendix to their memorandum, the Joint Chiefs analyzed nine possible enemy courses of action and matched them against the available US and allied responses, with data on objectives, forces, deployments, and timing where feasible. “The salient conclusion which can be drawn from this analysis,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised Mr. McNamara, “is that the United States and its allies can deal adequately with any course of action the DRV and/or CHICOMs decide to pursue.” Discussing US capability to counter any of the enemy moves, the Joint Chiefs found no significant logistic or personnel deficiencies until the uppermost levels of action were reached. They anticipated shortfalls when approaching full implementation of CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64, which called for sending nearly six divisions with supporting air and naval forces to Southeast Asia, and to a lesser extent when implementing the strongest actions of OPLAN 39-65. In these cases, the United States would have to mobilize some reserves, mainly Air Force transportation units and Army combat service support units, and extend terms of active duty. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff thought it improbable that the enemy would do anything that required full implementation of these plans in response. In any event, they said, “risks involved are considered to be more acceptable than the alternative of continuing the present course or withdrawal from Southeast Asia.”³⁸

In closing their memorandum of 14 November, the Joint Chiefs recommended that it be forwarded to the President and that its findings be reflected in the report being prepared by the NSC Working Group. Secretary McNamara replied that both this memorandum and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations of 4 November would receive consideration during the current interdepartmental study. He gave assurance that the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff would accompany the ExCom’s report when it went to the President.³⁹

On 18 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff delivered their second major statement of views. This one came in response to a request from Secretary McNamara, on 10 November, for Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations on courses of action to bring “controlled and increasingly severe military pressure on North Vietnam.” The Joint Chiefs responded in a memorandum with extensive appendices. Secretary McNamara added this memorandum to the materials being considered by the Working Group.⁴⁰

At the outset, the Joint Chiefs of Staff made clear that, in their view, the preferred course of action was the one they had already recommended, most recently in their memorandum of 14 November. It would provide an “initial hard knock” by destroying at the first blow the enemy’s main air capability and POL storage. In the current memorandum, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a military program for use if higher authority chose instead to apply controlled, systematically increased pressures against North Vietnam—the course of action toward which the NSC Working Group then was leaning. Such a program, the Joint Chiefs declared, should “signal the willingness and determination of the United States to employ increasing force in support of national objectives” in Southeast Asia and “reduce, progressively, DRV support of the insurgencies in RVN

and Laos to the extent necessary to tip the balance clearly in favor of the Governments of RVN and Laos.” To achieve the latter goal, the United States must reduce the amount of support available through destruction of men, material, and facilities; diversion of North Vietnam’s resources to increased homeland defenses and alerts; destruction of bridges and other LOC choke points, staging installations, and transport; and interruption of movements by attacks on selected fixed targets, armed route reconnaissance, raids, and waterborne interdictions.

As the Joint Chiefs of Staff viewed it, the gradual program would have two additional objectives. It would punish North Vietnam for Viet Cong and Pathet Lao military actions against the South Vietnamese and Laotian governments, including the US casualties that resulted from those actions; and it would aim at terminating the conflicts in South Vietnam and Laos “only under conditions which would result in the achievement of US objectives.”

The Joint Chiefs recommended a detailed military program very similar to the one they had proposed on 27 October, which had listed actions in an ascending order of severity. Their proposal of 18 November was more explicit regarding targets and numbers of sorties required. Unlike the October memorandum, it omitted the final possible step of committing “US and allied ground forces into Southeast Asia as required”; although it contained a somewhat similar provision under collateral actions.

The specific actions recommended, in sequence, were: 1) resume DE SOTO patrols; 2) intensify OPLAN 34A operations with the addition of air strikes against selected targets; 3) expand air and initiate ground cross-border operations against the Laos infiltration routes; 4) permit Saigon, at its discretion, to send its forces in pursuit of Viet Cong who withdrew into Cambodia; 5) conduct US armed reconnaissance and interdiction on highways in Laos and bomb Pathet Lao forces and facilities throughout Laos; 6) conduct low-level air reconnaissance of infiltration-associated targets near the Laos border in North Vietnam and attack lines of communication there and in the DMZ; 7) expand reconnaissance coverage of North Vietnam, extending it to Cambodia if necessary, and strike infiltration-associated targets in North Vietnam (446 sorties against 13 targets south of the 19th Parallel, followed by 594 sorties against 14 targets north of that parallel); 8) air drop mines into North Vietnamese ports, initiate a “naval quarantine/blockade,” and make heavier attacks on North Vietnamese targets; 9) be prepared to extend maritime operations as necessary to control shipping to Cambodia; 10) conduct air strikes against the remaining military and industrial targets on the 94 Target List; and 11) by amphibious and airborne operations, establish one or more lodgements on the North Vietnamese coast, large enough to pose a plausible threat. In addition, US forces should stand ready to launch appropriate reprisals if the North Vietnamese attacked a DE SOTO patrol or the Viet Cong committed a major depredation similar to the Bien Hoa raid.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also listed collateral actions that should accompany a decision to undertake the graduated program. These included evacuation of American dependents from Laos and South Vietnam and deployment of US forces for security and deterrent purposes in accord with the appropriate CINCPAC OPLANs. In addition, the

Joint Chiefs suggested the re-introduction of a MAAG-type supply and training mission to Laos. Finally, they proposed to deploy “additional US (and Thai or other Allied) forces” as necessary to: “conduct required operations,” deter further communist aggression, defend key points on the Mekong River, and logistically support operations.⁴¹

Ambassador Taylor Weighs In

In several messages, Ambassador Taylor added his views to the new round of Washington policy deliberations. On 3 November, Ambassador Taylor commented, at Secretary McNamara’s request, on the program of action the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended on 27 October. Most of the Ambassador’s points were equally applicable to the Joint Chiefs submission of 18 November and moreover expressed positions that he was to maintain in the consultations of the following weeks.

The Ambassador indicated complete agreement with the thesis that deterioration in South Vietnam could be checked only by measured military pressures on the Hanoi government to stop supporting the Viet Cong “and to use its authority to cause VC to cease or at least to moderate their depredations.” But unless the United States was going to retaliate very soon to the Bien Hoa attack along the lines Taylor had recommended, the Ambassador favored delay in taking action until the new Huong government found its footing. During this interim period, the US might intensify OPLAN 34A operations, adding covert VNAF air strikes against selected targets. As he had in other recent messages, Ambassador Taylor opposed the Joint Chiefs suggestion that US aircraft be used against the Viet Cong; but he stated the reason somewhat differently. “It amounts to departure for no clear gain from the principle that the Vietnamese fight their own war in SVN.”

The Ambassador also opposed resuming DE SOTO patrols, except for essential intelligence purposes. “If we are seeking an excuse for action, it is to our interest to strike Hanoi for its malefactions in SVN and not for actions in the Bay of Tonkin against the US Navy.” Besides, Ambassador Taylor noted, the most recent Tonkin Gulf incident, the firing at radar-detected targets on 18 September, had “developed in such a way as to reduce our ability to use subsequent episodes as a credible basis for action.” The United States should link military strikes to Hanoi’s support of the Viet Cong, not to the defense of purely American interests; and ample justification was available. Ambassador Taylor cited infiltration activities, the Bien Hoa raid, and increasing Viet Cong sabotage of the Saigon-Da Nang railway as examples of provocation.

Ambassador Taylor saw “nothing but disadvantage in farther stirring up the Cambodian border” by allowing ARVN hot pursuit across it. “We don’t often catch the fleeing VC in the heart of SVN,” he observed; “I see little likelihood of doing much better in Cambodia.” He cautioned that the reaction of Cambodia’s ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, might generate difficulties outweighing any military gain.

The Ambassador closed his comments on the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations of 27 October with “a final word”:

It is well to remind ourselves that “too much” in this matter of coercing Hanoi may be as bad as “too little.” At some point, we will need a relatively cooperative leadership in Hanoi willing to wind up the VC insurgency on terms satisfactory to us and our SVN allies. What we don’t want is an expanded war in SEA [Southeast Asia] and an unresolved guerrilla problem in SVN.⁴²

In two additional messages a week later, Ambassador Taylor provided additional information and comment pertinent to the study going on in Washington. He was convinced that “the next few months will be critical to the success of the new government and to our efforts to bring about some degree of stabilization in the internal political situation” of South Vietnam. Even under favorable circumstances, it would require three to four months to get the Huong government functioning effectively. The Ambassador planned to encourage the South Vietnamese to establish a set of short-term objectives—related to expansion and improvement of Saigon’s military forces and police and advancement of pacification—that were reasonably attainable. Success in these endeavors would “provide a point of departure from which we can later undertake more ambitious projects, military and civilian, inside and outside SVN.”⁴³

On 10 November, the Ambassador reported that the Mission Council was seeking to define the minimum level of Saigon government required to provide a basis for mounting military pressures against the North. Taylor “would describe that minimum as one capable of maintaining law and order in the urban areas, of securing vital military bases from VC attacks, and gearing its efforts with those of the U[nited] S[tates] G[overnment].” But, he asked, “do we withhold all action against the DRV (except those of the morale-sustaining type) until we get this minimum government? What if we never get it?”

My own answer would be that it is highly desirable to have this kind of minimum government before accepting the risks inherent in any escalation program. However, if the government falters and gives good reason to believe that it will never attain the desired level of performance, I would favor going against the North anyway. The purpose of such an attack would be to give pulmotor treatment for a government in extremis and to make sure that the DRV does not get off unscathed in any final settlement.

The Ambassador expanded upon the difficulties of working with a people who apparently lacked the willingness to sacrifice for a larger national purpose. He considered that the government “means well.” However, “major outside groups such as some Buddhists, Catholics and politicians” refused to give the new regime support and “are trying to tear it down before it even has a chance.” The Vietnamese “do not know how to remedy the situation, except at some damage to what they feel are their personal interests, and for all too many . . . this is unthinkable.” Yet Ambassador Taylor viewed the South Vietnamese as “an individually capable and courageous people” who did not want to be ruled by the North. There was a surprising degree of vitality and resiliency in the country at large that was generally unaffected by the political turmoil in Saigon. “Thus,” the Ambassador concluded, “we must hang on, doing our best in the hope that

out of this welter some real leadership will eventually emerge, and play for the breaks. Taking the initiative against the North is one way to force the breaks.”⁴⁴

A State Department View: Walt Rostow

As the NSC Working Group continued to study courses of action, Mr. Walt Rostow, Chairman of the State Department’s Policy Planning Council, presented a view that differed considerably from those of Ambassador Taylor and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In a memorandum to Secretary McNamara on 16 November, following a conversation the previous day, Mr. Rostow expressed concern “that too much thought is being given to the actual damage we do in the North, not enough thought to the signal we wish to send.” The signal, he believed, should make three points: first, that damage to the North is now being inflicted because they are violating the 1954 and 1962 accords; second, the US was “ready and able to go much further than our initial act of damage”; and third, the US was “ready and able to meet any level of escalation they might mount in response, if they are so minded.”

Unlike other participants in the administration’s discussions, Mr. Rostow saw a role for US ground troops in the signaling process. He was convinced “that we should not go forward into the next stage without a US ground force commitment of some kind.” By placing its combat troops in South Vietnam, and even in Laos, the United States would make clear to Hanoi’s leaders that they would encounter American strength on the ground if they tried to respond by invasion to US air attacks on their homeland. Also, withdrawal of these American ground forces could be an important bargaining counter in subsequent negotiations. Mr. Rostow pointed out that ground forces “can sit during a conference more easily than we can maintain a series of mounting air and naval pressures.”

As for the air strikes against the North, Mr. Rostow thought the first ones should be designed merely to establish that North Vietnam would thenceforward be subject to attack for its continuing violations of the 1954 and 1962 agreements. Accordingly, the initial bombing should be “as limited and as unsanguinary as possible.” It should establish the principle rather than wreak major damage.⁴⁵

By the time Mr. Rostow penned his remarks, the policy process set in motion on 2 November was moving toward its conclusion. The NSC Working Group, by 17 November, had prepared a 100-page preliminary draft report for comment. That same day, the administration instructed Ambassador Taylor to come to Washington on 26 November for what were expected to be about five days of high-level policy consultations. At those consultations, officials were to produce recommendations on a course of action in Southeast Asia for submission to President Johnson by 1 December.⁴⁶

A New Presidential Decision

The National Security Council Working Group issued its draft report on 17 November, followed on the 21st by a draft summary paper. There followed two weeks of intensive high-level policy discussions. The process began with comments on the drafts from the State and Defense Departments, the Central Intelligence Agency, and US officials in Saigon. It continued through days of meetings, in which Ambassador Taylor joined on the 26th. The deliberations culminated on 1 December in a new set of presidential decisions on the next phase of the Vietnam effort. Throughout, the Joint Chiefs of Staff contributed to the discussions, advocating early strong action against North Vietnam; but their views did not prevail.

The Working Group Suggests Three Alternatives

The Working Group's summary, drafted by William Bundy of State and John McNaughton of Defense, began with a review of some fundamentals. In South Vietnam, the authors concluded, "the political situation remains critical and extremely fragile. The security situation in the countryside has continued to deteriorate." Although the "basic elements" of enemy strength in the South were indigenous, "the North Vietnamese (DRV) contribution is substantial and may now be growing. There appears to be a rising rate of infiltration." The United States ability to compel North Vietnam to end or reduce the Viet Cong insurrection "rests essentially upon the effect of US sanctions on the will of the DRV leadership, and to a lesser extent on the effect of such sanctions on DRV capabilities." If North Vietnamese support were taken away, "the South Vietnamese could in time probably reduce the VC threat to manageable proportions."

The summary then reviewed US objectives and stakes in Southeast Asia. As part of the overall policy of resisting Communist expansion, the United States in South Vietnam was guided by the general principle of helping countries defend their own freedom;

by concern about the specific consequences of Communist control of South Vietnam and Laos on the security of other Asian nations; and by the worldwide implications of South Vietnam and, “to a lesser extent,” Laos as test cases of Communist “wars of national liberation.” “Essentially, the loss of South Vietnam to Communist control, in any form, would be a major blow to our basic policies. US prestige is heavily committed to the maintenance of a non-Communist South Vietnam, and only less heavily so to a neutralized Laos.” If South Vietnam fell, Laos and Cambodia likely would shift to the Communist camp and pressure would increase on Thailand and Malaysia. Mr. Bundy and Mr. McNaughton observed that

it cannot be concluded that the loss of South Vietnam would soon have the totally crippling effect in Southeast Asia and Asia generally that the loss of Berlin would have in Europe; but it could be that bad, driving us to the progressive loss of other areas or to taking a stand at some point where there would almost certainly be major conflict and perhaps the great risk of nuclear war.

At this juncture, the United States had available three broad options. Under Option A, the United States would continue “indefinitely” its present policies—maximum assistance within South Vietnam, limited military action in Laos and covertly by Saigon in North Vietnam, and reprisals for major Communist depredations, coupled with rejection of negotiations. Option B (which acquired the nickname of “fast full squeeze”) would add to the actions in A “a systematic program of military pressures against the north,” with the weight of the pressures increasing “at a fairly rapid pace and without interruption until we achieve our present stated objectives.” At some point, these actions would “mesh” with negotiations, “but we would approach any discussions ... with absolutely inflexible insistence on our present objectives.” Option C called for the addition to present actions of “an orchestration of 1) communications with Hanoi and/or Peiping, and 2) additional gradual military moves against infiltration targets, first in Laos and then in the DRV, and then against other targets in North Vietnam.” The military actions “should give the impression of a steady deliberate approach,” designed to give the United States “the option at any time to proceed or not, to escalate or not, and to quicken the pace or not.” In the accompanying negotiations, the United States would bargain “in an affirmative sense, accepting the possibility that we might not achieve our full objectives.”

The paper discussed the details of implementing every option and summarized the pros and cons of each. Option A would buy the allies “a short period of time,” but “appears to offer little hope of getting Hanoi out or an independent South Vietnam re-established.” Option B, Mr. Bundy and Mr. McNaughton declared, “probably stands a greater chance than either of the other two of attaining our objectives vis-à-vis Hanoi and a settlement in South Vietnam.” In addition, “Our display of real muscle in action would undoubtedly have a salutary effect on the morale of the rest of non-Communist Asia.” However, Option B “has considerably higher risks of major

military conflict with Hanoi and possibly Communist China.” Its results “could be extremely adverse to our position in other areas, and perhaps to American resolve to maintain present world-wide policies, *unless* we achieved a clearly satisfactory outcome in a fairly short time.”

Option C “is more controllable and less risky of major military action than Option B.” As a “stretched out course of action,” however, it was “likely to generate criticism in some quarters.” Nevertheless, this option was “more likely than Option A to achieve at least part of our objectives, and, even if it ended in the loss of South Vietnam, our having taken stronger measures would still leave us a good deal better off than under Option A with respect to the confidence and willingness to stand firm of the nations in the next line of defense in Asia.”

Whichever option the administration chose, the United States needed at once “a program of immediate actions” to bolster South Vietnamese morale and send a “firm signal” to Hanoi and Beijing. Conducted over four to eight weeks, this program should include: a strong presidential statement after the conference with Ambassador Taylor; a halt to the sending of dependents to South Vietnam; stepped-up air operations in Laos; increased high-level reconnaissance of North Vietnam and the beginning of low-level reconnaissance; a “small number of strikes just across the DRV border” against infiltration routes; a destroyer patrol in the Tonkin Gulf and also separately intensified South Vietnamese maritime operations; major US air deployments to the Philippines and at sea, in position to hit North Vietnam; and at any time reprisal air strikes against the North for “spectacular” enemy attacks in the South. In conjunction with these actions, the United States would press the Saigon government to “shape up” by intensifying all present programs. The authors warned:

None of these actions are inconsistent in theory with a decision to stick with Option A at least for the next few months. Nonetheless, to the degree they foreshadow stronger action, they would tend to have diminishing effect on GVN performance unless taken concurrently with at least an internal US Government decision that we were ready to move to Option C early in 1965 unless the situation changed.¹

JCS Comments on the Draft Summary, 23 November

The Joint Chiefs of Staff carefully considered their views on the NSC group’s working papers. The Joint Staff had identified a number of issues requiring comment, the first being concern that the papers understated “the gravity to the United States, both militarily and politically, of the possible loss of South Vietnam to the communists.” To address this point, the Joint Chiefs set forth basic considerations in full in their response. They also drew together in a single integrated treatment their two most recent expressions of views: JCSM-955-64, of 14 November, containing their preferred course of rapid major attacks

against North Vietnam (now called the “fast full squeeze”), and JCSM-967-64, of 18 November, outlining a program of graduated military pressures (“the progressive squeeze”).²

On 23 November, in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff laid out their position. They declared that Southeast Asia was “an area of major strategic importance to the United States, the loss of which would lead to grave political and military consequences in the entire Western Pacific, and to serious political consequences world-wide.” In an appendix, they characterized South Vietnam as “a military keystone in SEAsia and . . . symbolic of US determination in Asia” and asserted that its defense was “a matter of national prestige, credibility, and honor with respect to world-wide pledges and declaratory national policy.” They noted that Southeast Asia was “strategically situated between Communist China and the Indian sub-continent and Australia” and constituted “the southern anchor of the US and Free World defense posture in the Western Pacific.” Finally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that Southeast Asia was a major source of rice for the “food-deficit countries” of Asia and was a primary producer of natural rubber and tin. Control of the region, therefore, “would not only be important to communist economic development, but would convey additional political leverage in dealing with countries which depend upon Southeast Asia’s resources.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that a US success in South Vietnam would demonstrate to the world the nation’s will and determination to fulfill its commitments. In addition, success would discredit “wars of national liberation”; open “a new era of confidence” in Southeast Asia and increase the possibilities for “improving other potentially unstable situations in the area”; and “terminate the personnel and material costs attendant to pursuing a long, drawn-out conflict.” Conversely, an American withdrawal from Vietnam would “presage the collapse” of the US position in Southeast Asia and weaken the US defense posture in the Western Pacific. It would undermine the Free World orientation of the rest of Southeast Asia and cause “uncertainties” in Nationalist China, Japan, and Korea, not to mention making India more vulnerable to communist penetration and isolating Australia and New Zealand. A United States failure in South Vietnam would increase Communist China’s strength and influence. It would demonstrate US unwillingness or inability to defeat Communist insurgencies and thus encourage the enemy to extend such wars to other areas. Finally, loss or abandonment of South Vietnam would “weaken US prestige and influence throughout the world.”

Having argued for the transcendent importance of Southeast Asia to the United States, the Joint Chiefs of Staff then turned to another basic matter: American objectives in the region. Citing NSAM 288 of 17 March 1964 and NSAM 249 of 25 June 1963, they interpreted the established national objectives to be “a stable and independent noncommunist government in the Republic of South Vietnam, and a stabilized situation in Laos which conforms to the Geneva Accords of 1962.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered these objectives “valid and essential to maintaining the US security position world-wide.” They further considered that:

the best possibility of success in attaining these ends will be afforded by achieving the prerequisite objective of causing the cessation of North Vietnamese ...

support and direction of the insurgencies in RVN and Laos. Early implementation of political and military actions designed to achieve these objectives, in addition to continued aggressive programs in SVN, offers the greatest assurance of success.

Whereas the Working Group had identified three alternatives open to the United States, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed there were five. Two of the five corresponded to Options A and C in the Working Group draft. However, the Joint Chiefs found the draft's Option B to be "not a valid formulation of any authoritative view" of the JCS. On the one hand, it did not feature the strong initial blow at critical North Vietnamese targets that they recommended; on the other, it appeared to commit the United States to a nonstop campaign against the 94 Targets, without pauses or negotiating probes. The Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed a substitute version of Option B that did conform to their position.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff listed their five options for the Secretary of Defense in ascending order of severity and determination. First, Course A', they said was implicit in the Working Group draft but not separately identified. It was "to terminate commitments in RVN and Laos, and withdraw under conditions which impair as little as possible our standing in the eyes of the world." The second option, Course A, remained as originally defined: "continue actions within our present policies, including feasible improvements within the boundaries of those policies." Third, Course C (the original Option C) the Joint Chiefs characterized in a way that foreshadowed their subsequent rejection of it: "Undertake a program of graduated military and political initiatives to apply additional pressures against the DRV, without necessarily determining in advance to what degree we will commit ourselves to achieve our objectives, or at what point we might stop to negotiate, or what our negotiation objectives might be."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff added a fourth option, a new Course C', which was a more resolute version of Option C. This course conformed to the program the Joint Chiefs had recommended a few days earlier for use if higher authority chose to apply controlled, systematically increased military pressures against North Vietnam. They defined it as follows:

Undertake a controlled program of graduated military pressures, systematically applied against the DRV, in coordination with appropriate political pressures. This course is distinguished from Course C by the advance decision to continue military pressures, if necessary, to the full limits of what military actions can contribute toward US national objectives. The military program for this course of action is the program set forth in JCSM-967-94, dated 18 November 1964.

Finally, as the strongest alternative, the Joint Chiefs of Staff offered their redefined Course B:

Undertake a controlled program of intense military pressures against the DRV, swiftly yet deliberately applied, designed to have major military and

psychological impact from the outset, and accompanied by appropriate political pressures. The program would be undertaken on the basis that it would be carried through, if necessary, to the full limits of what military actions can contribute toward US national objectives; it would be designed, however, for suspension short of those limits if objectives were earlier achieved. The military program for this course of action is the program recommended in JCSM-955-64, dated 14 November 1964.

Assessing the probable consequences of the five courses of action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff rejected Course A' because it abandoned US objectives and would undermine the US position in the Western Pacific and throughout the world. Course A did not abandon American objectives but offered no reasonable prospect of achieving them. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not recommend Course C because it "is inconclusive as to attainment of our objectives." In addition, this option's slow military pace would permit and encourage enemy counteraction at every stage, thereby heightening the risks and costs to the United States of each successive move in the campaign. The Joint Chiefs considered Course C' preferable if the administration preferred a gradual military approach; but they warned that it also likely would entail higher military costs and casualties than Course B, for example by not eliminating North Vietnam's air force at the outset.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff closed their 23 November memorandum by recommending that Course B, "which offers the best probability of attaining the stated objectives, be implemented at this time." This course, they believed, entailed "the least risk, casualties, and cost, and ... the least probability of enemy miscalculation." In addition, Course B "offers greater psychological impact and presents to all concerned a clear and unequivocal picture of US determination and US objectives." The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Wheeler as their representative in high-level meetings, held to this recommendation throughout the subsequent consultations.

In the appendices, the Joint Chiefs discussed each of the five courses of action in detail and further elaborated on the advantages they saw in Course B. "A sharp blow," they said, "because of the boldness and resoluteness of its delivery, will discourage rather than encourage the enemy to escalate." It would convey an unmistakable signal of US determination and would confront the communist leaders with the necessity of making a single major decision at once. The Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw that if the US followed Course C or C', the enemy might marshal his resources and draw aid from allies to match each progressive step in the US program with a new level of reaction. (This turned out to be an accurate forecast of actual events.) In this way, hostilities would reach a scale that hardly differed from that of Course B, but the United States would lack the advantage of B's strong initial strikes against North Vietnam's air capability and POL storage. Under Course C, it might be said, Hanoi's leaders could keep in the game by advancing a few white chips in every round. Under Course B, they could stay in only by putting a stack of blue chips in the center of the table.³

Deliberations Begin

On 24 November, a group of principal presidential advisers—Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Mr. McCone, Under Secretary of State George Ball and Assistant Secretary William Bundy, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, and General Wheeler—convened to discuss the key issues. As recorded in a memorandum by William Bundy, the group concluded that the situation in South Vietnam would deteriorate further under Option A, “but that there was a significant chance that the actions proposed under Option B and Option C would improve GVN performance and make possible an improvement in the security situation.” The group also agreed that if Hanoi did withdraw its support of the Viet Cong, the security problem in South Vietnam could be solved in time if the Saigon government held together. “However, the struggle would still be long.”

Of particular concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, most of those present at the meeting believed that Option B was significantly more likely to lead to major escalation of the hostilities than Option C. For this and other reasons, a majority of the conferees dissented from the statement in the original Working Group draft that Option B offered the best prospect of attaining the full United States objectives. On the other hand, they agreed that the loss of South Vietnam would be “somewhat more serious” than stated in the original draft—a shift toward the Joint Chiefs of Staff viewpoint.

With reference to Option C, the conferees considered whether it could be carried out “under the klieg lights of a democracy, in view of its requirements that we maintain a credible threat of major action while at the same time seeking to negotiate, even if quietly.” It was pointed out that the United States had experienced difficulty in pursuing a similar policy in 1951–1953 during the negotiating phase of the Korean War. The officials reached a consensus that “the requirement of Option C—maintaining military pressure and a credible threat of major action while at the same time being prepared to negotiate—could in practice be carried out.” By “continuing military actions,” the government could “handle” such pressures and also “pressures for premature negotiations or concessions.”⁴

By this stage of the consultations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff at least had the satisfaction of knowing that the Option B under discussion was a true statement of their own concept, and not an imprecise version drafted by someone else. But the prospect of its adoption as US policy appeared slight. A revised version of the Bundy-McNaughton draft summary, issued after the 24 November meeting, noted the danger that South Vietnam might “come apart” while the US was pounding the North, leaving the United States engaged in “an almost irreversible sequence of military actions ... on behalf of a country that no longer wished to continue the struggle itself.” Further, Option B had “considerably higher risks of major military conflict with Hanoi and possibly Communist China.” The revised draft repeated the original’s warning that “If we found ourselves thus committed to a major military effort, the results could be extremely adverse to our position in other areas, and perhaps to American resolve to maintain present world-wide policies, unless we achieved a clearly satisfactory outcome in a fairly short time.”⁵

Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV Take Positions

Further discussion awaited the arrival of Ambassador Taylor, who was expected in Washington on 26 November. Well before leaving Saigon, Ambassador Taylor had received the initial NSC Working Group papers, delivered by courier. On 24 November, Admiral Mustin of the Joint Staff carried copies of the Bundy-McNaughton summary of 21 November and the JCS memorandum of 23 November to Hawaii to give to Admiral Sharp and to the Ambassador, who stopped at CINCPAC Headquarters en route to Washington. Thus, Ambassador Taylor arrived in the capital with his own position fully formulated and bearing comments from General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp.⁶

Just before Ambassador Taylor left Saigon, General Westmoreland provided him with a relatively optimistic assessment of the military situation. COMUSMACV was pleased with the way the South Vietnamese armed forces had “weathered the political storm over the past four months.” His earlier concern over the disruption and disunity that might be caused by political and religious reprisals against officers had lessened, since there had been few personnel changes for reasons of political expediency. Still more encouraging, the RVNAF was increasing substantially in strength. The results of a special call-up of men in the 20–25 age group had exceeded expectations, and the conscription drive had also spurred volunteering. General Westmoreland believed that the regular forces would meet their 1964 year-end strength goals by 1 February 1965.

The MACV commander also perceived improvements in armed forces morale and combat capabilities. Improved promotion policies, pay, and dependent housing were having positive impact on troop attitudes. The VNAF would soon have four combat-ready A-1H squadrons and under current plans would activate two more during 1965. An additional VNAF H-34 helicopter squadron would be operational by March. General Westmoreland reported that VNAF pilot proficiency was improving and that the increased US advisory effort was having a favorable impact throughout South Vietnam. He acknowledged, however, that the Popular Forces, the first line of hamlet defense, although increasing in number, had “failed to achieve an effective identity with the local rural population.” This problem required urgent attention.

Although encouraged by the current and prospective increases in RVNAF effectiveness, General Westmoreland observed that “the pacification program as a whole has not made comparable progress, and in many important areas has regressed.” As a means of restoring momentum to the effort, General Westmoreland hoped to induce all levels of South Vietnamese command and administration to set definite, attainable short-range pacification goals. Further, he urged that the United States expand its influence in planning, programming, and execution at the Saigon level. The United States must insert advisers into the central government offices “if the civil and military effort is to be coordinated and managed effectively.” Finally, General Westmoreland touched on North Vietnam’s support of the insurgency, declaring “The external threat we must

deal with as soon as some governmental stability is manifest and the counter insurgency campaign makes some progress.”⁷

On 27 November, in a message to General Wheeler, General Westmoreland elaborated upon his views on this last point. He declared that his assessment differed in one respect from Ambassador Taylor’s. Specifically, General Westmoreland believed that “we must assure ourselves that GVN is established on reasonably firm political, military and psychological base before we risk the great strains that may be incurred by vigorous external operations.” Ambassador Taylor and his deputy, U. Alexis Johnson, on their part, “tend to think that we can’t wait for these conditions to develop and that present government requires morale boost by way of immediate dramatic action well beyond pattern of present policy.” General Westmoreland considered that there was a “good prospect of things holding together until March or April” 1965. By that time, the South Vietnamese military “should be in far better shape to support expanded external operations and to capitalize on blows to VC morale which must inevitably result from expanded operations to [the] North.”

General Westmoreland recommended following Option A until the Saigon government “has predictable stability for a few months,” there was “some positive momentum in pacification,” and several other conditions were met. For action thereafter, he favored Option C rather than Option B. Once the United States exercised the latter option, he said, it “will be committed to follow through, regardless.” He objected further that “we don’t want to appear to be taking on GVN’s fight for them at this stage,” and that Saigon officials might become “unhealthily preoccupied with external operations to the detriment of pacification.” Finally, General Westmoreland suggested that friends and enemies alike might interpret an American resort to Option B as “an act of desperation on [the] part of [the] US to salvage [a] lost cause.”⁸

General Westmoreland’s superior, Admiral Sharp, also favored gradualism in action against North Vietnam. On 23 November, he advocated immediate adoption of a program resembling the Joint Chiefs of Staff Course C’. The United States, he declared “still have not made it clear to Hanoi and Peiping that the cost of pursuing their current objectives will become prohibitive.” Admiral Sharp called for “a campaign of systematically and gradually increased measured military pressures against the DRV conducted in conjunction with a coordinated diplomatic and psychological program.” The campaign would aim to convince the communists that “destruction will continue ... until they cease supporting the insurgency.” Admiral Sharp advocated a bombing campaign that would begin with infiltration routes, move to infiltration-associated targets, and then expand to other important targets. Geographically, the air strikes would commence in the Laos panhandle, move into southern North Vietnam, and gradually expand farther northward. The pattern would be “systematic and progressive attacks of ever-increasing intensity and severity. However, sufficient time would be allowed between strikes to determine DRV and CHICOM reaction.”

This option, Admiral Sharp said, would not commit the United States irrevocably to escalation of the hostilities to any particular level. For example, it would not be nec-

essary to strike Phuc Yen until the enemy jets based there began to interfere with US operations. Admiral Sharp held that the United States already had justification—in the form of the Bien Hoa raid and other enemy acts—for launching a program of controlled attacks. There was reason to believe that infiltration and military activity in the Laos Panhandle were increasing. “It is time,” he pronounced, “to reverse this trend.”⁹

Upon his arrival in Washington on 26 November, Ambassador Taylor submitted his views to the other senior officials. The paper he brought with him, and his subsequent counsel, had an important influence in shaping the outcome of the deliberations. Ambassador Taylor painted a dire picture of the situation in South Vietnam and called for urgent action to rectify it.

“After a year of changing and ineffective government,” the Ambassador declared, “the counterinsurgency program country-wide is bogged down and will require heroic treatment to assure revival.” The northern provinces, a year ago considered almost free of Viet Cong, were “now in deep trouble.” In the Quang Ngai-Binh Dinh area, the Viet Cong had gained enough ground to threaten “partition of the country by a . . . salient driven to the sea.” By continuous sabotage of the coastal railroad and highway, the enemy was in position to cut off the northern provinces economically. The pacification program had deteriorated in spite of “very heavy” Viet Cong combat losses and the increase in strength and competence of the South Vietnamese armed forces. Not only had the Viet Cong replaced their casualties but they also were demonstrating three “new or newly expanded” tactics: stand-off mortar fire against important targets, as at Bien Hoa; economic strangulation of limited areas; and finally, “the stepped-up infiltration of DRV military personnel . . . from the north.” North Vietnam directed the battle in the south through “endless radioed orders and instructions” and supported it by continuous infiltration of trained cadre and military equipment by land and water.

“Perhaps more serious than the downward trend in the pacification situation, because it is the prime cause, is the continued weakness of the central government.” Ambassador Taylor saw small chance of a long life for the Huong regime. “Indeed, in view of the factionalism existing in Saigon and elsewhere throughout the country, it is impossible to foresee a stable and effective government under any name in anything like the near future.” Given enough time, South Vietnam’s lack of political cohesion might be remedied, “but we are unfortunately pressed for time and unhappily perceive no short-term solution for the establishment of stable and sound government.” So long as no effective central government existed to mesh with the US effort, “the latter is a spinning wheel unable to transmit impulsion to the machinery of the GVN.”

The Ambassador identified three things that the United States needed to do to reverse a “losing game” in South Vietnam. First, it must establish an “adequate government” in the South. Second, it must improve the conduct of the counterinsurgency campaign. Third, the United States must “persuade or force the DRV to stop its aid to the Viet Cong and to use its directive powers to make the Viet Cong desist from their efforts to overthrow the government of South Vietnam.”

Given the time limitation, Ambassador Taylor wrote, the United States would have to settle for something considerably less than an ideal government in Saigon. "However," he continued:

it is hard to visualize our being willing to make added outlays of resources and to run increasing political risks without an allied government which, at least, can speak for and to its people, can maintain law and order in the principal cities, can provide local protection for the vital military bases and installations, can raise and support Armed Forces, and can gear its efforts to those of the United States. Anything less than this would hardly be a government at all, and under such circumstances, the United States Government might do better to carry forward the war on a purely unilateral basis.

In spite of these dubious prospects, Ambassador Taylor wrote, the United States should continue to aid, advise, and encourage the Saigon government, try to restrain the minority groups seeking its overthrow, and use all possible influence to maintain continuity of both organization and leadership. To raise the morale and confidence of the government and people of South Vietnam, Ambassador Taylor favored attacks against the infiltration system in Laos and increased OPLAN 34A operations against North Vietnam, by air as well as by sea. While the latter would be covert in the sense of being disavowed, "their occurrence could be made known in such a way as to give the morale lift which is desired." The United States also should launch reprisal bombings for major Viet Cong depredations in South Vietnam.

All these actions, Ambassador Taylor warned, "may not be sufficient to hold the present government upright." If it failed, "we are going to be in deep trouble, with limited resources for subsequent actions." The United States could try to cobble together another civilian government, "but the odds against it would be even higher than those which have confronted the Huong government." A new military dictatorship "on the model of that headed of late by General Khanh" was another alternative. "However, Khanh did very poorly when he was on the spot and we have little reason to believe that a successor military government could be more effective." Finally,

we always have the option of withdrawing, leaving the internal situation to the Vietnamese, and limiting our contribution to military action directed at North Vietnam. Such action, while assuring that North Vietnam would pay a price for its misdeeds in the South, would probably not save South Vietnam from eventual loss to the Viet Cong.

As to military pressure on North Vietnam, Ambassador Taylor noted that the allies would reach the first rung on the escalation ladder by "the initiation of intensified covert operations, anti-infiltration attacks in Laos, and reprisal bombings mentioned above as a means of stiffening South Vietnamese morale." Beyond that, the US could mount attacks on North Vietnam, beginning with infiltration-related targets such as staging areas, training facilities, communications centers, and the like. Progressively, these attacks could

extend ultimately to “the destruction of all important fixed targets in North Vietnam and to the interdiction of movement on all lines of communication.”

Before undertaking such a program, the United States must consult with Prime Minister Huong and General Khanh. “They will be taking risks as great or greater than ours,” and their views would deserve a serious hearing. “If, as is likely, they urge us with enthusiasm, we should take advantage of the opportunity to nail down certain important points.” Specifically, the Saigon government should undertake to keep its military and police forces up to strength, replace incompetent military commanders and province chiefs and leave competent ones in place for an indefinite period, suppress disorders and demonstrations, establish effective resources control, and obtain US concurrence for all military operations outside South Vietnam. In addition, Saigon should undertake “responsibility for the land defense of South Vietnam to include protection of all U.S. nationals and installations.” In return, the United States would accept “responsibility for the air and maritime defense of South Vietnam.” South Vietnam would accept “the U.S. statement (to be prepared) of war aims and circumstances for negotiations.”

Shortly after beginning escalation, the United States “should communicate with the DRV and the CHICOMs to establish certain essential points in the minds of their leaders.” First, under no circumstances would the United States let North Vietnam “go unscathed and reap the benefits of its nefarious actions in South Vietnam.” Second, the US would hold North Vietnam responsible for the Viet Cong insurgency and would reject any claims from Hanoi that it could not control Viet Cong actions. “We know better and will act accordingly.” At the same time, the enemy should know that US objectives were limited. The United States did not seek to re-unify Vietnam or change the government in Hanoi, and it sought no permanent military presence in Southeast Asia. However, “we do insist that the DRV let its neighbors, South Vietnam and Laos, strictly alone.” As an incentive to North Vietnam, Ambassador Taylor suggested that if Hanoi “remains aloof from the CHICOMs in a Tito-like state, we would not be adverse to aiding such a government provided it conducted itself decently with its neighbors.”

But with all, we are tired of standing by and seeing the unabashed efforts of the DRV to absorb South Vietnam into the Communist orbit against its will. We know that Hanoi is responsible and that we are going to punish it until it desists from this behavior.

Ambassador Taylor anticipated that the enemy would mount counteractions to his program. The Viet Cong would intensify their activities, and the North Vietnamese might launch limited air and ground attacks on South Vietnam, using regular military units “and perhaps volunteers from Red China.” Ambassador Taylor also considered it “quite likely” that North Vietnam would invite in some Chinese military forces “if only to reinforce its air defense.” If these countermeasures failed and the enemy came under unbearable pressure, the Hanoi leadership might feign submission or choose some other course. The Ambassador would “leave negotiation initiatives to Hanoi.” Whatever happened, however, the United States should stick to three principles: “do not enter into

negotiations until the DRV is hurting”; never let North Vietnam gain a victory in the South “without having paid a disproportionate price”; and keep the South Vietnamese “in the forefront of the combat and the negotiations.”

Ambassador Taylor attached to his paper a “Suggested Scenario for Controlled Escalation.” The actions in the scenario were to begin only after intensified OPLAN 34A operations and air strikes and armed reconnaissance over Laos had been in progress for some time, and after Washington and Saigon had released new figures on the scale of enemy infiltration. Action would start with the consultations with Mr. Huong and General Khanh that the Ambassador had sketched. It would continue through a rather deliberate sequence of steps until reaching a moderate level of air strikes against infiltration targets in North Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor cautioned that if the Huong government indicated willingness to discuss a settlement, the United States must avoid “becoming involved in a cease fire vis-à-vis the DRV and/or the VC accompanied by strung-out negotiations.”¹⁰

One of the early items in Ambassador Taylor’s scenario was “cease travel to Vietnam of additional [US] dependents, but take no action to evacuate dependents already in Vietnam pending further developments.” Coincidentally, on 26 November, in another connection, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took a position on this matter. They informed the Secretary of Defense that they thought it undesirable to announce a suspension of dependent movement to South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff cited two reasons for their view. First, such a policy announcement would inevitably raise in the minds of the South Vietnamese and others the idea that the United States was beginning a withdrawal from South Vietnam. Second, the announcement might focus the attention of the Viet Cong on American dependents then in the country, thereby placing them in danger. The Joint Chiefs repeated their opinion that dependents should leave shortly before or concurrently with the start of overt US military action against North Vietnam.¹¹

A Policy Recommendation Takes Shape

On 27 November, Ambassador Taylor met with the group of senior advisers for a wide-ranging discussion. Those present concluded that, while the emergence of a neutral, nonaligned Republic of South Vietnam insured against communist takeover would be acceptable to the United States, such a regime could not appear until after the Viet Cong were defeated.

The officials reviewed the materials General Westmoreland had contributed to the discussion. Both Ambassador Taylor and Secretary McNamara dissented from General Westmoreland’s belief that conditions in South Vietnam would improve, creating a firmer base for stronger actions six months hence. The Ambassador doubted that the situation would hold together for long if the United States merely followed Option A, continuing its current programs as COMUSMACV had recommended. On the other hand, Ambassador Taylor thought that stronger action along the lines of Option C would definitely improve

South Vietnamese performance and morale. Others in the group suggested that “the strengthening effect of Option C could at least buy time, possibly measured in years.”

As recorded by William Bundy, the meeting reached the following consensus:

It was urged that over the next two months we adopt a program of Option A plus the first stages of Option C. The likelihood of improvement in the government seemed so doubtful that to get what improvement we could it was thought that we should move into some parts of C soon.¹²

At this meeting, Ambassador Taylor presented a list of thirteen questions on aspects of the initial NSC Working Group papers that had not seemed clear to him. Several questions fell within the purview of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who responded promptly. They indicated that Option B, as they conceived it, would require an estimated 20 strike days for implementation; while their preferred version (C') of Option C would need two to three months. These courses of action, however, were “designed ... for suspension short of these time spans if objectives are earlier achieved.” To the question, “What do we do if the Huong government collapses some place along the B or C track?,” the Joint Chiefs answered:

These courses of action are expected to decrease the likelihood of a collapse of the Huong government. Should a collapse occur, however, we must establish and sustain a government at least through attainment of our objectives. If necessary, reinstatement of military control should be considered as an acceptable course of action.¹³

At their own meeting on 27 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff surveyed the status of the consultations. It was clear that the JCS stood alone in advocating Option B. The three senior officials in the field did not agree with them. General Westmoreland favored continuing with Option A for upwards of another six months. Admiral Sharp had firmly endorsed Option C. The most influential of the three, Ambassador Taylor, advocated Option A plus the initial stages of Option C. None of the other senior advisers in Washington appeared to support any stronger action than this.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff nevertheless held to their position. After an extended discussion, they reaffirmed that, barring a change of United States objectives, their recommendations of 23 November in JCSM-982-64 were the correct course. In that paper, the Joint Chiefs had restated and focused attention on the avowed US objectives, hoping that the reception it received would reveal any change of thought at the highest policy level. No senior official had drawn back from a statement that bespoke a US determination to stand firm against communist expansion in Southeast Asia, and specifically in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that the military course of action they had recommended followed logically from this determination. It was designed to accomplish the objective in the most assured and effective way, in the least time and with the fewest casualties. General Wheeler summarized the underlying issue in an annotation he made on one of the papers used in the high-level meetings: “If we do not undertake B or C’,

we must establish [a] new objective in SEA. JCS would need to study new objective and draw appropriate military plans.”¹⁴

In the high-level discussions to date, opposition to Option B had rested on three main counts. First, in the judgment of most the conferees, Option B was the course most likely to lead to major hostilities with North Vietnam and possibly Communist China. Second, Option C would provide the US with greater flexibility and control. A decision to proceed to Option B would still be possible, whereas moving immediately to Option B would commit the United States to an irreversible sequence of actions.

Third, Option B violated one of the principles Ambassador Taylor had enunciated in his paper: “keep the GVN in the forefront of the combat and the negotiations.” As planned by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Option B involved the use of Strategic Air Command aircraft and a bombing program with hardly more than token VNAF participation. Ambassador Taylor considered it highly important that the war retain the appearance of a conflict in which South Vietnam was defending itself, with the United States supporting to the degree necessary. The United States must avoid converting the conflict to an American war against North Vietnam, mounted largely from South Vietnamese territory. Ambassador Taylor thought that the VNAF, particularly after its fourth A-1H squadron became operational in December, would be capable of taking the lead in bombing the North at a level below Option B. Exploring this point, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 November asked CINCPAC for his estimate of the maximum number of A-1H sorties the VNAF could generate against North Vietnam, currently and in the future. The JCS also requested Admiral Sharp’s views on the effect this commitment would have on air support of operations within South Vietnam.¹⁵

On 28 November, Secretary Bundy circulated to the principal advisers another set of papers. In these papers, Mr. Bundy, as the group had requested on the 27th, set out a scenario for “the Immediate Action Program.” By way of introduction, he declared that the problem was “a real jigsaw puzzle” in which the advisers had to “weigh at every point” the viewpoints of the American Congress and public, Saigon, Hanoi and Beijing, and “key interested nations.”

With reference to public opinion, the Bundy papers included worksheets on the timing and nature of a White House statement at the conclusion of the conferences, consultation with Congressional leaders, and a major speech, preferably by the President. Concurrently, the administration might stage a background briefing on infiltration both in Saigon and in Washington, followed a week or so later by publication of a detailed white paper. The briefing and paper would highlight a recent MACV estimate of infiltration into South Vietnam between 1959 and 1964 that nearly tripled the number who had entered the country during that period from 13,000 to 34,000. Regarding this briefing, Mr. Bundy commented that “This will be a major action, since it shows not only that it has been increasing this year, but that it has probably been greater all along than we realized.” The estimate “will have a major public play in the US, and may well kick up a storm. We need to make this one stick as a prelude to all else.”¹⁶

In further discussions on 28 November, the senior advisers gave more definite shape to their conclusions. Secretary Bundy embodied them in a draft action paper, which he circulated to the group after it was first reviewed by Ambassador Taylor, Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton, and Michael Forrestal. Headed “Draft NSAM on Southeast Asia,” this paper, after final polishing at an advisors’ meeting on 30 November, went to the President as the Working Group’s final policy recommendation.

The draft stated United States objectives in South Vietnam as compelling North Vietnam to stop supporting and directing the Viet Cong; re-establishing an “independent and secure” South Vietnam under international safeguards, free to accept “US and other external assistance as required”; and maintaining the security of other non-Communist nations in Southeast Asia, including specifically observance of the Geneva Accords of 1962 in Laos. To achieve these objectives, the United States would take an escalating series of actions. It would continue to press the South Vietnamese Government “in every possible way” to make itself more effective and to push forward with pacification. The United States would join “at once” with the South Vietnamese and Laotian governments in “a determined action program aimed at DRV activities in both countries and designed to help GVN morale and to increase the costs and strain on Hanoi, foreshadowing still greater pressures to come.” Under the first phase of this program, during the next thirty days, the allies would intensify “forms of action already under way,” plus US armed reconnaissance strikes in Laos and South Vietnam and possibly US air strikes against the North as reprisals against any “major or spectacular” Viet Cong violence in the South, “whether against US personnel and installations or not.”

Beyond the thirty-day period, the United States might continue first phase actions without change or take additional military measures. Those could include withdrawal of dependents and “the possible initiation of strikes a short distance across the border against infiltration routes from the DRV. In the latter case, this would become a transitional phase.”

Thereafter, if the Saigon government improved its effectiveness “to an acceptable degree” and if Hanoi did not “yield on acceptable terms,” or if stronger action were needed to keep South Vietnam afloat, the United States would be “prepared—at a time to be determined—to enter a second phase program ... of graduated military pressures” against North Vietnam. That program

would consist principally of progressively more serious air strikes, of a weight and tempo adjusted to the situation as it develops (possibly running from two to six months). Targets ... would start with infiltration targets south of the 19th parallel and work up to targets north of that point. This could eventually lead to such measures as air strikes on all major military-related targets, aerial mining of DRV ports, and a US naval blockade of the DRV. The whole sequence of military actions would be designed to give the impression of a steady, deliberate approach, and to give the US the option at any time (subject to enemy reaction) to proceed or not, to escalate or not, and to quicken the pace or not. Concurrently, the US would be alert to any sign of yielding by Hanoi, and would be prepared to explore negotiated solutions that attain US objectives in an

acceptable manner. The US would seek to control any negotiations and would oppose any independent South Vietnamese efforts to negotiate.

Next, the paper set forth a “Thirty-Day Action Program” for the first phase of the concept. It prescribed the White House statement to be issued and the points Ambassador Taylor was to make in his consultations with the Huong government. The draft plan called for early publicization of the evidence of increased North Vietnamese infiltration by on-the-record press briefings in Washington and Saigon, special presentations to Congressional leaders and key allied ambassadors, and publication of a detailed report. Meanwhile, the US Ambassadors in Laos and Thailand would inform those governments in general terms of the steps the US intended to follow, seeking their support—specifically that of Souvanna Phouma for increased US armed reconnaissance in Laos. Other US diplomats would explain the concept more fully to the governments of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines. The US would request only political support from the United Kingdom, considering the British commitment in Malaysia; but it would seek additional contributions to the war effort from the other three SEATO nations and try to obtain still more “third country aid” from other countries.

During the thirty-day period, the United States would make no special approach to Communist China, but “we will convey to Hanoi our unchanged determination and objectives, and that we have a growing concern at the DRV role, to see if there is any sign of change in Hanoi’s position.” The United States would make similar representations to the Soviets, “not in the expectation of any change in their position but in effect to warn them to stay out, and with some hope they will pass on the message to Hanoi and Peiping.” The United States would engage in no activity at the United Nations, except to explain and defend any reprisal actions that might occur.

Military actions during the initial 30-day period would include intensified OPLAN 34A MAROPS by South Vietnamese forces and increased US high-level reconnaissance over North Vietnam. The Royal Laotian Air Force was to intensify its strikes against the infiltration system in Laos, supported by United States CAP and flak suppression missions when needed. Beyond that, “US armed air reconnaissance and air strikes will be carried out in Laos, first against the corridor area and within a short time against Route 7 and other infiltration routes in a major operation to cut key bridges.” (The drafters added the term “air strikes” after General Wheeler explained that “armed reconnaissance” did not include the type of pre-briefed operations necessary to cut specific bridges.)

Expecting Viet Cong provocations justifying reprisal, the paper called for the United States to “be alert for any appropriate occasion.” It listed enemy attacks on Saigon, on provincial or district capitals, on important airfields or major POL facilities, or against US citizens as some of the possible incidents that might merit retaliation. Reprisals should be launched, preferably within 24 hours, against one or more targets in North Vietnam. “GVN forces will be used to the maximum extent, supplemented as necessary by US forces.” The reprisal targets, generally associated with infiltration, would be selected from those located south of the 19th Parallel. The United States and South Vietnam were

to initiate combined planning immediately, both for reprisals and for possible later air strikes across the border into North Vietnam.

The planning group had considered stopping the flow of US dependents to South Vietnam as an early action during the initial 30 days. However, at the meeting on 30 November, General Wheeler again presented the JCS opinion on this matter, and the group accepted it. Rather than definitely scheduling this action, the draft paper stated that the United States should be prepared to stop the flow at an appropriate time, chosen with due regard for the signal it would convey.

The paper closed with a list of deferred actions, not to be taken within the 30-day period but available for adoption thereafter. The list comprised: 1) major air deployments to the area; 2) furnishing United States air cover for South Vietnamese MAROPS; 3) resuming destroyer patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin; 4) evacuation of American dependents; 5) US low-level reconnaissance into North Vietnam; and 6) United States/South Vietnamese air strikes across the border, initially against infiltration routes and installations and then against other targets south of the 19th Parallel. This latter point answered a question by General Wheeler, who had inquired whether it was intended to limit air strikes and reprisal raids to targets south of 19 degrees. He was assured that this was intended.¹⁷

The course of action being recommended to the President could be characterized as in intensified Option A, to be pursued for at least a 30-day period. Thereafter, if the Saigon government gave evidence of greater stability and effectiveness, the United States could decide to move to Option C. This option would be implemented with less speed and determination than the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended. The recommended course thus fell far short of Option B, the strong line of action that the Joint Chiefs favored. This Joint Chiefs of Staff view was to have a final hearing, however, for the executive group had agreed that General Wheeler would present it orally to the President during a meeting scheduled at the White House on 1 December.

A Final Argument from the Joint Chiefs of Staff

In preparation for the meeting, General Wheeler wrote a paper that restated the recommendations the Joint Chiefs of Staff had consistently advanced since the Bien Hoa attack a month earlier. As its first point, he declared:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend initiation of sharp military pressures against the DRV, starting with an attack in force This program would be designed to destroy in the first three days Phuc Yen airfield near Hanoi, other airfields, and major POL facilities, clearly to establish the fact that the US intends to use military force, if necessary, to the full limits of what military force can contribute to achieving US objectives in Southeast Asia, and to afford the GVN respite by curtailing DRV assistance to and direction of the Viet Cong. The follow-on military program—involving armed reconnaissance of infiltration routes in Laos, air strikes on infiltration targets in the DRV, and

then progressive strikes throughout North Vietnam—could be suspended short of full destruction of the DRV if our objectives were earlier achieved. The military program would be conducted rather swiftly, but the tempo could be adjusted as needed to contribute to achieving our objectives.

In support of this recommendation, the Chairman repeated the Joint Chiefs of Staff evaluation of the importance of holding Southeast Asia and the objectives of US national policy in the region. He reviewed the official consensus that the military and political situation in South Vietnam was deteriorating even as North Vietnam directed and underwrote the Viet Cong insurgency. “In sum,” General Wheeler asserted, “if military action against the DRV is not undertaken at an early date, a Communist victory in SVN must be foreseen. To suffer defeat in this first ‘War of Liberation’ in a strategically important area will, we believe, incubate other such wars.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a “hard knock” on North Vietnamese resources early in the military program. In particular, “an early and heavy attack on DRV combat aircraft and POL” would have military, political, psychological, and economic advantages. By destroying North Vietnam’s combat aircraft and air support facilities, the United States would reduce enemy offensive and defensive air forces, limiting Hanoi’s ability to inflict US losses, retaliate against South Vietnam, and provide logistic support to the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao. The North Vietnamese and the Chinese would “be impelled to provide greater defense capabilities, thereby siphoning off resources which could be used offensively.” An initial heavy strike would let Hanoi and Beijing know from the outset “the threshold of military activity established by the United States. Since our action will not be ambiguous, or of minor effect, they must face up to the alternative of war or accommodation to US objectives.” Finally, by wrecking North Vietnam’s POL facilities, the US would “impose a stricture on land and air communications and, to some degree, on their limited industry.” Such damage “will forecast to them what the future will hold if they continue on their present course.”

In conclusion, General Wheeler observed:

The JCS recognize that any course of action we adopt, except early withdrawal from SVN, could develop eventually into the course they advocate. This fact reinforces our belief that we should profit by the several advantages of forthright military action initiated upon our decision. In other words, if we must fight a war in Southeast Asia, let us do so under conditions favorable to us from the outset and with maximum volition resting with the United States.¹⁸

The President Adopts a Program

On 1 December, President Johnson gathered at the White House with his principal advisers on Vietnam: Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Secretaries Rusk and

McNamara, Ambassador Taylor, McGeorge Bundy, General Wheeler, CIA Director McCone, and Assistant Secretaries McNaughton and William Bundy. During the discussions, General Wheeler orally presented the arguments in his paper and amplified upon several of them in response to the President's questions. There was no dissent regarding the importance of Southeast Asia to the United States, the US objectives, and the other elements of the situation as the Chairman described them. All agreed that the Saigon government was unlikely to grow stronger. Its sudden collapse did not appear imminent, but the interplay of Viet Cong aggressiveness and South Vietnamese weakness would probably yield a continuing debilitation of the government unless effective measures were taken. With regard to the paper's final paragraph, which General Wheeler did read at the meeting, all present acknowledged the truth of the first sentence: whatever policy the United States adopted, the further development of the situation might lead eventually to the strong military measures the Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated now. Nevertheless, the conferees rejected the strong course of action, primarily out of concern over the weakness and instability of the Saigon regime.

After much discussion and many expressions of frustration at the situation and the choices before him, President Johnson accepted substantially the two-phase program recommended by his advisers. He deferred some elements—such as US air cover for MAROPS—for later decision. The thirty-day first phase would begin with Ambassador Taylor's return to Saigon. Assuming a favorable outcome of his consultations with Mr. Huong and General Khanh, the approved military actions would start about 15 December. Also as part of this phase, the US intended to launch reprisal strikes following any major Viet Cong or North Vietnamese attacks or incidents in South Vietnam or at sea. In addition, the President ordered a vigorous and extended diplomatic effort to obtain men, materials, and supporting services for Vietnam from other free nations. After the first phase ran its course, the United States could decide to conduct air strikes, in conjunction with the South Vietnamese, against North Vietnam during the next two to six months. The raids would start with targets south of the 19th Parallel and then work northward. At a still later stage, the US might decide to mine North Vietnam's ports and impose a naval blockade.¹⁹

The military operations of the first phase were to consist of intensified MAROPS, intensified high-level reconnaissance of North Vietnam, intensified RLAF strikes in Laos, and "approximately two missions per week of four sorties each conducted by US aircraft in Laos." Subsequent to these actions, and to deployment of 100–150 aircraft to Southeast Asia plus an alert of US ground forces for movement, "we would conduct low level recce of targets near [the] border" in North Vietnam and "US/RLAF/GVN air attacks in DRV near Laotian border."²⁰

Following the 1 December meeting, the Executive Committee embodied the President's decisions in two documents: a final version of the committee's 29 November position paper and a set of presidential instructions to Ambassador Taylor. The President gave final approval to those documents on 3 December, in effect setting the new policy in motion.²¹

Publicly, the White House, in a statement issued on 1 December on the consultations with Ambassador Taylor, avoided heralding any new turn in US policy toward South Vietnam. Among other things, the statement did not emphasize the infiltration data, release of which Secretary Bundy had once identified as “a prelude to all else.” Whereas earlier drafts of the White House statement had announced that a report on infiltration would be released shortly, the statement as issued declared only that the meeting had reviewed “the accumulating evidence of continuing and increased North Vietnamese support of the Viet Cong and of North Vietnamese forces in, and passing through, ... Laos in violation of the Geneva accords of 1962.”²²

During December, the administration engaged in extended discussion of the desirability of releasing the infiltration data. Eventually, on 21 January 1965, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara briefed Congressional leaders on the information. Since leakage to the press was now likely, the administration arranged for background briefings of correspondents in Saigon and Washington on 26 January. On 27 February, the Department of State published a detailed and documented report entitled *Aggression from the North: The Record of North Vietnam's Campaign to Conquer South Vietnam*. Besides describing the significant volume of infiltration, the publication presented numerous case studies proving that the personnel coming into South Vietnam were drawn from regular North Vietnamese military units.²³

In its key paragraphs, the White House statement of 1 December 1964 announced that President Johnson had “instructed Ambassador Taylor to consult urgently with the South Vietnamese Government as to measures that should be taken to improve the situation in all its aspects.” In addition, the President had “reaffirmed the basic U.S. policy of providing all possible and useful assistance to the South Vietnamese people and government in their struggle to defeat the externally supported insurgency and aggression being conducted against them.” This policy, the statement noted, “accords with the terms of the congressional joint resolution of August 10, 1964, which remains in full force and effect.”²⁴

Implementing the Presidential Decisions

During the first part of December, the United States began implementing the new presidential decisions. Ambassador Taylor explained the program to the Huong government, which accepted it. The United States intensified certain of its military activities in Laos and made plans for further expansion of the RVNAF. Once again, however, these measures proved to be a false start, cut short by another Saigon political crisis. As a result, at the end of the month, the administration passed up another occasion for reprisal in response to a spectacular Viet Cong attack.

Ambassador Taylor Delivers the Message in Saigon

After the consultations in Washington, Ambassador Taylor returned to Saigon bearing written instructions. Dated 3 December, the instructions constituted an authoritative statement of the White House decisions. The document began by declaring that progress in pacification in South Vietnam was “unsatisfactory” due to two “primary causes from which many secondary causes stemmed.” The first cause was governmental instability in Saigon; the second was North Vietnam’s continued reinforcement and direction of the Viet Cong. “To change the direction of events, it will be necessary to deal adequately with both these factors.” The two causes, however, were not of equal importance. “There must be a stable, effective government to conduct a successful campaign against the Viet Cong even if the aid of North Vietnam for the VC should end.” Ending North Vietnamese support, while important, would not in itself end the war against the Viet Cong. Therefore, since action against North Vietnam would be “contributory, not central” to victory, the allies should not incur the risks of expanding hostilities “until there is a government in Saigon capable of handling the serious problems involved in such an expansion and of

exploiting the favorable effects which may be anticipated from an end of support and direction by North Vietnam.”

Ambassador Taylor’s instructions specified certain minimum criteria of performance that the Huong government must meet before new measures against North Vietnam would be either justified or practicable. The government should be able to speak for and to its people, to maintain law and order in the principal population centers, and to make effective plans and see them executed by military and police forces entirely responsible to its authority. Further, the government must have the military strength to cope with the probable enemy reactions to increased pressure on the North.

Ambassador Taylor was to urge the South Vietnamese government to make a particular effort to accomplish eight objectives, which had inherent value and would constitute a gauge for measuring the regime’s effectiveness. The objectives were: 1) improve the use of manpower for military operations and pacification; 2) bring the armed forces and police to authorized strength and maximize their effectiveness; 3) replace incompetent officials and commanders and keep the competent in place for extended periods; 4) clarify and strengthen police powers of arrest, detention, and interrogation of Viet Cong suspects; 5) clarify and strengthen the authority of province chiefs; 6) make “demonstrable” progress in the HOP TAC operation around Saigon; 7) broaden and intensify civic action using both civilian and military resources to demonstrate the government’s desire to help the hamlets and villages; and 8) carry out a sanitary clean-up of Saigon.

While the Huong government pursued these objectives, the United States would increase its air attacks on the infiltration routes in Laos, in conjunction with the efforts of the Royal Laotian Government; and it would encourage intensified MAROPS by South Vietnamese forces. “In combination, these operations in Laos and at sea constitute the first phase of military pressures to reduce infiltration and to warn the DRV of the risks it is running.” Meanwhile, the United States and South Vietnamese armed forces would stand ready to execute prompt reprisals for any unusual enemy action. The US Mission was authorized to engage in planning with Saigon for this purpose.

“As a second phase,” the instructions continued, the United States was “prepared to consider” a campaign of direct military pressure on North Vietnam, “to be executed after the GVN has shown itself firmly in control.” This second phase would consist of air attacks on the North “progressively mounting in scope and intensity,” aimed at convincing the leaders in Hanoi that it was in their interest to stop assisting the Viet Cong and respect the independence and security of South Vietnam. In these attacks, the United States would participate in support of the VNAF “and at the request of the Government of Vietnam.” The US Mission was authorized to engage in combined planning with the South Vietnamese for these operations, with a clear understanding that the United States was making no advance commitment to implement the plans.¹

Ambassador Taylor returned to a South Vietnamese capital in which calm had not been entirely restored following the demonstrations and brief imposition of martial law in late November. Accompanied by General Westmoreland and Deputy Ambassador Johnson, Taylor on 7 December met with Mr. Huong, his Deputy Premier, and General

Khanh. These three were the only South Vietnamese officials to whom Taylor revealed the US program. The Ambassador presented a written statement derived from his instructions. Mr. Huong and his colleagues initially reacted favorably, although not as enthusiastically as the Americans had hoped. The Vietnamese accepted as reasonable the US criteria for measuring their government's progress and agreed to work out details in future meetings. Despite the continuing Buddhist demonstrations and widespread opposition, the Prime Minister asserted that his government was already "able to speak for and to its people."²

On 11 December, after further consultations, the two sides issued a joint communiqué. It said that the United States government had "offered additional military and economic assistance to improve the execution of the [Saigon] Government's programs and to restrain the mounting infiltration of men and equipment by the Hanoi regime in support of the Viet Cong." The communiqué highlighted provisions for increasing the military, territorial, and police forces, and the fact that the South Vietnamese government and the US Mission were "making joint plans to achieve greater effectiveness against the infiltration threat." Ambassador Taylor's instructions had included a statement that the Huong government had "the complete support of the USG in its resistance to the minority pressure groups which are attempting to drag it down." This thought appeared in blander language in the communiqué, as a simple expression of full US support "for the duly constituted Government of Prime Minister Huong." The Buddhists, nevertheless, protested that the United States was maintaining Mr. Huong in power against "the just desires of the Vietnamese people and the Buddhist Church."³

Intensified OPLAN 34A Operations

With Huong's government apparently on board, the United States pushed forward its Phase I military actions in accordance with the 15 December target date. Immediately following the President's decisions of 1 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to submit plans for increasing the frequency of South Vietnamese MAROPS in two "Packages." Package One would consist of a series of shallow penetration raids on the North Vietnamese coast, to begin about 15 December and continue for 30 days or longer. The raids were to strike targets offering the greatest psychological impact, with their military utility and actual destructiveness regarded as secondary. Package Two actions might be ordered at any time after the 30-day period. They would feature employment of US aircraft to protect the MAROPS vessels from attack by North Vietnamese air and surface craft, and possible lifting of restrictions on certain targets above the 19th Parallel.⁴

Based on the replies of Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, with some modification, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 12 December recommended a program to the Secretary of Defense. Package One provided for bombardments of specific targets as well as harassment sweeps by fast torpedo boats (PTFs) against targets of opportunity along the

southern coast of North Vietnam, to begin about 15 December. Package Two added US air cover for a schedule of similar operations. Normally, eight aircraft would accompany the PTFs—four armed for air-to-air and four for air-to-surface operations. Both packages included as corollary missions the capture of North Vietnamese naval craft and the destruction of junks, after removing the crews. The Joint Chiefs believed that the United States and South Vietnam could complete the necessary training and command and control arrangements in time to allow implementation of Package Two by 15 January 1965.⁵

On 14 December, Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance approved implementation of the corollary missions and the first two increments of targeted bombardments of Package One, but he disapproved the coastal harassment features. With the same exception, he approved in principle the third and fourth increments of the package, with implementation to be deferred until the United States could observe reactions to the first two increments. Secretary Vance deferred a decision on Package Two and the related rules of engagement the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted.⁶

Concurrently with this round of recommendations and partial approvals, the Joint Chiefs of Staff made a successful effort to increase flexibility in the procedures for scheduling OPLAN 34A MAROPS. The system in effect involved approval by State, Defense, and White House officials in Washington, first of a monthly program for planning purposes and then of each individual mission prior to its execution. General Westmoreland believed that the operations would produce better results if he was permitted greater latitude in scheduling the individual missions. That way, he could take into account local weather and sea conditions and the readiness of crews and equipment. General Wheeler presented this view to the Secretary of Defense on 8 December. He recommended that, after Washington endorsed the monthly program, COMUSMACV should submit packages of up to five missions for execution approval. With that approval obtained, General Westmoreland would be free to schedule the operations at his discretion, subject to coordination with Ambassador Taylor.⁷

Deputy Secretary Vance obtained approval of this proposal. At a meeting of the principal advisers on Southeast Asia on 19 December, McGeorge Bundy, the White House official concerned with OPLAN 34A scheduling, indicated that he was willing to “consider group approval of still larger packages if necessary, having due regard to our veto capabilities if a changed political situation should so require.” This decision had little immediate practical effect. As was pointed out at the meeting, the MAROPS approved so far did not represent any significant intensification of the program. No operations at all had been conducted for the past three weeks. Moreover, the prospects for greater activity in the near future were slight, owing to seasonal sea conditions.⁸

BARREL ROLL

On 1 December, as part of the Phase I actions, the President had approved a limited application of US air power against the infiltration system in Laos. US aircraft

already were engaged in operations over Laos, flying CAP and flak suppression missions when necessary to assist the Royal Laotian Air Force in bombing targets in the panhandle. In addition to long-standing high-level reconnaissance of the South Vietnamese border areas, in May the United States had instituted the YANKEE TEAM reconnaissance flights over Laos. Although authorized to return hostile fire and to attack known enemy anti-aircraft positions, YANKEE TEAM flights did not have the mission of destroying infiltration targets. Their purpose was to provide intelligence and proof of infiltration, as well as to give evidence of the US military presence in Southeast Asia. From May until the end of 1964, USAF planes stationed in South Vietnam and Navy carrier aircraft flew 880 YANKEE TEAM missions, a total of 1,257 sorties.⁹

As a result of the 1 December directive, the United States added to the existing activities armed reconnaissance and pre-briefed air strikes against infiltration routes and facilities in the Laos corridor. Initially, the administration considered only the program for the first week of the 30-day period, consisting of two missions of four aircraft each, separated by at least three days. At General Wheeler's direction, Joint Staff representatives sought guidance from the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) regarding routes to be subjected to armed reconnaissance and secondary targets to be struck with unexpended ordnance. Assistant Secretary McNaughton indicated that the risks to US aircraft should be held to a minimum, with no overflight of North Vietnam permitted. Further, "the purpose of the missions was to send a signal of deeper US involvement, the signal to be more psychological in nature than of pure military effectiveness."

Meanwhile, the US Ambassador to Vientiane, William Sullivan (who had recently succeeded Leonard Unger in that post), obtained permission from Souvanna Phouma for US armed reconnaissance against infiltration routes in Laos. Souvanna approved flights over routes in the panhandle; but as a *quid pro quo* he requested missions over Route 7 in the Plain of Jars in northern Laos, the premier's principal area of interest in his own war against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese.¹⁰

On 11 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a message to CINCPAC alerting him to be prepared to conduct the initial two missions following receipt of execution orders on or about 14 December. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs informed the Secretary of Defense of the plans for the two missions and recommended approval of their execution. They advised Mr. McNamara that the two missions each involved armed reconnaissance of certain segments of designated highways. Each also included a secondary target, a military strongpoint or barracks, to be hit with unexpended ordnance. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had informed Admiral Sharp that he could use "optimum conventional ordnance," select aircraft at his option with the restriction that strike sorties could not be launched from Thai bases, provide anti-MIG combat air patrol, and conduct post-strike reconnaissance and search and rescue (SAR) operations. The admiral was to coordinate his actions with the American Embassy in Vientiane.¹¹

At a meeting the following day, 12 December, the senior presidential advisers, after adding a prohibition on the use of napalm, approved the Joint Chiefs of Staff

mission plan. McGeorge Bundy “said the program fulfilled precisely the President’s wishes, that he would so inform the President, and that it should be executed unless advised separately to the contrary by him.” The conferees agreed that the United States would make no public statement concerning the air operations over Laos, though the question would be reopened if a US aircraft were lost. Later on 12 December, the Secretary of Defense orally confirmed the White House approval. The Joint Chiefs of Staff then dispatched the action message to CINCPAC. The new operations received the codename BARREL ROLL.¹²

On 14 December, F-105 jets of the 2nd Air Division flew the first BARREL ROLL mission. Carrier aircraft from the USS *Ranger* performed the second mission on the 17th. The third mission, four days later, carried out armed reconnaissance over Route 7, as Souvanna Phouma had requested. Two further missions were flown before the end of the month. Conducted during daylight hours, the US flights observed no enemy personnel or traffic (most movement on the Ho Chi Minh Trail occurred at night) and expended their ordnance on secondary targets, barracks and a bridge. The American planes received occasional anti-aircraft fire and spotted several unmanned anti-aircraft positions. BARREL ROLL operations continued thereafter, the sixth mission being flown on 2 January 1965.¹³

Strengthening South Vietnam

The President’s decisions of 1 December included a renewed effort to increase the size and effectiveness of Saigon’s armed forces. Measures for this purpose were for the most part already under review. For instance, on 24 November, COMUSMACV had recommended an increase in the RVNAF force structure, in which Ambassador Taylor and Admiral Sharp had concurred. General Westmoreland recommended adding some 140,000 men during 1965 to the South Vietnamese military’s then authorized strength of 243,599 regulars and 212,246 territorials and paramilitary.¹⁴

On 17 December, in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed General Westmoreland’s recommended increase. They declared it was “necessary to provide additional forces for implementation of the national pacification programs and for preventing further deterioration in the military situation.” The decisive stage of consideration of this program, however, did not occur until well into 1965. Although Secretary McNamara approved in principle on 13 January, implementation awaited final agreement by the State Department, negotiations with Saigon, and arrangement of the Military Assistance Program funding. In any event, the increases were not to take place until after the RVNAF reached its currently authorized strength, which was expected to be around 1 February 1965.¹⁵

During December, the administration briefly reconsidered its plans for expanding South Vietnam’s air force. On 15 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended to the Secretary of Defense that two additional A-1H fighter squadrons—the fifth and

sixth—be added to the VNAF during 1965. The JCS declared that existing VNAF and FARM GATE resources were insufficient to meet all requests from ground commanders for close air support. In the face of increasing Viet Cong activity, and with the functioning of the air request net steadily improving, this shortfall appeared certain to reach serious proportions in the coming months. For training purposes, the Joint Chiefs recommended retaining FARM GATE in Vietnam at least until the sixth VNAF squadron became fully operational. At that time, officials could make a determination of the requirements for a residual US training capability.¹⁶

On 6 November, Secretary McNamara approved the VNAF expansion program. Under its schedule, the fifth VNAF squadron was to be operational at full strength by 1 June 1965 and the sixth by 15 October 1965. McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to submit recommendations for the disposition of FARM GATE at such time as the fifth VNAF squadron became operational.¹⁷

In a message on 9 December, Ambassador Taylor questioned this decision. He thought “we should not embark on an expansion of VNAF by two more A-1H squadrons since the training requirements will reduce operational VNAF aircraft during the coming critical months.” The Ambassador believed it would be better to reinforce FARM GATE and the VNAF with B-57 jet bombers. Ambassador Taylor understood that the VNAF had pilots capable of flying eight B-57s at once if the US Air Force provided maintenance. Hence, “although we are committed to support the fifth and sixth A-1H squadrons under current understandings, the substitution of a modest jet program would, I believe, overcome any GVN objection to cancelling these last two squadrons.”¹⁸

The Joint Chiefs of Staff disagreed with Ambassador Taylor’s proposal. They realized that Ambassador Taylor was misinformed about the VNAF pilot situation. Only six South Vietnamese pilots, chiefly senior command personnel, had received limited transition training in the B-57. They were qualified for daytime visual noncombat flying only. Also, the schedule for activating the additional squadrons had taken into account the ability of the VNAF to absorb them; implementation should not reduce operational capability as the Ambassador feared. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 12 December, the Joint Chiefs registered their opposition to Ambassador Taylor’s suggestion and reaffirmed their support of the VNAF expansion program. Besides the lack of qualified South Vietnamese pilots, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that addition of B-57s to the VNAF could have major political implications, since the Geneva Accords prohibited the introduction of jet aircraft into Indochina. The Joint Chiefs believed that the jet question should be considered separately from the projected increase in fighter squadrons. In the end, the administration made no change in the scheduled VNAF expansion.¹⁹

It should be noted, however, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff favored in principle the introduction of jet aircraft into South Vietnam. On 4 September, they had recommended that 15 VNAF pilots and the required maintenance personnel receive jet training in the United States during 1965 and that the United States provide ten jet aircraft to South Vietnam early in 1966. Secretary McNamara had disapproved this recommendation on the grounds that

the undertaking would not contribute significantly to the current counterinsurgency battle and that “it would tend to duplicate, at considerable cost, the task of air defense that the US must be ready to perform for the foreseeable future.”²⁰

Besides strengthening South Vietnam’s forces, the United States made its own preparations for possible action against the North. Administration officials long had recognized that military pressures against North Vietnam might bring enemy air attacks in retaliation. Hence, air defenses in the South would have to be increased. After the first Tonkin Gulf incident in August, in response to recommendations from General Westmoreland, the Defense Department on 1 September alerted a Marine anti-aircraft missile (HAWK) battalion for deployment from the continental United States to Da Nang. During the heightened tension following the Bien Hoa attack on 1 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with Secretary McNamara’s approval, directed movement of the HAWK battalion to the Western Pacific. The unit sailed on 18 November. During the more than two weeks it was in transit, an additional Marine HAWK battery remained on alert for airlift to Da Nang in the event of an emergency. Meanwhile, CINCPAC analyzed the security and support problems its deployment would present. On 25 November, Admiral Sharp recommended early deployment of the battalion, less one battery, to Da Nang. For the time being, the remainder of the battalion was located on Okinawa pending further siting and security developments. Both Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland concurred in this recommendation.²¹

As the embarked unit neared its destination in early December, the deployment hit snags. At Da Nang, the Vietnamese authorities were slow in turning over land for the battery positions, requiring Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland to divert the battalion to Okinawa, where it disembarked on 7 December. Then the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland fell into disagreement over details of battery siting and over arrangements for construction of their permanent positions. On 11 December, the State and Defense Departments authorized Ambassador Taylor to inform the Saigon government that two HAWK batteries were ready for prompt deployment to South Vietnam whenever needed. A new South Vietnamese political crisis, however, resulted in the United States suspending the battalion’s deployment for the rest of the year.²²

Phase I Starts Slowly

President Johnson on 1 December had not provided the go-ahead for any major actions. Within the Phase I program of the first 30 days, only the BARREL ROLL missions over Laos constituted a new activity; and those operations were intended to “send a signal of deeper US involvement” rather than strive for a higher level of military effectiveness. In fact, the first BARREL ROLL flights were not much of a signal; US officials saw no sign that the other side even noticed a departure from the existing YANKEE TEAM operations. The administration also had used restraint in the scheduling of OPLAN 34A MAROPS and the disposition of the HAWK battalion.²³

At a meeting on 19 December, senior officials discussed the future of BARREL ROLL missions beyond the first two of 14 and 17 December. General Johnson, attending as Acting JCS Chairman, “pointed out that this program is not as strong as that recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and that it provides no significant intensification as compared with the previous week’s operations.” The other conferees acknowledged this point. Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance “stated that that was a criterion governing preparation of the program.” CIA Director McCone “confirmed that there is not yet any indication that the DRV has recognized any change in the nature of our military operations as the result of last week’s program.” The group’s consensus was “that this was the way things should remain for the next two weeks.”²⁴

The administration thus had opted for restraint in carrying out the 1 December decisions. During the next several weeks, political events in Saigon gave US officials still further reason to proceed with caution and reinforced their reluctance to take decisive action.

The Generals Dissolve the High National Council

The Armed Forces Council, dominated by General Khanh and the so-called Young Turk faction among the RVNAF generals, precipitated the new political crisis. Early in December, the council had devised a regulation requiring retirement of all general officers with over 25 years of service. It was aimed particularly at General Minh and three other generals closely associated with him in the regime General Khanh had overthrown. On 18 December, General Khanh, as armed forces Commander in Chief, petitioned the High National Council to promulgate the regulation.

When the HNC did not promptly comply, General Khanh and the Armed Forces Council, after a meeting late on 19 December, proclaimed the dissolution of the High National Council and ordered the arrest of certain of its members. Most of the arrests occurred during the early hours of 20 December; eight HNC members were taken into custody along with a number of other individuals tabbed as political agitators. In a telephone report to Washington, General Westmoreland declared that “by arresting members of the High National Council, which is the interim legislative branch of the government, the military leaders have in fact abrogated the charter of the land.”²⁵

This event precipitated a diplomatic confrontation between the generals and the US Mission. Early on 20 December, the Deputy COMUSMACV, Lieutenant General John L. Throckmorton, USA, went to the RVNAF high command headquarters seeking an explanation of the generals’ action. The VNAF commander, General Ky, designated the Young Turks’ spokesmen because of his superior knowledge of English, denied that the officers intended a military coup. He claimed that they had moved only against the HNC, some members of which were under communist influence and were undermining the government. General Ky asserted further that Prime Minister Huong and Chief of State Suu had given prior assent to the dissolution of the HNC, which General Ky insisted

would strengthen the government and lead to greater stability. The armed forces still supported Prime Minister Huong and Dr. Suu and sought no change in the cabinet.

General Throckmorton replied that, whatever the merits of the action, the generals' failure to consult or even notify the US Mission was an affront to the US government. The purge of the HNC jeopardized the confidence the United States had reposed in South Vietnam's military leaders and "rendered unpredictable the continuation of US support." General Throckmorton persuaded General Ky to postpone a scheduled press conference until he and other spokesmen for General Khanh had met with Ambassador Taylor.²⁶

Shortly before noon on the 20th, General Ky and three other Young Turk generals met at the US Embassy with Ambassador Taylor. Angered by the officers' disregard of his earlier pleas for stability, Ambassador Taylor, as Secretary McNamara later recalled, "chewed them out as a drill instructor might a squad of raw recruits." The Ambassador reported his comments in more restrained tones: "I very forcefully expressed my disappointment in the action they had taken, made it clear they had jeopardized US support in everything they had been seeking, and asked for their explanation." The four Vietnamese officers averred that General Khanh had made the decisions and that the Armed Forces Council had merely advised him. The Ambassador told them that their midnight meeting and the subsequent purge of the HNC would appear to Washington and the rest of the world as another military coup. He stressed the importance of maintaining the duly constituted government and strongly urged the generals to find a way to retreat from their dissolution of the HNC.²⁷

On the following day, General Khanh faced the Ambassador's wrath. When pressed by Ambassador Taylor, General Khanh admitted that the HNC dissolution was his decision, although he maintained that he was carrying out the will of the majority of the officer corps. "I then asked him," Ambassador Taylor reported, "if he felt he had acted ... consistent with the conduct of a loyal ally.... I was obliged to tell him that he had lost my confidence." General Khanh then asked the Ambassador whether, "under the circumstances," he should retire as armed forces commander. Ambassador Taylor "was prepared for this question since we had discussed the matter earlier in the morning in the US Mission Council, where I found all members unanimous in feeling that Khanh must go." Hence, the Ambassador replied in the affirmative and suggested that General Khanh "might enjoy traveling abroad."²⁸

General Khanh, however, did not retire. He publicly reaffirmed and defended the dissolution of the High National Council while insisting that the Armed Forces Council still supported the Suu-Huong civilian government. Taking an increasingly anti-American and anti-Taylor line, General Khanh portrayed the Ambassador as ill-tempered and domineering and accused him of insulting South Vietnam's national honor. He charged the Ambassador with meddling in South Vietnam's internal affairs and told an American newsman that "if Taylor did not act more intelligently, Southeast Asia would be lost." On 23 December, General Khanh induced the Armed Forces Council to endorse a letter to the Chief of State and the Prime Minister that amounted to a request that Ambassador Taylor be declared *persona non grata*.²⁹

The Department of State countered with a strong statement that Ambassador Taylor had acted “throughout with the full support of the United States Government” and had expressed to the Vietnamese leaders the established policy of the United States. In other statements and orders, the United States made clear that any effort to expel Ambassador Taylor would cause a break in US-South Vietnamese relations and an end to American assistance. During the latter days of December, the two governments smoothed over the discord with explanations and clarifications. Nevertheless, the United States had to accept the dissolution of the High National Council as a *fait accompli*. The Embassy received intimations that some of the Young Turks, notably General Ky, had become convinced that General Khanh had acted exclusively in his own interests throughout the affair, but there appeared to be no prospect of forcing Khanh out of the Commander in Chief’s post for some time.³⁰

Whatever the legalisms the State Department devised for preserving the appearance of continued constitutional government in South Vietnam, the fact was that the Huong regime existed at the sufferance of the military officer corps, headed by an increasingly intractable and unpredictable General Khanh. The recent events constituted a definite rebuff to US hopes for governmental permanence and stability in Saigon, and they left a legacy of tension between the RVNAF leadership and the US Mission. Under these circumstances, a United States decision to move to Phase II of its program became less likely. In addition, the United States also declined to carry out the reprisal element of Phase I when the enemy again launched a spectacular attack.

The Brink Hotel Bombing

On Christmas Eve, a powerful explosion shattered the Brink Hotel, an American bachelor officers’ quarters (BOQ) in downtown Saigon. One US Army officer and one US civilian were killed and 63 US servicemen and civilians were injured, along with one Australian officer and 43 Vietnamese. Unknown persons had delivered this blow, apparently by parking an explosive-laden automobile in the hotel’s first-floor garage.³¹

Ambassador Taylor characterized the bombing as a “major terrorist attack directed squarely at US personnel,” and he termed it providential that only two deaths had resulted. The incident was clearly one of the types that had been marked for reprisal in the recent US consultations. But the Ambassador saw a counter-indication in the absence as yet of “clear proof that the bombing is work of VC.” In addition, “Another question arises as to timeliness of initiating reprisals in view of our sorry relations with RVNAF.” Ambassador Taylor would “get around this point” by excluding the Vietnamese from participation and by using carrier-based US aircraft for the strike. “We can tell our military opposite numbers that it is [the] kind of operation we would have liked to conduct jointly but could not in [the] present state of our relations.” Nevertheless, the Ambassador withheld a recommendation for a reprisal attack pending the outcome of an investigation of the Brink bombing.³²

In a joint message later on Christmas Day, the State and Defense Departments cited further reasons for caution, stemming mainly from the current political difficulties in South Vietnam. If a reprisal were mounted at this point, “Hanoi would hardly read into it any strong or continuing signal in view of [the] overall confusion in Saigon.”

Hanoi might well share what would certainly be strong reaction in US opinion and internationally that we were trying to shoot our way out of an internal political crisis. Under present circumstances of Saigon disunity, it would be hard for American people to understand action to extend war. Moreover, unless evidence crystal clear, there might be some suspicion at least internationally that BOQ bombing was not in fact done by VC. For these reasons, we are not convinced reprisal action desirable as of now, but we are prepared to make quick decision if you make recommendation with different assessment....

Should reprisal be decided on, the administration had already chosen the target: the Vit Thu Lu military barracks in lower North Vietnam, to be struck only by US aircraft.³³

On 26 December, Admiral Sharp weighed in with a strong recommendation that the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese masters not be allowed to escape unscathed as they had following the Bien Hoa raid. Sharp favored an immediate strike against the Vit Thu Lu barracks, saying “this is the language the VC understand.”³⁴

By 28 December, Ambassador Taylor had concluded there was no reason to hold back. “Although we will probably never have evidence which will stand up in court of VC complicity in the Brink bombing, no one in this part of the world has [the] slightest doubt of VC guilt.” He reported that National Liberation Front radio was claiming credit for the explosion. “They say that they did it and we should treat them accordingly.” The US Mission Council, Ambassador Taylor declared, unanimously recommended that a reprisal bombing attack be executed as soon as possible against the Vit Thu Lu barracks. Ambassador Taylor noted that General Westmoreland wished the VNAF to have some role in the primarily US operation. Since US relations with the RVNAF seemed to be improving at the moment and 43 Vietnamese were injured in the Brink bombing, the Ambassador did not oppose this suggestion.³⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff strongly endorsed the Ambassador’s recommendation. They agreed with Ambassador Taylor’s assignment of blame to the Viet Cong for the Brink bombing, which they called “a deliberate act aimed directly at US forces in South Vietnam.” In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 28 December, the Joint Chiefs sought approval for the dispatch of an action order to CINCPAC to carry out the reprisal. The attack, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, should be “primarily a US operation, in such strength as to assure a high probability of target destruction.” The South Vietnamese air force should participate if its readiness and time permitted. The two aircraft carriers then on station, with land-based air already in place, would provide sufficient strength to execute this attack on roughly six hours’ notice. The proposed Joint Chiefs of Staff message to CINCPAC would instruct him to launch the operation on 30 December, Saigon time, employing 40 US strike sorties, plus any additional sorties the VNAF might be able to provide. He was to use optimum conventional ordnance, excluding napalm.³⁶

These urgings and recommendations failed to carry the day. Senior administration officials, with Secretary Rusk presiding, met at mid-day on 28 December. Some of those present opposed mounting an attack in view of the political instability in Saigon and the time that had elapsed since the Brink bombing. The officials agreed that Secretary Rusk and McGeorge Bundy would consult with President Johnson at his Texas ranch the following day. President Johnson agreed with the opponents of retaliation. Early in the evening on the 29th, Secretary Rusk reported to Ambassador Taylor that “highest levels today reached negative decision on proposal ... for reprisal action for BOQ bombing.” General Wheeler similarly informed Admiral Sharp. Once again, the administration, faced with a communist provocation, had declined to retaliate.³⁷

Afterwords: General Wheeler and President Johnson

On the last day of the year, General Wheeler sent a personal message to Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland. The Chairman said he still had not been apprised of “the factors which influenced highest authority to disapprove recommendations of Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC, and JCS to undertake reprisal for Brink bombing.” He then provided his own assessment of the probable reasons.

General Wheeler cited first “the presence of US dependents in South Vietnam.” This had been a matter of “continuing concern” to the President and other officials. According to General Wheeler, “There is concern in Washington, amounting almost to conviction, that our dependents are liable to attack as a VC/DRV reprisal to a US attack against the DRV.” As long as American dependents remained in South Vietnam, “I consider that forceful action by the US outside the borders of South Vietnam is practically precluded.” The continued presence of the dependents was “a hurdle which trips decisions.”

General Wheeler noted other factors that had affected the decision. There was, he said, “doubt in some Washington sectors that security measures of critical installations in Saigon and elsewhere are adequate.” Some officials took the attitude that “lax security not only invites but in some curious way justifies a VC attack and thereby inhibits us from retaliatory action.” Next, some senior Defense Department officials shared a “widespread and strong belief” that reprisals must be executed within 24–36 hours of a provocation. To wait longer was to remove the US action “from the reprisal to the offensive area,” making it an escalatory move. Finally, “US policy determination currently is limited to the decision to exert a limited squeeze on the DRV; no decision has yet been taken to move militarily against the North.” That being the case, “the GVN disarray on Christmas Eve did not permit an affirmative decision to execute a reprisal for the Brink bombing.” In other words, “the political confusion in Saigon does not encourage nor, indeed, permit the US to increase the stakes in Southeast Asia.”

General Wheeler anticipated that, when Congress reconvened in the New Year, there would be “sharp inquiries into US policy in South Vietnam, the conduct of the war and the reasons for our lack of success. The Congress and the American people are

increasingly concerned about the situation in Southeast Asia.” He believed, however, that their concern was not that the United States was engaged in a war; it stemmed from frustration “that we are not winning the war.”

The Chairman counseled the two commanders to look to the maintenance of the US capability for prompt retaliation. Despite the recent decision against reprisal, some officials continued to talk of the need for a 6-hour reaction time for response to Viet Cong or North Vietnamese provocation. General Wheeler noted that he had advised the administration more than once that if VNAF participation was desired, an additional 24 hours would be required to arrange it. Beyond that, General Wheeler said,

We must continue to press the military and the civilians in Saigon to submerge their differences and fabricate a reasonably sound governmental structure; ... we must somehow convince the Washington policy-makers that our security arrangements are as good as the type of war we are fighting will permit.³⁸

The day before General Wheeler sent his message to Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, President Johnson sent a personal message of his own to Ambassador Taylor. In it, the President explained his reasons for vetoing a Brinks reprisal and also tried to turn the military discussion in a different direction. President Johnson gave as reasons for his decision the same ones the Chairman had cited: the political turmoil in Saigon, concern for US dependents, and reluctance to order reprisals in cases where US security seemed weak. The President also was worried “by our lack of progress in communicating sensitively and persuasively with the various groups in South Vietnam.” Finally, President Johnson expressed dissatisfaction with the military advice he was receiving and solicited from the Ambassador and COMUSMACV recommendations for a different approach:

Every time I get a military recommendation it seems to me that it calls for large-scale bombing. I have never felt that this war will be won from the air, and it seems to me that what is much more needed and would be more effective is a larger and stronger use of Rangers and Special Forces and Marines, or other appropriate military strength on the ground and on the scene. I am ready to look with great favor on that kind of increased American effort, directed at the guerrillas and aimed to stiffen the aggressiveness of Vietnamese military units up and down the line. Any recommendation that you or General Westmoreland make in this sense will have immediate attention from me, although I know that it may involve the acceptance of larger American sacrifice. We have been building our strength to fight this kind of war ever since 1961, and I myself am ready to substantially increase the number of Americans in Vietnam if it is necessary to provide this kind of fighting force against the Viet Cong.³⁹

Ambassador Taylor replied to this suggestion on 6 January 1965, in a message sent with General Westmoreland’s concurrence. On the basis of a MACV staff study, the Ambassador declared that the number of American advisers and support personnel in South Vietnam already was close to the maximum that the RVNAF could absorb. As

to the employment of US combat units, either by themselves or integrated into South Vietnamese formations, MACV had concluded that any such action would entail political disadvantages that would outweigh any possible military benefits. In summary, the Ambassador declared:

The Vietnamese have the manpower and basic skills to win this war. What they lack is motivation. The entire advisory effort has been devoted to giving them both skill and motivation. If that effort has not succeeded there is less reason to think that US combat forces would have the desired effect. In fact, there is good reason to believe that they would have the opposite effect by causing some Vietnamese to let the US carry the burden while others, probably the majority, would turn actively against us Intervention with ground combat forces would at best buy time and would lead to ever increasing commitments until, like the French, we would be occupying an essentially hostile foreign country.⁴⁰

For the Johnson administration, 1964 had been a year of much planning and policy debate regarding Southeast Asia but little new action. The US Mission in Saigon had struggled to keep the South Vietnamese campaign against the Viet Cong going and to achieve a measure of stability and effectiveness in the Saigon government. On both fronts, progress had been limited at best. In Washington and the field, officials had made and re-made plans for striking at North Vietnam. However, except for the Tonkin Gulf reprisal, they had taken no major escalatory steps beyond a limited expansion of aerial activity in Laos. A presidential election, South Vietnam's political disarray, and general reluctance to risk a larger conflict had prevented stronger measures. By contrast, their adversaries had spent the year systematically preparing their forces and logistic system for a campaign of large-unit operations in South Vietnam—an effort the Americans noticed only as increasing Viet Cong activity and an appearance of native North Vietnamese among the infiltrators. As 1965 began, the communists were ready to strike the first blows of their planned offensive, opening what would be a year of rapid escalation by both sides.

A New Stage of US Commitment

As 1965 began, the United States policy of furnishing only military equipment and counsel to nations threatened by communist wars of liberation appeared to have failed in Vietnam. The United States now faced the choice of either entering the conflict more directly and at increased risk and cost or, by inaction, allowing the communists to prevail. In view of the growing North Vietnamese support for the insurgents and the critical governmental weakness and waning military fortunes of South Vietnam, the pressure on the American administration for a decision while choice was still possible grew more urgent each day. In the first months of the New Year, President Johnson, moved as much by events as by the arguments of his advisers, ordered a more direct military, economic, and political intervention in Vietnam. Even more than the year 1962, when President Kennedy had much enlarged the US advisory presence and dispatched military support units to South Vietnam, 1965 was to mark a massive escalation and transformation of the United States engagement in Southeast Asia.

The Enemy Push for Victory

Early in 1965, the Viet Cong seemed closer than they had ever been before to a decisive military victory over the Saigon government. Pressing their attack against the weakened and dispirited South Vietnamese forces, the insurgents battered the ARVN and the Regional and Popular Forces throughout the country in large-unit battles, patrol skirmishes, and ambushes. Saigon's troops seemed to be no match for a highly motivated, more skillful enemy reinforced by a steady stream of North Vietnamese troops and materiel.

Carrying out the Politburo decision to expand the large-unit war, in October 1964 the Central Military Party Committee in Hanoi ordered its armed forces in the south

to launch a campaign during the winter and spring of 1964–1965 with the objectives of “destroying a significant number of puppet regular army units and expanding our liberated zones.” The principal battlefields were to be in III Corps near Saigon and in the central highlands and coastal provinces of II Corps. Viet Cong main force units, augmented by North Vietnamese regiments, would conduct the principal attacks, with extensive logistic and combat support from guerrillas and local forces.¹

The most dramatic engagement of the ensuing upsurge of activity occurred at Binh Gia, a strategic hamlet about 40 miles southeast of Saigon. After two months of methodical planning and logistical preparation, two Viet Cong main force regiments, supported by additional units and local guerrillas, attacked Binh Gia on 27 December, and then stayed in the area to fight a succession of South Vietnamese relief forces. Between 28 December and 3 January, the Viet Cong killed almost 200 government troops and 5 American advisers, shot down two helicopters, and captured more than 300 weapons. They all but destroyed a battalion of South Vietnamese marines and another of rangers before successfully disengaging and slipping away to their base areas. To US military intelligence experts, Binh Gia and other sharp engagements indicated that the enemy might be moving into a more intense phase of the war; and such indeed was the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong intention. North Vietnamese official historians declared that the Binh Gia campaign was “strategically important because it marked the beginning of a new era in our revolutionary war, the era of combining guerrilla warfare with conventional warfare, combining military attacks with uprisings conducted by the masses.”²

At the beginning of 1965, US intelligence authorities estimated that the communists were employing about 30,000 regular (main force) Viet Cong troops and between 60,000 and 80,000 part-time guerrillas in South Vietnam. The regular force appeared to have increased by 8,000 to 10,000 men during 1964—a remarkable rise in view of the estimated 21,000 casualties the enemy had sustained in the same period. US experts judged that only a well-established, efficient military-political organization could take such losses and still be able to function with greater effectiveness than ever. Clearly, the VC had professional command, logistics, communications, and personnel systems to support their military operations.

As of early 1965, MACV had identified among the regular Viet Cong units 5 regiments, 47 battalions, and 135 companies. Strong concentrations of these units were located in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai provinces in southern I Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). VC regular units were thinner on the ground in the central area of II CTZ, where North Vietnamese regiments were coming in to reinforce them—a fact as yet unconfirmed by allied intelligence. Main force units were heavily concentrated in III and IV CTZs north and south of Saigon, and local guerrillas also were most numerous in those regions. As of the beginning of the year, MACV had no definite proof that any organized North Vietnamese units had entered South Vietnam, although such entry was suspected and was in fact occurring. However, the command estimated that nearly half of the 7,500 infiltrators reported to have come in during 1964 were native northerners rather than

southerners who had gone north at the end of the French war. MACV estimated that from 1959 to the end of 1964, more than 37,000 persons had infiltrated from the north to join Viet Cong units, although the command could confirm only about half of these on the basis of POW interrogations.³

In spite of pacification efforts, the allies estimated that the Viet Cong controlled almost one quarter of South Vietnam's rural population and more than half of the countryside's land area. Throughout most of the nation, the Viet Cong were intensifying their tactics of terror and subversion. Citizens who favored the Saigon government were intimidated into silence and compliance or eliminated, while those who were uncommitted cooperated with the Viet Cong from fear of punishment. Security was better in the larger urban areas, but there were definite signs of Viet Cong presence in such cities as Saigon and Da Nang and of the enemy's increasing capacity to cause trouble in those thickly populated communities.

At the beginning of 1965, it appeared that strategically the Viet Cong meant to cut South Vietnam in half by driving government forces out of northern II CTZ and establishing a wedge of control from the mountains to the sea. By a combination of main force and guerrilla attacks in the piedmont and coastal plain, the enemy were pinning the ARVN in its garrisons, dismantling the Saigon administration, destroying hamlet fortifications, and blocking road traffic. At the same time, communist political cadres gradually established their own administration in the unprotected villages.⁴

South Vietnam: Military Decline and Political Confusion

In contrast to the communists' improving position, the plight of South Vietnam was discouraging in nearly every aspect. Pacification had come to a virtual standstill by early 1965. The RVNAF, unable to respond effectively to the enemy's initiatives, had been forced into an increasingly defensive posture. It was clearly evident that without a great deal more outside assistance, the RVNAF and, consequently, South Vietnam, was going down to defeat.

Statistically, South Vietnam surpassed the Viet Cong in armed strength. In January 1965, Saigon had 245,000 men in its regular forces, 99,000 in the Regional Forces, 165,000 in the Popular Forces, and 31,500 National Police. The regular establishment included a 220,000-man ARVN and a 7,000-man marine corps, the latter generally employed as a reserve force. The republic also possessed a navy of 8,000 personnel and an air force of 11,000, neither considered particularly effective by American authorities.

Because the enemy could strike at places and times of his own choosing while the RVNAF had to be spread throughout the country, Saigon's overall numerical superiority gave the government no real advantage. The communists often could bring superior strength to bear at their chosen points of attack. The RVNAF had extreme difficulty shifting troops and supplies from one area of South Vietnam to another, partly because

the Viet Cong controlled many of the main lines of communication and also because ARVN divisions recruited from particular localities, suffered from demoralization and desertion when moved out of their home regions. As the tempo of Viet Cong attacks rose, the ARVN was struck hard in widely separated towns and outposts, its garrisons being defeated in rapid succession, often by night assaults, and its maneuvering columns bloodied in ambushes. Allied airpower and artillery partially compensated for the RVNAF's disadvantages and kept enemy casualties high but could not reverse the overall unfavorable military trend.

US statistical reports highlighted the RVNAF's deteriorating position. In the first month of the New Year, the South Vietnamese suffered 3,313 killed and wounded. While casualty figures might be dismissed as an indication of a brave defense by outnumbered forces, a more ominous picture emerged when these figures were read in conjunction with those on desertion and weapon losses. MACV reported that in January 7,000 men had deserted from South Vietnam's forces, about the same monthly rate as had prevailed in 1964. In the following months, this figure would soar to over 11,000 per month. The news on weapon losses was equally bad. The RVNAF lost an average of about 2,000 weapons in each of the first two months of 1965 while capturing fewer from the Viet Cong.⁵

These adverse military developments were accompanied by growing political chaos in South Vietnam. Sapped by uprisings and coups since late 1963, the republic had degenerated into a jumble of mutually antagonistic religious, political, and military factions—all maneuvering for control. Government ministries and provincial leaders operated with little direction or support from the central authority, with predictably crippling effect on the war effort. Lacking confidence in the regime's ability to govern or to prosecute the war, important elements of the population, notably the large and influential Buddhist community, displayed increasingly antiwar, antigovernment, and anti-United States sentiment.

The immediate problem, the growing rift between the new Huong government and the generals, seemed capable of solution. After an extended reconciliation effort by Ambassador Taylor, the generals and the government on 5 January agreed that the military would return full power to the civilians and that the Huong regime would promise to hold early elections for a national assembly. The generals, headed by Khanh, would announce their support for the Huong government and its election plan and release the persons the military had arrested on 20 December. In addition to these provisions, in a joint communiqué issued on 9 January, the two sides promised to vest all legislative power temporarily in the Chief of State.⁶

Ambassador Taylor doubted that the agreement would last long. Washington, too, was skeptical about the effectiveness of the arrangement and instructed Ambassador Taylor to avoid to the extent possible any action that would commit the United States to either the civilian government or to General Khanh. For his part, Ambassador Taylor worked for the integration of the military into the government. This, he hoped, would give the soldiers a sense of participation, but not actual control, in the administration. At the same time, Ambassador Taylor emphasized to all factions the US insistence on

political stability, warning the various power groups which might be planning “adventures” that the United States would not support them.⁷

As a result of behind-the-scenes negotiations, Prime Minister Huong and the generals reached an agreement on military participation in the government that appeared to meet US specifications. On 18 January, Mr. Huong reshuffled his cabinet, appointing four generals to the formerly all-civilian body. They included General Nguyen Van Thieu, commander of IV Corps, who became Second Deputy Prime Minister. At the same time, Prime Minister Huong dismissed two ministers who were objectionable to the Buddhists.⁸

Unfortunately, the settlement between the civilian government and the military did not eliminate the long-standing Buddhist unrest. The Buddhist leaders had remained quiet during the post-20 December political crisis, but their objectives were unchanged. They continued to seek the removal of Prime Minister Huong and on 19 January announced a new campaign against him. The campaign began at once, with a hunger strike by monks and student anti-government demonstrations in Saigon. Similar demonstrations continued in the following days and spread to the other major cities, with monks threatening self-immolation if their demands were not met. As the disturbances spread, they took on an anti-American tone, with demonstrators calling for an end to United States interference in South Vietnam’s internal affairs and the expulsion of Ambassador Taylor. The anti-American reaction reached a climax on 23 January, when a mob sacked and burned the United States Information Service library in Hue.⁹

In the midst of this turmoil, General Khanh reached an agreement with the Buddhist leaders. In return for a guarantee of religious freedom, the Buddhists pledged to support a military government for two years and to avoid political activity. Despite remonstrances and warnings from Deputy US Ambassador Johnson, General Khanh and the Armed Forces Council (AFC) ousted the Huong government on 27 January. General Khanh announced that he would immediately convene a twenty-member military-civilian council, representing religious, political, and military groupings, which would choose a new Chief of State and advise the government on important decisions. The Chief of State, with the approval of the new council, then would select a prime minister to form a government responsible for convening a national assembly. The AFC would remain the “supreme body” until the new council was formed and a government selected, when it would revert to its position as executive body of the military. In the interim, until the new government was formed, the AFC named Nguyen Oanh, a former deputy of Huong’s, Acting Prime Minister.¹⁰

In the wake of the successful coup, the United States once again faced the bleak prospect of supporting a military dictatorship under General Khanh. Making the best of the situation, the State Department instructed Ambassador Taylor to deal with the new government without raising the question of recognition. Ambassador Taylor was to treat with General Khanh in a manner that would neither increase Khanh’s prestige nor consolidate his power, but leave the United States in a position to continue an effective relationship with him should his regime prove viable. At the same time, the United States

would keep open channels to potential military opponents of General Khanh and to the Buddhists, pending clarification of Khanh's intentions and prospects.¹¹

Ambassador Taylor remained convinced that a stable government in Saigon was impossible so long as General Khanh lingered on the scene. He reported to the State Department that General Khanh's ability to stay in power would depend largely on the support of both the Buddhist leaders and the generals, and Ambassador Taylor doubted that General Khanh could keep both those groups in line. The Ambassador believed General Khanh incapable of maintaining even the minimum level of stability necessary for the United States to continue the war at the present level. He urged that the United States take every possible step to prevent General Khanh's becoming Chief of State. To that end, with Washington's approval, Ambassador Taylor began informing influential generals, including the VNAF chief, General Ky, that the United States did not support General Khanh. The United States thus was in the position of encouraging the downfall of South Vietnam's "de facto" leader, without having a candidate to replace him.¹²

Belying Ambassador Taylor's fears, General Khanh made no attempt to assume the leadership of the new government. The Armed Forces Council retained the incumbent, Phan Khac Suu, as Chief of State and appointed Dr. Phan Huy Quat, a former foreign minister acceptable to the Buddhists, to serve as Prime Minister. The AFC kept in force the 20 October 1964 charter and promised to assemble quickly the military-civilian council, a transitional legislative body, and to work with the new government on convening a national assembly. The Armed Forces Council renewed its pledge to restrict itself to military problems once the government was functioning, but added that it would intervene whenever necessary to preserve the political equilibrium until a government elected directly by the people took office. On 17 February, General Khanh announced the formation of the long-promised military-civilian council—the National Legislative Council. This council was composed of 20 members drawn from the military, the major religious and political groups, and independents. It was supposed to exercise legislative power as defined in the 20 October 1964 charter until the election of a national assembly, but in fact it never functioned.¹³

Although the formation of the Quat government and the establishment of the National Legislative Council raised hope for renewed stability among US officials, the Saigon political wheel promptly turned again. Scarcely had Dr. Quat entered office when an attempted military coup rocked Saigon. On the afternoon of 19 February, dissident officers, led by two obscure figures, Brigadier General Tan Van Phat and Colonel Phan Ngoc Thao, moved against the government. They demanded, among other things, the removal of General Khanh. After 24 hours of confusion, during which General Ky threatened to bomb the mutineers and General Westmoreland urged him in "strongest terms" against this action, the coup collapsed and General Phat and Colonel Thao fled the country. The Quat government survived the abortive coup; but to the satisfaction of Ambassador Taylor and officials in Washington, General Khanh did not. On 21 February, the general's opponents in the AFC, seizing the occasion of the coup, ousted General Khanh as RVNAF Commander in Chief. Premier Quat and Chief of State Suu issued a

decree replacing General Khanh with Major General Tran Van Minh. Subsequently, Dr. Quat appointed General Khanh as Ambassador at Large; and General Khanh left South Vietnam on 24 February to take up diplomatic assignments in Europe and the United States, exiting for good from the stage of Saigon politics.¹⁴

The survival of Dr. Quat and the removal of General Khanh brought a brief interlude of viable government to South Vietnam. A civilian government was functioning for the moment, with broad representation from religious and political factions and national regions; although it operated under the watchful eye of the AFC. In Saigon and Washington, US officials hoped that this regime would be capable of supporting the expanded military efforts currently under way or planned for South Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor reported that Dr. Quat gave “firm direction from his side while paying appropriate consideration to his military colleagues,” who in turn played “constructive and supporting roles.” Ambassador Taylor added: “For the first time, there appears to be something approaching a single team on the other side of the table.”¹⁵

Well before these political machinations had run their course, the turmoil in Saigon had convinced two key presidential advisers that the United States had reached “the fork in the road” in Vietnam. On 27 January, Secretary of Defense McNamara and McGeorge Bundy, the President’s Special Assistant for National Security, sent President Johnson a “short but explosive memorandum.” Subsequently, they discussed the memorandum at the White House with the President and Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

Secretary McNamara and Mr. Bundy made the central point that the policy set in December—to postpone wider military action until the South Vietnamese established a stable government—“can lead only to disastrous defeat.” The decision had pinned the United States into “a policy of first aid for squabbling politicians and passive reaction to events we do not try to control.” United States indecisiveness and inaction were demoralizing America’s friends in South Vietnam and also supporters of the administration’s policy at home. At this point, “the worst course of action is to continue in this essentially passive role which can lead only to eventual defeat and an invitation to get out in humiliating circumstances.” Secretary McNamara and Mr. Bundy saw two stark alternatives: to use US military power in the Far East and to force a change in Communist policy; or to “deploy all our resources along a track of negotiation, aimed at salvaging what little can be preserved with no major addition to our present military risks.” The writers favored the first course, but believed “that both should be carefully studied and that alternative programs should be argued out before you.” They concluded:

Both of us understand the very grave questions presented by any decision of this sort. We both recognize that the ultimate responsibility is not ours. Both of us have supported your unwillingness, in earlier months, to move out of the middle course. We both agree that every effort should still be made to improve our operations on the ground and to prop up the authorities in South Vietnam as best we can. But we are both convinced that none of this is enough, and that the time has come for harder choices.¹⁶

Proposals for Additional US Military Measures

South Vietnam's deteriorating military position and political turmoil formed the background of US military planning and actions during the early weeks of 1965. By the beginning of 1965, with over 23,000 uniformed personnel in Vietnam, the United States had become an active belligerent in the war in virtually everything but name. About 15,000 American Army troops were in South Vietnam, about one-third in advisory and staff support positions directly under COMUSMACV, the rest providing combat support and combat service support to the RVNAF and the US advisers. The US Air Force was employing over 6,000 personnel in South Vietnam to not only train and develop the VNAF but also to fly combat missions under the guise of instruction. A 650-man US Marine unit operated a medium helicopter squadron supporting RVNAF operations in I CTZ. The US Navy had approximately 1,500 men in and around Vietnam, all in administrative and logistic support roles. Despite this substantial commitment of United States armed forces and the continued infusion of US supplies and equipment for the RVNAF, South Vietnam's situation steadily worsened.¹⁷

Concerned over the lack of a sound government and the adverse effect of this on the military situation, General Wheeler suggested to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that they press military and civilian leaders in Saigon to submerge their differences in their own national interest. In response, on 6 January General Westmoreland, with the concurrence of Ambassador Taylor, issued guidelines to MACV advisers to be used in discussing the political situation with their Vietnamese counterparts. He stressed that the US was concerned primarily for "stable government in place, able to speak for all its components," adding that the absence of such a government was blocking the allies from a more vigorous prosecution of the war. General Westmoreland urged the rapid restoration of conditions favorable to the pursuit of the struggle.¹⁸

The 30-day period originally scheduled for the completion of Phase I of the President's December program elapsed in mid-January. While the military portions of the program were well under way by that time, the political side had not fared so well. As of mid-January, the Saigon political situation was no better, and perhaps worse, than it had been in early December. The growing anti-American tone of the Buddhist agitation especially alarmed both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC. On 25 January, Admiral Sharp positioned an Amphibious Ready Group within 24 hours' reaction time of Da Nang. The next day, at General Westmoreland's request and because of the threat to the US consulate at Hue and US property in South Vietnam, Admiral Sharp moved two task groups to within a six-hour reaction time of Saigon.¹⁹

As the governmental turmoil in Saigon continued through January and into February, the administration extended Phase One of the program into a second month. US military leaders, however, became increasingly impatient to get on with the military actions they had proposed; and recommendations and preparations for those operations multiplied during this period.

An issue that arose early was the use of US jet aircraft in South Vietnam. At the height of the Buddhist unrest, US intelligence experts warned that the Viet Cong might attack district and provincial towns and critical US installations, especially during the coming Tet holiday period. General Westmoreland himself was convinced that the enemy would try for a spectacular victory during Tet, to coincide with the period of "extreme political uncertainty." The MACV commander noted that South Vietnamese forces were spread thin by the widespread civil disorders and would have difficulty coping with major Viet Cong attacks. In addition, the discipline and efficiency of the VNAF had diminished because of General Ky's preoccupation with politics. Accordingly, Westmoreland asked for authority to use US jets in South Vietnam, subject to the Ambassador's prior concurrence in each mission. COMUSMACV or his Deputy personally would decide to launch the jets on a mission by mission basis under the following criteria: 1) COMUSMACV considered that a threat existed that the Viet Cong would gain a major victory or that numbers of American lives otherwise would be lost; 2) US ground or airborne observers in touch with the situation on the ground and the location of friendly troops would control the strikes; 3) reliable intelligence located a major Viet Cong concentration beyond the effective strike capacity of FARM GATE and the VNAF; and 4) the strikes had been cleared in advance with the RVNAF. The Embassy in Saigon concurred with General Westmoreland's request. On 27 January, with White House and State Department agreement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized the restricted use of US jets in combat in South Vietnam for the first time.²⁰

The administration also revisited the issue of resuming DE SOTO destroyer patrols along the coast of North Vietnam. Although the Joint Chiefs had recommended resumption of the patrols in October 1964, the President had deferred a decision. At that time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been concerned with establishing and maintaining a legitimate US presence in international waters, resuming intelligence collection, and continuing to exert pressure on North Vietnam. As one of the military programs under Phase I, DE SOTO patrols assumed a new significance. On 28 January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff alerted CINCPAC to prepare to resume DE SOTO patrols on or about 3 February, for the first time since their suspension in mid-September. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that, to avoid provocation, the patrols remain 30 nautical miles off the North Vietnamese mainland and Hainan Island and south of 20 degrees north latitude. They did, however, authorize patrol ships and supporting aircraft to return fire if attacked. When necessary to destroy an attacking force, patrol ships could pursue the enemy to the recognized three-mile territorial limit; and aircraft could conduct hot pursuit of surface vessels inside territorial waters and of aircraft into North Vietnamese and Chinese air space.²¹

In planning for renewal of DE SOTO patrols, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took into account the possibility that the North Vietnamese might attack the destroyers and the US might conduct reprisals. They ordered Admiral Sharp to put retaliatory forces in position before commencing the patrol and to proceed with reprisal planning against five targets in the southern part of North Vietnam. The five targets were all from the

JCS Outline Plan of 14 November for air operations against the North. The Joint Chiefs also directed CINCPAC to prepare a further strike increment for the VNAF against an additional North Vietnamese target. During the next few days, they revised this guidance to provide greater flexibility in reprisal options and to include targets “more suitable in terms of Washington objectives.” They asked CINCPAC to develop reprisal plans based on three attack options. In ascending order, these options increased the scale of the attack, although all three involved low-value military targets, primarily barracks areas, in southern North Vietnam.²²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not the only ones anticipating North Vietnamese attacks on DE SOTO patrols. Ambassador Taylor, for one, hoped that the planned patrol would create an opportunity for US reprisals. On 31 January, he told the State Department that an incident on a DE SOTO patrol followed by immediate, strong, and effective US retaliation would offer “a priceless advantage to our cause here.”²³

The DE SOTO patrol planned for 3 February never occurred. The administration postponed it first because of the Tet holiday (2–6 February) and later to prevent it from coinciding with a visit to Hanoi by Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin. Ironically, Kosygin, accompanied by military and economic advisers, was in Hanoi to discuss increased Soviet aid to North Vietnam.²⁴

Taking up another of the Phase I actions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff late in January asked the Secretary of Defense to approve additional OPLAN 34A maritime operations. MACV had continued those covert operations throughout January based on the first four increments of Package One actions approved on 15 December 1964. On 5 January 1965, the JCS had authorized VNAF air support for 34A MAROPs south of the 18th parallel, and on 21 January they had codified and consolidated approval procedures to give COMUSMACV the maximum possible flexibility for planning and advance approval within the limitations set by higher authority.

By the end of the month, General Westmoreland had completed three of the four authorized increments. On 30 January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested Secretary McNamara to approve an additional four increments under Package One. COMUSMACV had prepared these additional increments at JCS direction, using the original Package One planning guidance of early December 1964. The Joint Chiefs pointed out that all the recommended actions were of types previously approved for execution with one exception: harassment of coastal villages by firing illumination and leaflet shells over them with no physical harm to the inhabitants or houses. The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the four new increments. After coordination with the White House and State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland of this approval. MACV continued MAROPs based on these increments until mid-June 1965, when the JCS submitted additional increments to the Secretary of Defense.²⁵

Throughout this period, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to be concerned with the general question of reprisals. On 29 January, they pointed out to Secretary McNamara that the Viet Cong had carried out 61 attacks against US military and civilian personnel in South Vietnam during 1964 and reviewed their previous proposals for retaliation

against North Vietnam. They repeated their argument that US failure to respond to major enemy assaults on American personnel could be misconstrued and result in additional attacks. Noting Ambassador Taylor's support for reprisals, the Joint Chiefs once again recommended that the United States deliver a positive, timely, and appropriate response to the next significant provocation. This would signal to Hanoi that further depredations would bring prompt, destructive United States retaliation. Such a reprisal, they said, should be executed against selected North Vietnamese targets within 24 hours of the triggering incident, using the VNAF to the extent feasible. The JCS also provided Mr. McNamara with a resumé of reprisal actions of varying intensity for which plans were available for rapid execution. The Secretary of Defense noted the Joint Chiefs of Staff views and passed them on to the State Department and the White House.²⁶

Because of the increased high-level interest in operations against North Vietnam, on 1 February the Chief of Staff, Army, provided a warning and views to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Johnson warned that any direct military pressure against North Vietnam carried an inherent risk of overt Chinese Communist intervention. He urged the Joint Chiefs of Staff not to ignore this risk and recommended a program of additional military actions to prepare against the eventuality of direct Chinese engagement in Vietnam. The program called for a series of measures that would eventually culminate in major deployments to support military pressures against the North.²⁷

The Dependent Problem

In the Johnson administration's consideration of action against North Vietnam, the question of removing American dependents from South Vietnam always came up. The Saigon political turmoil of early 1965 gave new urgency to the issue. At the beginning of 1965, as the result of policies set during safer times, there were more than 1,500 dependents of US military and civilian personnel in the country. With the increasing political troubles and the upsurge of Viet Cong activities, the dependents became a source of great worry to President Johnson. He feared for their safety should the political crisis turn into a full-scale revolution or should the Viet Cong direct a terror campaign against them. The chances of this latter eventuality appeared to be on the rise, since in the past year the enemy had conducted 61 major attacks on American personnel, resulting in 19 deaths and 253 injuries.²⁸

Several times in the past, the administration had seriously considered withdrawing the dependents from South Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor and other officials had opposed such action, mainly on the ground that it would demoralize the South Vietnamese people and leaders, who would interpret the withdrawal as the beginning of US abandonment of their country. The dependents' presence, however, had an inhibiting effect on US freedom of military action in Vietnam. General Wheeler was convinced, for example, that the problem of the dependents had been a major factor holding the President back from ordering further reprisals against the North. Hence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted

all American dependents evacuated from South Vietnam prior to or concurrent with the start of overt US military action against North Vietnam. If done in this context, the removal would not undermine the South's morale. In the light of the Brink Hotel bombing and the growing boldness of the Viet Cong, the Joint Chiefs recommended to Secretary McNamara on 4 January the withdrawal of all US dependents from South Vietnam as soon as it was possible to do so in an orderly fashion. The Secretary forwarded the Joint Chiefs of Staff views for consideration at the "highest levels of government."²⁹

On 14 January, after discussions with the President, Secretary of State Rusk informed Ambassador Taylor that the administration was "of the view that it would be far preferable if dependents could be withdrawn in the near future and prior to initiation of possible reprisals." At the same time, the administration shared the Ambassador's concern with avoiding any action that would entail "serious risk of creating panic in South Vietnam." Hence, Secretary Rusk asked Ambassador Taylor to discuss the dependent issue with then-Premier Huong on a "strictly personal and confidential basis," explaining the US reasons for taking action soon. The Ambassador was to report to Washington on Mr. Huong's reaction and make further recommendations in the light of the Premier's views. Secretary Rusk authorized the Ambassador to tell Mr. Huong that simultaneous with the evacuation, President Johnson would issue a public statement strongly reaffirming the continuing United States commitment to South Vietnam.³⁰

Even as Ambassador Taylor pursued this line of policy, Defense and State officials at an interdepartmental meeting on 15 January discussed possible reduction of dependents in South Vietnam. They requested participants to provide further information on this subject. The Joint Staff concluded that the advantages of withdrawal in terms of military freedom of action far outweighed the disadvantages, but that only complete withdrawal of all US dependents would provide the desired freedom.³¹

The dependent question was still under review in late January, when the deteriorating Saigon political situation heightened administration concern about the security of Americans in South Vietnam. On 26 January, CINCPAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the present instability in Saigon, the tenuous security arrangements, and the general vulnerability of US personnel to attack by "dissident elements" made it prudent to withdraw American dependents. Acknowledging the serious political implications of such action, Admiral Sharp insisted that because of the worsening situation, evacuation was no longer primarily a political problem but must be decided on the basis of "the actual and growing danger to American lives." The next day, however, General Westmoreland reported that developments in Saigon had reduced the danger to Americans. He recommended against evacuation because of its potential adverse, perhaps disastrous, impact on South Vietnam.³²

General Wheeler supported CINCPAC. While agreeing with COMUSMACV that withdrawal at this time would have an impact in South Vietnam and the rest of Southeast Asia, he was not persuaded that the impact would necessarily be disastrous. The Chairman believed that General Khanh and other "adventurers" in Saigon were using US dependents as hostages to pressure for their ends. The removal of dependents would

free American hands by removing these hostages, by shocking “Khanh and company” into realizing that there were limits to US patience, and by clearing the decks for possible future action.³³

With the establishment of the caretaker government on 28 January, a measure of stability returned to South Vietnam, and the administration again deferred the complicated question of dependent evacuation. Within a short time, however, events would lead to a resolution of both the dependent issue and the reprisal issue with which it was so closely linked.

The Pleiku Attack—A Turning Point

In response to the McNamara-Bundy “fork in the road” memorandum of 27 January, and after additional consultations with his advisers, President Johnson dispatched McGeorge Bundy to South Vietnam “for a hard look at the situation on the ground.” Mr. Bundy left Washington for Saigon on 2 February, accompanied by senior staff members from the State and Defense Departments and the National Security Council. Lieutenant General Andrew J. Goodpaster, USA, Assistant to the Chairman, represented the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the delegation. Before leaving Washington, Mr. Bundy informed Ambassador Taylor: “In general, I am primarily interested in coming away with a sense of what kind of pressures you and your senior subordinates feel can be effectively applied to the VC and Hanoi.” He wanted the Ambassador’s views “without any constraints you may feel are imposed by existing policy or moods anywhere.”³⁴

Hardly had Mr. Bundy’s group arrived in South Vietnam when the Viet Cong struck a blow that was to have a profound effect on the United States’ national policy toward Vietnam. In the early morning hours of 7 February (Saigon time), the enemy fired a devastating mortar barrage at the US advisers’ compound and airfield at Pleiku in the central highlands. The shelling killed eight US military personnel, wounded 108 others, and damaged or destroyed 20 US aircraft. Forty-five minutes later, the Viet Cong bombarded a POL storage area near Tuy Hoa, destroying the fuel stocks and leaving five South Vietnamese dead. In a third attack, the enemy struck a series of villages northeast of Nha Trang but inflicted no casualties.³⁵

Coming as it did during the administration’s reconsideration of its Vietnam policy, the Pleiku attack drew a swift and unequivocal US response. From the field, General Westmoreland, Ambassador Taylor, and McGeorge Bundy, all of whom personally had inspected the Pleiku carnage, seconded by Admiral Sharp, called for reprisals against North Vietnam. In Washington, where the news arrived in the late afternoon of 6 February, General Wheeler and Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance briefed the President on the attacks. A National Security Council meeting followed that evening that included House Speaker John McCormack and Senator Mike Mansfield. At the meeting, all present—except Senator Mansfield who urged caution—endorsed an immediate reprisal and laid out a plan for retaliatory action against North Vietnam. The plan called for US/

VNAF strikes against four military targets in southern North Vietnam. After consulting with Ambassador Taylor in Saigon, the administration selected as targets four North Vietnamese military barracks in areas supplying men and arms for attacks in the South. United States forces would strike three of the barracks, while VNAF and FARM GATE aircraft would hit the fourth. All the targets were on the Joint Chiefs of Staff list of reprisal attack options forwarded to CINCPAC on 3 February.

Besides the reprisal strikes, the conferees at the 6 February meeting also approved the deployment by air to South Vietnam of a HAWK antiaircraft missile battalion—a measure tentatively agreed upon after the Tonkin Gulf incident to accompany any further retaliatory raids on North Vietnam. Finally, President Johnson seized the occasion to resolve the dependent issue, ordering their immediate evacuation.³⁶

When informed of the planned reprisals, the South Vietnamese government was enthusiastic. Acting Prime Minister Oanh “readily” concurred. General Khanh, when contacted by General Westmoreland, also approved. Ambassador Taylor told Mr. Oanh that “this reprisal action was a significant new step which we should take enthusiastically and with a visible clearing of the boards for possible future action.” Among United States preparations for future action, Ambassador Taylor mentioned bringing in HAWK missiles to Da Nang and possibly evacuating American dependents. He urged the South Vietnamese to think of ways to exploit these reprisals and to demonstrate that “a new and encouraging element” had been added to the war.³⁷

On 7 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to execute the reprisal strikes, code named FLAMING DART. He was to use “optimum conventional ordnance,” excluding napalm, on Dong Hoi, Vit Thu Lu, and Chap Le Barracks, while VNAF and FARM GATE aircraft struck Vu Con Barracks. The Joint Chiefs also alerted CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to expect an announcement within the next 12 hours of the decision to withdraw all US dependents from South Vietnam. CINCPAC was to designate safe havens and provide the necessary airlift, keeping the evacuation “expedited but orderly.” At the same time, the State Department notified US ambassadors in key world capitals of the impending reprisals. The ambassadors, except those in Moscow and Paris, were to inform their host governments of the action being taken.³⁸

Admiral Sharp acted at once to carry out the reprisals. He placed all PACOM forces in Vietnam, Thailand, and the South China Sea areas on DEFCON (Defense Condition) 2 and the PACOM forces west of 160 degrees longitude on DEFCON 3, a lower stage of alert. He directed CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, and COMUSMACV to execute the strikes.³⁹

Preparing against possible North Vietnamese retaliation, the President approved, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed, the immediate movement of the headquarters plus one battery of the Marine Light Anti-Aircraft Missile (LAAM) battalion from Okinawa to Da Nang. The first LAAM battery became operational at Da Nang on 8 February. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Admiral Sharp to alert the remainder of the LAAM battalion for movement to Vietnam and alerted the 173rd Airborne Brigade for transfer by air from Okinawa to South Vietnam. They also instructed CINCPAC to position one amphibious group carrying the Marine Special Landing Force⁴⁰ off Cap St. Jacques (130 miles from

Saigon) and the Commander in Chief, Strike Command (CINCSTRIKE), to alert 10 tactical fighter squadrons for movement to the western Pacific. CINCPAC had recommended alerting only three squadrons, but the President had directed that 10 be alerted.⁴¹

The initial FLAMING DART operation on 7 February was less than impressive. Poor flying weather resulting from Vietnam's northeast monsoon forced cancellation of three of the four raids; only a US Navy attack on Dong Hoi barracks took place on schedule. The carrier jets destroyed or damaged 22 out of 275 buildings at this large North Vietnamese division base, at the cost of one US plane shot down and seven others damaged by enemy antiaircraft fire.⁴²

Ambassador Taylor recommended to Washington that the three cancelled missions be rescheduled "at once" for the morning of 8 February (Saigon time). However, at a National Security Council meeting, Secretary McNamara and State Department officials opposed this course of action, arguing that additional US air strikes would give the appearance of a continuing campaign, on which the administration had not yet decided. The officials did authorize a rescheduling of the VNAF strike even though Mr. McNamara doubted that it would do much damage, because it was essential "to demonstrate full Vietnamese participation" in the reprisal. Escorted and supported by an armada of US planes, the Vietnamese executed their raid on 8 February, doing little damage to the target and losing an aircraft.⁴³

Following a joint announcement in Saigon by Acting Premier Oanh and Ambassador Taylor, the White House announced the Viet Cong attacks and justified the subsequent reprisals. The US statement emphasized that the Americans and South Vietnamese had responded to provocations ordered and directed by Hanoi, and that their response was justified because of the continuation and marked increase of North Vietnamese infiltration of the South. The White House stressed that the allies' response had been "carefully limited" to military facilities that were supplying men and arms for attacks in South Vietnam. The statement repeated the frequent US insistence that it "sought no wider war." Whether or not the United States could maintain this course depended on whether or not Hanoi ceased infiltration and gave a "clear indication" of intention to cease aggression against its neighbors.⁴⁴

Addressing the nation, President Johnson announced his decision to withdraw American dependents from South Vietnam and warned that expanded US action in Vietnam might continue. He stated that it had become clear that Hanoi had undertaken a more aggressive course of action against both South Vietnamese and Americans and that the United States had no choice "but to clear the decks and make absolutely clear our determination to back South Vietnam in its fight to maintain its independence." The President also announced the deployment of the air defense missile battalion to South Vietnam and declared that other reinforcements "in units and individuals" might follow.⁴⁵

Communist bloc reaction to the raids was predictable. Radio Hanoi claimed that its forces had "victoriously rebuffed" the "unjustified attack" and boasted that its troops had downed the "aggressor" US aircraft. Both Moscow and Beijing condemned the American

“provocation” and pledged support and assistance to North Vietnam. However, both statements were cautious, neither raising the specter of a wider conflict nor portraying the US action as a threat to world peace.⁴⁶

FLAMING DART Continues

Perhaps understandably, given its limited results, the Pleiku reprisal did not deter the enemy from additional attacks on US installations. On 10 February, bombs planted by the Viet Cong destroyed a US enlisted men’s billet in the coastal city of Qui Nhon, killing 23 soldiers and wounding 22. Seven Vietnamese also died in the attack. Again, Admiral Sharp recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff strong retaliation by both US and South Vietnamese planes. Deputy Ambassador Johnson, after reviewing the situation with General Westmoreland, agreed that this “serious VC atrocity” justified prompt air reprisal. Ambassador Taylor reported to Washington that both the MACV and VNAF staffs were working on specific target recommendations for the strikes. Ambassador Taylor had already alerted Acting Premier Oanh of the possible reprisal, and General Westmoreland was informing General Khanh.⁴⁷

Within hours of the attack, the President met with the National Security Council, including the Acting JCS Chairman, Admiral David L. McDonald, to consider retaliatory action. The group quickly agreed on retaliation, although there was some sentiment for withholding action until Premier Kosygin left Hanoi. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended seven reprisal targets in North Vietnam. Of these, Secretary McNamara proposed to the President that three be bombed—the Thanh Hoa Bridge and two barracks. Because of objections that the bridge was too far north, the President, with Mr. McNamara’s agreement, directed that only two targets, the Chanh Hoa and Vu Con barracks, would be hit. Acting on the President’s decision, the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to execute reprisal strikes against North Vietnam during daylight hours of 11 February, designating Chanh Hoa barracks as the primary US target and Vu Con barracks as the primary VNAF target.⁴⁸

Accordingly, on 11 February, the United States launched the largest reprisal air strike to date against North Vietnam, code named FLAMING DART II. More than 100 planes from three US carriers bombed Chanh Hoa barracks, while 28 VNAF planes, supported by 22 US aircraft, hit their weather alternate target, Chap Le barracks. Both attacks did limited damage to their targets, and the US lost three planes in the Chanh Hoa strike.⁴⁹

Upon completion of the air strikes, the White House announced that US air elements had joined the VNAF in attacking North Vietnamese military facilities used for the training and infiltration of personnel into South Vietnam. The statement justified the strikes as reprisal not only for the Qui Nhon incident but also as a response to additional direct provocations by Hanoi, citing the increased number of Viet Cong ambushes and attacks against South Vietnamese and American personnel since 8 February. The White House stated that, after consultation, the United States and South Vietnamese governments,

while wishing to avoid spreading the conflict, felt compelled to take action. Following the White House announcement, Ambassador Taylor and Acting Prime Minister Oanh released a joint statement in Saigon giving the details of the reprisal and echoing the Washington justification.⁵⁰

The reprisal strikes on 7, 8, and 11 February had been less than overwhelming in their effects. South Vietnamese and US aircraft had flown a total of 267 sorties against three barracks areas containing a total of 491 buildings, destroying 47 and damaging 22. Operations at the target facilities showed little sign of impairment. Secretary McNamara informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, in spite of the limited effectiveness of the strikes, he was quite satisfied with the results. "Our primary objective, of course," he said, "was to communicate our political resolve. This I believe we did." He then indicated that he really was not satisfied at all, pointing out that "future communications of resolve" would carry a "hollow ring" unless the raids did more damage than in this case. Mr. McNamara expressed concern and doubt over the adequacy of the military planning and the execution of future missions. He observed that "surely we cannot continue for months accomplishing no more with 267 sorties than we did on these ... missions."⁵¹

Secretary McNamara was not alone in believing that the reprisal planning and strike techniques against North Vietnam could stand some improvement. General Westmoreland held the same view, although for different reasons. Since the Tonkin Gulf incident the previous August, the MACV commander had argued against Admiral Sharp's decision to coordinate all air attacks on the North from CINCPAC. General Westmoreland thought that MACV headquarters, under Admiral Sharp's general direction, should coordinate the strikes—at least those flown by the VNAF and US Air Force units based in South Vietnam. Continuing this debate, on the day following the Qui Nhon reprisals, COMUSMACV sent a lengthy message to Admiral Sharp criticizing the procedures that had been used and describing the confusion and lost motion those procedures had caused in Saigon on 10 and 11 February. He complained particularly about lack of information on what was going on, and about seemingly unnecessary changes in direction during the two-day period. General Westmoreland charged that his 2nd Air Division and the VNAF staff had worked all night for no purpose and that units were "whiplashed" and confused by orders and counter orders. He concluded: "My vantage point would seem to make me a logical candidate for target selection (recommendation) and for operational coordination to be exercised through my Air Force component commander. I take this position because of the essentiality of adaptation and coordination with the US Ambassador, the GVN and the RVNAF."⁵²

Admiral Sharp rejected both General Westmoreland's complaints and his proposal. He reminded COMUSMACV of the specific directives that had been issued assigning responsibilities and establishing command relationships for attacks on North Vietnam. CINCPAC stated that in his opinion, the existing system was capable of doing the job very well. Under the operations orders in effect on 10 and 11 February, Admiral Sharp reminded General Westmoreland, CINCPACAF had been directed to plan for USAF strikes against the North while COMUSMACV was to continue planning for the VNAF

to strike its assigned target. These standing orders had been paralleled by numerous telephone conversations with the various commands involved. “You and the component commanders were given information just as fast as we received it,” Admiral Sharp told General Westmoreland. “This flow of information, combined with the clear directives that I have outlined above, should have resulted in a minimum of confusion.” The admiral agreed that it was unfortunate that COMUSMACV’s officers had worked all night to no purpose and in confusion; but he noted that the Navy’s carrier forces, operating under similar instructions and orders, were not confused and had carried out their preparations and strikes smoothly and with a minimum of fuss.

CINCPAC informed COMUSMACV that in future similar situations he intended to continue to exercise operational command through CINCPACFLT for the carrier forces, CINCPACAF for USAF forces, and COMUSMACV for the VNAF. This system, Admiral Sharp was convinced, would work as smoothly as any for a complicated joint, combined operation of this nature. In this operation, the Commander, 2nd Air Division would work for Westmoreland in planning the VNAF strikes and for CINCPACAF in planning the USAF strikes. “This two-hatted arrangement will work perfectly well if we all will recognize it as a fact of life and help him in this difficult assignment.” In sum, Admiral Sharp intended to run the air war against North Vietnam, if there was one, while General Westmoreland managed the fight in South Vietnam and coordinated VNAF participation in the extended campaign.⁵³

The US response to the Pleiku and Qui Nhon attacks was more than mere reprisal; it marked a turning point in the war. Within a four-day period, the United States had carried out two air attacks against North Vietnam, ordered the removal of all its dependents from South Vietnam, deployed a HAWK battalion to Da Nang, moved additional aircraft to the western Pacific, and warned that additional reinforcements in units and individuals might soon follow. President Johnson announced these steps as measures to “clear the decks” for continued efforts to back the South Vietnamese in their fight to maintain their independence. Ambassador Taylor welcomed the reprisals as a “significant forward step” in demonstrating US determination and a “good foundation” for embarking on a graduated reprisal program to pressure Hanoi to cease its intervention in the South. Indeed, such a program was under discussion in Washington even as the reprisal strikes went forward.⁵⁴

The Quantum Jump— ROLLING THUNDER

The reprisal decisions of early February, although significant, were precursors of more vital decisions in the offing. The direction that United States policy would now take depended on a number of difficult judgments. These judgments involved, among others, the real gravity of the military and political situations in South Vietnam, the capabilities and intentions of the enemy north and south, and the consequences to the US national interest of success or failure in Vietnam. In a broader context, the United States would also have to judge the effect of its military and political actions in Southeast Asia upon its relations with its allies, with its potential enemies, and with neutral or uncommitted nations throughout the world.

As the new round of decisionmaking began, General LeMay retired on 31 January and was succeeded as USAF Chief of Staff by General John P. McConnell. With LeMay's replacement by McConnell, a Secretary McNamara selection, the transition of the Joint Chiefs Staff from a body of warriors to one of officers attuned to the complexities of the nuclear age and willing to defer to civilian authority was complete. The other members of the Joint Chiefs remained the same—General Wheeler as Chairman, General Johnson as Army Chief of Staff, Admiral McDonald as Chief of Naval Operations, and General Greene as Commandant of the Marine Corps.¹

The Bundy Report, 7 February 1965

To a great extent, McGeorge Bundy set the agenda for the critical round of administration decisionmaking. After the Pleiku attack, Mr. Bundy and his group cut short their visit to South Vietnam and left Saigon for home the afternoon of 7 February. When he reached Washington, Mr. Bundy presented to President Johnson a memorandum

containing conclusions and recommendations his team had already developed before the Viet Cong mortared Pleiku.²

In his memorandum, Mr. Bundy told the President the same thing the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been telling him for several months: unless the United States took new action soon, it was going to lose in Vietnam and it could not afford to lose. “The international prestige of the United States and a substantial part of our influence, are directly at risk in Vietnam,” Mr. Bundy said. There was no way of unloading the burden on the Vietnamese or of negotiating a way out at present. A negotiated withdrawal would mean surrender “on the installment plan.”

Mr. Bundy had found great uncertainty among both Vietnamese and Americans in Vietnam. The Vietnamese were nervous about the sincerity of the United States; their political leaders were fearful and their military leaders wary. The ordinary citizens displayed a general lassitude and a lack of commitment or purpose. As to the Americans, the morale of junior officers was sustained by their belief that they were doing well at their demanding tasks and by their dedication. Among the senior officials, on the other hand, who knew they were responsible and accountable for the overall outcome, Mr. Bundy sensed “the inner doubts of men whose outward behavior remains determined.” Mr. Bundy took some heart in what he believed was the slowly rising combat effectiveness of the RVNAF and in the resilience of the Vietnamese people who, though war-weary, did not want to fall under communist domination.

The national security assistant had made a careful examination of the Saigon political scene and came away with mixed judgments. In the short run, the current interim government, with General Khanh exercising the “raw power” while a civilian caretaker regime “goes through the motions,” was strong enough to allow the United States to take its immediate military reprisals and other actions. In the longer term, to support broader and more meaningful programs to unify South Vietnam, a more effective regime would have to be created. Ambassador Taylor and Mission personnel felt that General Khanh was dangerous, could not be trusted, and would fail eventually. They believed also that the Buddhists were disruptive and would have to be faced down, if necessary by military force. Mr. Bundy and his group “tend to differ with the mission on both counts.” The Washington delegation saw no one else than Khanh in sight who could combine military authority with some sense of politics. The Buddhists would have to be brought into the government rather than eliminated. (Events, notably the fall of General Khanh after the 19 February coup attempt, soon rendered moot this part of Bundy’s argument.)

Overall, Mr. Bundy warned the President, “the prospect of Vietnam is grim.” “The energy and persistence of the Viet Cong are astonishing . . . Yet the weary country does not want them to win.” The administration must take every chance to convince the Vietnamese people of the firmness of the United States commitment to them. For this “overriding reason,” Mr. Bundy now recommended a policy of sustained reprisal against North Vietnam. “Once such a policy is put in force,” Mr. Bundy argued, “we shall be able to speak in Vietnam on many topics and in many ways, with growing force and effectiveness.”

Speaking for both himself and the group who had accompanied him to South Vietnam, Mr. Bundy stated that the “sustained reprisal” policy should take the form of air and naval attacks on North Vietnam. These attacks should be carried out in partnership with the South Vietnamese, keyed initially to specific acts of violence such as the Pleiku incident. Once the program was launched, however, it could be continued without relating it to any specific enemy act, simply as a response to continued communist aggression. The United States should make clear to Hanoi and to the world that it was not out to destroy or conquer North Vietnam. The reprisals should stop when the provocation stopped. In Mr. Bundy’s view, the bombing itself should begin at a low level, increasing only gradually and decreasing if the Viet Cong seemed to be reducing their terrorism in South Vietnam. “The object would not be to win an air war against Hanoi, but rather to influence the course of the struggle in the South.” Mr. Bundy acknowledged, however, that if the bombing and American losses increased, “it seems likely that it would eventually require an extensive and costly effort against the whole air defense system of North Vietnam.”

Bundy stated that the attack on Pleiku had created an ideal opportunity for the prompt development and execution of sustained reprisals. He suggested to the President certain “major necessary steps in preparation”: 1) complete the evacuation of dependents; 2) deploy necessary supporting forces for contingency plans; 3) initiate joint planning with Saigon on both civil and military levels; 4) take necessary diplomatic steps; and 5) publicly renew the United States commitment to its programs in South Vietnam.

Mr. Bundy acknowledged that a reprisal policy likely would entail “significant” US air losses and carried the risk of increased Viet Cong terrorism and greater Soviet and Chinese involvement in the war. He warned that the struggle in South Vietnam would be long at any event, with no early solution, and that the reprisal policy might fail to change the course of the conflict. Even if the policy failed, however, at minimum “it will damp down the charge that we did not do all that we could have done, and this charge will be important in many countries, including our own.” Beyond that, Mr. Bundy continued, “a reprisal policy—to the extent that it demonstrates US willingness to employ this new norm in counter-insurgency—will set a higher price for the future upon all adventures of guerrilla warfare, and it should therefore somewhat increase our ability to deter such adventures.” In sum, “measured against the costs of defeat in Vietnam, this program seems cheap. And even if it fails to turn the tide—as it may—the value of the effort seems to us to exceed its cost.”³

The Eight Week Program

At a White House meeting on 8 February, Mr. Bundy discussed his proposals first with the President’s chief advisers and then with the President himself. Among the advisers, all present, including the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, agreed that the United States should now embark on a program of sustained attacks against

lower risk targets in southern North Vietnam. Mr. Bundy suggested that the program start off with what looked like reprisals and then expand as appropriate. During the discussions, Secretary McNamara stated that the campaign probably would lead to a confrontation with North Vietnam's MIGs and that "we would be obliged to take the MIGs out in 3 to 6 weeks." General Wheeler observed that militarily "the cheapest thing would be to take all the MIGs out right now," but he agreed that "a more gradual approach would probably be more feasible." When President Johnson joined the discussion, he expressed concern about achieving a stable Saigon government. His advisers assured him that the reprisal strikes would help achieve this objective. In the end, the president endorsed the reprisal plan with the reservation that "he wished to avoid a rapid escalation and therefore favored a gradual approach." Gradualism notwithstanding, President Johnson made the critical determination to "go forward with the best government we can get" in Saigon and to "carry out our December plan for continuing action against North Vietnam." The administration, however, would not publicize this decision "until we have determined precise opening moves, and until Kosygin is safely out of Hanoi."⁴

After the meeting, Mr. McNamara told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that there was some "leeway" in the presidential decision and that what was now needed was a program of specific bombing actions that the President could approve. He asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a program covering eight weeks, designed as reprisals against enemy provocations, with two or three attacks scheduled each week. The Secretary also asked for a list of types of provocative incidents that could be used as reasons for initiating the program. In addition, he instructed the Joint Chiefs to include in their planning large-scale air deployments to PACOM to support the attacks or deal with their aftermath, provision for security of American bases in South Vietnam, and measures to counter any North Vietnamese or Chinese ground intervention. He declared that the United States would attack the MIG base at Phuc Yen only in the event of North Vietnamese or Chinese air intervention. Finally, Secretary McNamara directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to plan for VNAF participation in the reprisal raids.⁵

In readying their proposals, the Joint Chiefs of Staff drew upon the detailed in-depth plans, including target lists, that the Joint Staff and CINCPAC headquarters had been preparing for months. The Joint Chiefs considered also the views of Ambassador Taylor. Heartened by the reprisals of 7–8 February, the Ambassador had immediately asked for more. Ambassador Taylor, who agreed with Mr. Bundy that the current reprisals had established a good foundation for other bombing, told the Secretary of State on 9 February that the United States should launch a measured and controlled series of reprisals against North Vietnam with the objective of forcing Hanoi to end its intervention in the South. He wanted VNAF pilots to participate with US flyers in attacks against purely military targets. In line with Mr. Bundy's recommendation, Ambassador Taylor suggested that reprisals could be mounted against any general catalog or package of enemy actions and not necessarily in response to some particularly grave outrage. Ambassador Taylor considered that the United States response

would be tantamount to the “so-called Phase II escalation” but “justified on the basis of retaliation.” The Ambassador concluded:

I believe a Phase II program based largely on graduated reprisals offers the best available means of exerting increased pressure on the DRV leaders to induce them to cease their intervention in SVN, while at the same time being more manageable in terms of domestic and international opinion and with our friends. I recommend that we proceed along this track.⁶

Working from the plans already established for targeting, deployments, and other support requirements, the Joint Staff swiftly drafted the eight-week program. Some differences arose between the Joint Chiefs over the force deployments necessary for the campaign. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force originally proposed to move 15 additional squadrons to the Western Pacific. The Army Chief of Staff considered this number excessive, inconsistent with the enemy threat and the scope of air operations visualized for the first eight weeks. There were, General Johnson said, already 865 US aircraft in the Western Pacific; and the USAF was capable of deploying very rapidly if the need arose. He believed, therefore, that an additional nine squadrons would be sufficient for the mission at hand. On the other hand, the Army Chief of Staff thought that the current ground force deployments being proposed were inadequate. He declared that an additional US infantry division was required in northeast Thailand as a minimum, with a second division in the same area advisable. The Joint Chiefs worked out compromises on these points. At their meeting on 10 February, they approved the eight week program prepared by the Joint Staff.⁷

On 11 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to Secretary McNamara a military program that included air strikes but also provided for naval gunfire bombardment, continuation of covert operations, resumption of DE SOTO patrols, and cross-border ground incursions into Laos. In North Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed bombing of fixed targets south of the 19th parallel as well as armed reconnaissance of Route 7 close to the Laotian border. For the first eight weeks, these air attacks would occur at a rate of four fixed targets and armed reconnaissance of two road segments per week. All the proposed targets were military in nature and were taken from the JCS 94 Target List. The Joint Chiefs provided Secretary McNamara with the estimated number of sorties, either with tactical or strategic bombers, required for each target. The fixed targets were barracks and storage depots, with a few LOC targets, such as bridges, included.

In order to support these attacks, to provide security for strike forces, to deter North Vietnamese or Chinese aggression, and to improve US readiness to “cope with possible escalation,” the Joint Chiefs recommended immediate deployment of the following: 1) 9 additional tactical fighter squadrons (TFS) from the US to the Western Pacific; 2) 30 B-52 bombers from the US to Guam; 3) one Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB)⁸ from Okinawa and Japan to Da Nang; 4) one US Army brigade of the 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii to Thailand; 5) a fourth carrier to the Western Pacific; 6) one MEB from

Hawaii to the Western Pacific; and 7) the necessary combat support and service support units outlined in CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65. At the same time, a US Army airborne brigade, the 173rd, should be alerted for shipment to Vietnam. The 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force (-)⁹ and the 25th Infantry Division (-) should assume an advanced state of deployment readiness, with the necessary sealift prepositioned and airlift alerted. The remaining forces specified in CINCPAC OPLANs 32-65 and 39-65 should also be alerted.

While agreeing with the aforementioned deployments, the Chief of Staff of the Army continued to urge that additional ground forces—at least one US infantry division and preferably two—be moved to northeast Thailand. General Wheeler endorsed the air strike program and the recommended deployments but was noncommittal on General Johnson's extra two divisions. He stated that further study should be made of force requirements beyond the initial deployments and informed the Secretary of Defense that the JCS already had such a study under way.

Looking to additional contingencies, the Joint Chiefs listed in detail the minimum forces that should be deployed in the event of large-scale North Vietnamese and/or Chinese intervention. These were the forces called for in CINCPAC contingency plans. In conjunction with the actions recommended in the current eight-week program, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that operations already taking place should be continued and, where feasible, intensified. They informed Secretary McNamara that their proposed actions would demonstrate to Hanoi that it had better mend its ways or face “more serious punishment.” They suggested further that if Hanoi did not reduce its support of the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao after the initial set of raids, the United States should extend its bombing north of the 19th parallel and if necessary intensify it.

While acknowledging that the bombing program would be initiated in response to enemy provocations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw that the need for such justification would lessen. “As this program continues,” they told the Secretary of Defense, “the realistic need for precise event-association in this reprisal context will progressively diminish.” At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff furnished to Mr. McNamara the list he had requested of examples of provocative acts that might trigger the program.

Examining possible enemy reaction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff predicted that Hanoi, Beijing, and Moscow would “make every effort through propagand and diplomatic moves to halt the US attacks.” Hanoi would do everything possible to defend itself, perhaps even launching overt attacks on South Vietnam and Laos. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not foresee any immediate lessening of Viet Cong activity; but they believed that, if the United States resisted international pressures and ignored communist threats of escalation, chances would improve that Hanoi would reduce its support of the southern insurgency. United States attacks on North Vietnam would probably cause Communist China reluctantly to take some dramatic action such as sending in “volunteers,” as in Korea in 1950. In addition to strong diplomatic and propagand efforts, the Soviets almost certainly would provide North Vietnam with military support, such as antiaircraft artillery and radars. There was an even chance that Russia would send in surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) along with technicians. If China and Russia went further and initiated

open aggression, the Joint Chiefs assured Secretary McNamara that “the United States and its allies can deal with them adequately.”¹⁰

The same day the JCS memorandum went forward, General Wheeler sent some personal comments of his own to CINCPAC. The Chairman declared that he did not like the impression generally held that the United States was responding only to Viet Cong “spectaculars” against Americans. He opposed letting the intermittent attacks on North Vietnam slip into the “tit-for-tat” pattern. Any concept which limited the United States to a particular type of retaliation or in the timing and location of strikes would automatically hand the initiative to Hanoi and color world opinion against the United States. “Our objective,” he told Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland on 11 February, “is to move to a concept of ‘sustained reprisals’ which will permit us to apply military pressures in the manner and at times and places of our choosing. We must build a bridge between ‘tit-for-tat’ and ‘sustained reprisal.’” The administration was already building that bridge, across which the United States would pass from FLAMING DART to ROLLING THUNDER.¹¹

ROLLING THUNDER Begins—Slowly

In their recommendations of 11 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reinforced their strong recommendations of November 1964 for action against North Vietnam. In certain respects, such as targeting, these latest proposals were more specific; in other respects—bombing of the Phuc Yen MIG base and weight of effort, for example—the Joint Chiefs of Staff called for less than in November. The administration did not adopt their proposals at once or in detail. Nevertheless, the Joint Chiefs’ recommendations, complementing as they did the proposals by Mr. Bundy and Ambassador Taylor, were reflected in presidential directions for both near-term and longer-range actions in the days and weeks that followed.

On 8 February, President Johnson had made a general decision to go forward on attacking North Vietnam. On the 13th, he approved three specific courses of action. The United States would “intensify by all available means” pacification within South Vietnam. It would “execute a program of measured and limited air action” jointly with South Vietnam against “selected military targets” in the North, remaining south of the 19th parallel for the time being. The administration expected to launch one or two attacks per week, hitting two or three targets on each day of operations. Concurrent with the bombing, the administration would take its case to the UN Security Council, arguing that Hanoi was the aggressor and declaring that the United States was “ready and eager” for talks to bring the aggression in South Vietnam to an end.

Perhaps anticipating some South Vietnamese reluctance to come out publicly in favor of negotiating an end to the war, the State Department, in announcing this decision to Ambassador Taylor, instructed him to reassure the leaders in Saigon about American firmness. Taylor was to tell the South Vietnamese that the offer to talk was for the

purpose of putting the allies in a stronger diplomatic position than would be the case if they waited for a third party to urge them to the conference table. The United States was determined to continue its military actions regardless of any Security Council deliberations or ensuing “talks” until Hanoi ended its aggression in the South. “Our demand will be that they cease infiltration and all forms of support [to the Viet Cong] and also the activity they are directing in the South,” the State Department explained.¹²

On 12 February, anticipating the presidential decision, the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to develop “as a matter of urgency” reprisal plans with three attack options involving ascending numbers of targets—three in Option I, six in Option II, and nine in Option III. The targets included military barracks, a naval base, ammunition and supply depots, and in Option III the Thanh Hoa Bridge. Weather alternate targets would include radar sites, barracks, and an airfield. On 16 February, the Joint Chiefs approved for planning purposes a different group of options covering generally the same targets but in a different order of priority. Slightly later on the same day, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to CINCPAC the “illustrative 8-week program of military action against low risk targets in North Vietnam,” which they said was being “discussed at the highest levels.” This was the air strike program they had recommended to the Secretary of Defense on 11 February. Admitting that this program was intended only as a guide and could well be drastically revised, the Joint Chiefs told Admiral Sharp that they were interested in interdicting the Hanoi-Vinh railway, roads, highway bridges, and ferries and destroying radar and telecommunication facilities. “From our preliminary analysis,” they said, “we have concluded that the LOC net should not be attacked until we are authorized to go to the 20th parallel, but the program on this category of target should be initiated early before AA defenses increase.” The Chiefs did not want piecemeal attacks on the radars and telecommunications, but rather a complete, systematic, and integrated attack.¹³

After a National Security Council meeting on 18 February agreed to a new round of attacks, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent CINCPAC an execute order directing him to launch US air strikes on 20 February. US planes were to bomb the Quang Khe Naval base, with Vinh Linh and Vit Thu Barracks as weather alternate targets. At the same time, the VNAF with US support would strike Vu Con Barracks or, if weathered out, Dong Hoi airfield. This reprisal raid was code named ROLLING THUNDER I (RT I).¹⁴

Before RT I could be launched, the attempted coup of 19 February occurred in Saigon. With the VNAF involved in defending the regime and in fact threatening to bomb its own airfields, it was obvious that striking North Vietnam on 20 February was now out of the question. Admiral Sharp telephoned Washington on the 19th and recommended postponement of the operation. General Wheeler agreed with Admiral Sharp’s recommendation, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff called off RT I on the same day. Because of the postponement, General Wheeler asked CINCPAC if he thought the operation had been compromised and whether the United States should change the strike targets. Admiral Sharp considered it highly unlikely that the delay had compromised the targets.¹⁵

There followed a frustrating succession of ROLLING THUNDER missions ordered and then postponed and finally cancelled. RT II fell victim to the Saigon coup crisis and

was scrubbed on 24 February. ROLLING THUNDERS III and IV were called off on the 26th and 27th due to bad flying weather. The administration held back on the next attempt, scheduled for 1 March, so that the raids would not coincide with the opening of a major Communist world conclave in Moscow that same day. Rescheduled for 2 March, RT IV was renamed RT V and its primary US target was changed from Quang Khe naval base to the Xom Bang ammunition depot. Under the revised plan, the VNAF would strike the naval base as a primary target.¹⁶

On 26 February, in the midst of these postponements, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized for planning purposes aerial reconnaissance in support of the proposed ROLLING THUNDER program. The reconnaissance effort received the code name BLUE TREE. The Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to prepare plans for conducting medium-level reconnaissance, using six aircraft at a time, mainly along key transportation routes in North Vietnam south of the 19th parallel. The next day, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized Admiral Sharp to execute the missions concurrently and in conjunction with RT IV. This authority was extended to RT V.¹⁷

On 1 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued the execute order for the first ROLLING THUNDER strike, RT V, actually conducted against North Vietnam. They authorized CINCPAC to attack the designated targets on 2 March “during daylight hours . . . if, but only if, US and VNAF primary targets can both be struck.” If weathered out, “execute strikes against primary or alternate targets during daylight” on the following day. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs advised the Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command (CINCSAC), that his B-52s, which the Joint Chiefs had earlier alerted for possible participation, would not take part in the strikes against North Vietnam. Rather, PACOM forces, USAF planes from Thailand bases, would fly the mission. Operations from these fields would be coordinated with the US Ambassador in Thailand. Admiral Sharp could use all conventional ordnance, except napalm, against the ammunition depot and naval base. The administration forbade reconnaissance flights over the targets immediately before the raids and required aircraft on post-strike assessment missions to fly unescorted and at medium altitude.¹⁸

On 2 March, the first ROLLING THUNDER strike took place on schedule. One hundred eleven US Air Force planes attacked the Xom Bang ammunition depot, about 10 miles above the Demilitarized Zone, while 19 VNAF aircraft bombed the Quang Khe naval base, North Vietnam’s southernmost such installation. The US strikes destroyed at least 75 percent of the depot; the VNAF bombers accounted for at least two gunboats at the naval base. As had been true in the FLAMING DART operations, North Vietnamese anti-aircraft gunners took a toll of the attackers, bringing down one VNAF aircraft and five USAF jets.¹⁹

Command Issues

In the aftermath of the postponed and cancelled missions of late February, General Westmoreland reopened the issue of which headquarters should direct ROLLING THUNDER operations. Emphasizing his special relationship with the VNAF, on the eve

of RT V Westmoreland posed some questions to General Wheeler and Admiral Sharp—more, he said, to bring the problem to their attention than in expectation of any quick or easy solution. He pointed out that it would be most difficult to maintain the “pretext of partnership” with Saigon if Washington selected targets, determined attack timing, and set force levels for the VNAF share of the strikes. The South Vietnamese, General Westmoreland argued, must have a sense of substantive participation in the attack planning and there must be a mutual spirit of trust between the respective planners and commanders. “How can one rationalize a Washington decision that the VNAF will be limited to 16 strike aircraft on a given target,” he asked, “when General Ky judges 24 the proper number?”

The MACV commander asked also how much authority he had to disclose strike information to the VNAF commanders through his air component, the 2nd Air Division; and whether he could inform the VNAF of warning orders discussing US plans and intentions. General Westmoreland pointed out that the VNAF required time to prepare before launching missions. They should be notified at least 24 hours in advance of time on target as a minimum and, more desirable yet, should receive planning details 48 hours in advance. Within not less than 24 hours, South Vietnamese planners should have a comprehensive picture of the entire operation in which they were to participate.

When weather forced cancellation of strikes, which happened often during the Vietnamese monsoon season, General Westmoreland wanted authority to make the decisions to scrub and to divert idled squadrons for operations in South Vietnam. Washington, he argued, was too far away to keep up with rapid weather changes, and decisions made there could be wasteful and sometimes dangerous. General Westmoreland asked if there were some way “in which procedures and delegation of authority can be combined” to reduce fatigue among high level commanders in Vietnam. Under current rules, he complained, these men had to be constantly on the alert, which caused much waste of energy and effort. “At this end of the line,” the MACV commander said, “this situation inhibits vital trips to the field by myself and my key staff, repeatedly interrupts other equally essential work . . . , and induces an unnecessary degree of stress on senior officials here who on the one hand want to leave no stone unturned in preparation for reprisals, and on the other, want to minimize nonproductive preparations in operational units occasioned by changing plans.”

General Westmoreland sought for his headquarters initiative in “orchestrating” the graduated reprisal program by methods similar to those in effect for BARREL ROLL and OPLAN 34A actions. In those programs, authorities in Washington or Honolulu made the decision to take actions and left the “how” to COMUSMACV. “Experience indicates,” he argued, “that the more remote the authority which directs how a mission is to be accomplished, the more we are vulnerable to mishaps resulting from such things as incomplete briefings and preparation, loss of tactical flexibility and lack of tactical coordination.” With the concurrence of Ambassador Taylor and the 2nd Air Division commander, General Westmoreland suggested that his headquarters conduct all ROLLING THUNDER operations south of the 19th parallel while CINCPAC

directed operations north of that line. Each headquarters would use a list of preauthorized targets but determine the timing and details of strikes on its own. The MACV commander thus staked a claim to control of at least part of the air campaign against North Vietnam.²⁰

General Wheeler and Admiral Sharp denied General Westmoreland's claim. In an immediate, personal reply to the general, the Chairman declared that "we here recognize the policy and procedural difficulties" imposed on COMUSMACV and the South Vietnamese by the "close control of ROLLING THUNDER exercised by Washington." He assured General Westmoreland that the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense were doing their best to clear away the hindrances and restrictions. He emphasized to COMUSMACV, however, the "sizable and vexing" domestic and international political problems inherent in US military operations against North Vietnam. Washington authorities had to steer a careful course which would lead to the greatest possible effect on the enemy both in and out of South Vietnam while minimizing the chances of bringing the Chinese into open battle. The weather, Premier Kosygin's visit to Hanoi, and an international communist conference in Moscow had increased the difficulty of the existing political problems and adversely affected ROLLING THUNDER. Hence, for the present, Washington must maintain close control of the tactical and operational details.

Looking to the future, General Wheeler reminded General Westmoreland that BARREL ROLL and YANKEE TEAM operations in Laos had begun subject to over-restrictive caveats. But as time went on the Joint Chiefs of Staff had secured the lifting of many of these limits. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were working toward setting up for ROLLING THUNDER a procedure similar to that in effect for the Laos programs, with a previously approved bank of targets from which field commanders, on the basis of their own knowledge of weather and operational factors, could direct their strikes. "In this connection," the Chairman stated, "it is most important to get off this next ROLLING THUNDER to break what seems to be a psychological/political log jam."²¹

If there were to be more latitude for the field commanders in conducting ROLLING THUNDER, Admiral Sharp made clear who would exercise it. In his reply to General Westmoreland, CINCPAC declared that "In this one phase of the war," the United States was "a major participant with an overwhelming share of the forces involved" and hence would make the decisions. Admiral Sharp rejected General Westmoreland's request for the South Vietnamese to be given more and earlier information about projected raids, on grounds that Saigon's security procedures were inadequate. The VNAF commanders should receive only the minimal information they required for their own missions, as late as possible in the preparations. Admiral Sharp rejected "most emphatically" General Westmoreland's proposal for dividing strike control. As he had established in his August 1964 directive, CINCPAC would conduct ROLLING THUNDER through his Air Force and Navy component commanders, with General Westmoreland coordinating the VNAF participation. "I intend to use this method in the future," he told COMUSMACV, and "would appreciate it if you would accept that fact."²²

Use of Napalm

In the early missions against North Vietnam, the administration did not authorize the use of napalm. On 17 February, even before the first ROLLING THUNDER strike was authorized, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force objected that this restriction deprived US airmen of a very useful and legitimate weapon. General McConnell pointed out that US planes could attack most safely by coming in at low altitudes, and in this situation napalm was extremely effective. The incendiary weapon could reduce the number of sorties needed to destroy “soft” targets such as parked aircraft, buildings, vehicles, unprotected personnel, fuel storage areas, and radar-directed anti-aircraft sites. Allied forces already were using napalm against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, and McConnell felt that it should be employed in the North as well.²³

The State Department opposed the use of napalm in Southeast Asia on the grounds that napalm was a terror weapon, use of which would bring adverse reaction from both friendly and neutral governments. For example, the United States was not employing napalm in Laos, largely at the behest of the British government. The Chief of Staff of the Army suggested, however, that the appropriate time had come to raise the issue of napalm in North Vietnam with the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State.²⁴

On 25 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, repeating much of the USAF Chief of Staff’s information on napalm, recommended to the Secretary of Defense that use of the weapon in North Vietnam be authorized. They argued that when CINCPAC determined that napalm would increase the effectiveness of the strike force and/or potentially reduce friendly losses, or that targets were so located that collateral damage to noncombatant life and property would be minimized, or that targets were particularly vulnerable to napalm, he should be authorized to employ the incendiary. Secretary McNamara supported the Joint Chiefs of Staff on this issue. On 9 March, President Johnson added napalm to the list of weapons usable in ROLLING THUNDER.²⁵

ROLLING THUNDER—Restrictions Are Relaxed

From confused and modest beginnings, the controlled and selective bombing of military and military-related targets in North Vietnam grew into one of the key elements of US strategy in Vietnam. The operation also became one of the prime issues in acrimonious debates over US policy in Southeast Asia. Regardless of the precedent set by the Tonkin Gulf and FLAMING DART reprisals, deliberate bombing, without waiting for a specific provocation, marked a definite change in US policy. Initially, however, the leaders in Hanoi showed no indication that they “got the message” that they should stop supporting the Viet Cong. During March, the United States continued limited bombing of North Vietnam, but no spectacular political reactions occurred. Hanoi did not quit, South Vietnam did not join ranks behind its leaders, China did not intervene, Moscow did not sever relations with the United States, and most Americans at home gave little sign

that they appreciated the depth of the latest change in policy. (Not all. The first anti-war “teach-in” took place at the University of Michigan on 24 March 1965.)²⁶ Although tight restrictions remained a burden to ROLLING THUNDER, a trend toward relaxation of the rules wherever possible became apparent early in the program.

On 9 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered Admiral Sharp to carry out RT VI during daylight on 11 March. The primary US target was an ammunition depot north of the 19th parallel; the VNAF was to strike a military barracks. The United States had two weather alternate targets and the VNAF three. Once again, the story was one of postponements. Weather forced rescheduling of the strikes to 13 March. Because General Ky said that his pilots were “not in operational posture,” the raids did not take place until the 14th. However, American planes participated that day only in support of the VNAF strikes, since the US primary target was weathered out and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had, in the meantime, ordered US commanders not to bomb their alternate targets. Finally, on 15 March, the Americans attacked their primary target, the ammunition depot.²⁷

By this time, it was apparent to everyone, including presumably the enemy, that the United States was conducting a controlled bombing program that was intended to be systematic. But thus far it was proving to be far from a dynamic, stunning blow to Hanoi. Due to a combination of bad weather, an erratic ally, and long-range control, the United States had expended a great deal of effort with only marginal results.

In a 13 March cable to the State Department, Ambassador Taylor criticized the decision to hold back the US effort in RT VI until the primary target could be struck. He said, “We may be attaching too much importance to striking Target 40 [the ammunition depot] because of its intrinsic military value as a target. If we support the thesis (as I do) that the really important target is the will of the leaders in Hanoi, virtually any target north of the 19th parallel will convey the necessary message at this juncture as well as Target 40. Meanwhile, through repeated delays we are failing to give the mounting crescendo to ROLLING THUNDER which is necessary to get the desired results.”²⁸

The following day, echoing Ambassador Taylor’s concern, the Chief of Staff of the Army, who had just returned from an inspection tour of South Vietnam, told the Secretary of Defense, “To date the tempo of punitive air strikes has been inadequate to convey a clear sense of US purpose to the DRV.” General Johnson called for an increase in the scope and tempo of US air strikes against the North. He acknowledged that such action could escalate and broaden the war, but it could also achieve the US objective of causing Hanoi to cease its support and direction of the Viet Cong.²⁹

General Johnson called for the lifting of some of the “self-imposed restrictions” on ROLLING THUNDER, which he said had severely reduced the effectiveness of air strikes and made it impossible to approach the goal of four missions each week. Specifically, he wanted the administration to remove: 1) the requirement that a US strike be conducted concurrently with a VNAF strike; 2) the requirement that US planes strike only their primary target; 3) the ban on use of classified ammunition; 4) the narrow geographical limits imposed on target selection; and 5) the requirement to obtain Washington approval before striking alternate targets when the primaries were not available due to weather

or other local conditions. On 15 March, the President approved removal of all of these restrictions except the ban on classified ammunition, which was only partially lifted. Each specific request from CINCPAC to use those munitions would have to be reviewed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.³⁰

On 16 March, General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that during a meeting the day before, the President “announced” that at present the United States would avoid operations in North Vietnam that would be likely to result in air clashes with MIGs in the Hanoi area. The Chairman interpreted this to mean that, for the time being, air strikes must not be mounted north of the 20th parallel. In this vein, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the 16th modified BLUE TREE instructions to read: “Conduct daily BLUE TREE type reconnaissance over NVN south of the 20th parallel.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized combat air patrol for these missions but directed that the flights would withdraw if they sighted MIGs. Escorting fighters were to engage the enemy jets only if necessary to protect the reconnaissance planes.³¹

On 16 March, after a decision by the President, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to carry out the next block of ROLLING THUNDER strikes, RT VII, between 19 and 25 March. The administration authorized this group of strikes on a weekly basis, allowing CINCPAC to conduct bombings in daylight at any time during the seven-day period. In addition, RT VII for the first time included authority for US and VNAF planes to perform armed reconnaissance along selected limited segments of Route 1 in North Vietnam as well as striking designated primary or alternate fixed targets.³²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff welcomed these expansions of ROLLING THUNDER, but some members advocated still stronger action. On 17 March, for example, the Air Force Chief of Staff pointed out to his colleagues that the President had expressed an “urgent desire” to reverse the trend of events in Southeast Asia. General McConnell took the position that this could be accomplished only by the immediate and more forceful application of United States military power against North Vietnam. He believed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff must devise a method for destroying the “source of DRV strength,” and he presented them with a plan the USAF staff had developed for accomplishing this. Basically, this plan called for an air and naval offensive against vulnerable enemy resources outside South Vietnam and a stepped-up campaign in the South to destroy communist strength there. The United States would begin immediately concentrated air strikes in southern North Vietnam, then move the bomb line northward at intervals of 2–6 days until Hanoi itself came under attack. As these raids took place, the United States would deploy other forces to Southeast Asia to secure the necessary logistic facilities and to support the ARVN in its counterinsurgency operations.³³

The Joint Chiefs referred General McConnell’s memorandum to the Service planners for consideration during the development of a proposed program of “optimum military actions” to follow the completion of the current bombings of North Vietnam. They also directed the J-3 to consider the paper in examining alternatives for a “follow-on program of air strikes” beginning with the sixth week of ROLLING THUNDER.³⁴

Before the JCS could act on the Air Force Chief of Staff's memorandum, the Secretary of Defense on 20 March asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a 12-week bombing program for his consideration. Mr. McNamara directed that the air raids on North Vietnam be planned to avoid heavily populated areas and direct attacks on airfields. The J-3 developed such a program and briefed it to the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and visiting Admiral Sharp on 22 March. The Joint Staff proposed a first phase consisting of three weeks of interdiction of North Vietnam's lines of communication south of the 20th parallel, including destruction of key bridges and intense armed reconnaissance. The second phase called for interdiction strikes on lines of communication and also bombing of radar sites north of the 20th parallel.

On 27 March, after studying the 12-week program at greater length, the JCS expressed to the Secretary of Defense some reservations about the Joint Staff's recommendations. The Joint Chiefs told the Secretary that, while they were willing to recommend the staff's proposals for bombing south of the 20th parallel, they had definite reservations about the second phase, in which US planes would strike more deeply into the North. Accordingly, they had directed a new study of alternatives for a follow-on bombing program beginning with the sixth week. Reflecting General Westmoreland's views on the need for better procedures and greater delegation of authority in the campaign, the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that the operational commander must have "flexibility in the execution of this military program in order to achieve a high degree of effectiveness." They urged that the field commander be permitted to conduct frequent random reconnaissance operations to detect targets of opportunity and to exploit such targets when found.³⁵

As they continued their planning, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 March asked CINCPAC for his views. On 3 April, Admiral Sharp recommended a wide-ranging armed reconnaissance program employing the maximum number of available sorties, as well as bombing of important and varied types of targets, south of 20 degrees N. He proposed that, after completing this program, the United States extend its operations farther to the north against meaningful military targets but avoid the Hanoi and Haiphong areas.³⁶

The Joint Staff took Admiral Sharp's views, as well as those of General McConnell, into account in preparing a proposed memorandum for the Secretary of Defense. In their draft, the staff proposed a four week program of increasing intensity that would have moved the air strike effort north of the 20th parallel by 30 April and would include an attack on the important POL storage areas at Haiphong.

The Chief of Staff of the Army took strong exception to the memorandum. While agreeing that the scope and intensity of US air strikes should increase, General Johnson preferred more gradual increases and particularly did not want to attack above 20 degrees N "during this time period." Too little time had gone by to evaluate properly the results and effects of ROLLING THUNDER. In addition, the Army chief was concerned that raids close to the Chinese border might provoke Beijing to intervene. "I believe," he declared, "that frequent and random day and night armed reconnaissance below the 20th parallel designed to insure maximum interdiction and disruption of the LOC into

Laos and RVN should be the key element of the air strike program.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff referred the staff report to the J-3 as an input for further studies and did not send the proposed memorandum to the Secretary of Defense.³⁷

While ROLLING THUNDER VII went on as scheduled during the week following 19 March, US planners turned their attention to RT VIII, which was to take place during the period 26 March–1 April. For this block of strikes, they focused on the enemy’s radar systems, destruction of which could pave the way for expanded bombing at lower cost. On 24 March, at Secretary McNamara’s direction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to send US aircraft against a package of radar sites designated as primary targets. In addition, US pilots were to carry out armed reconnaissance against enemy patrol boats along North Vietnam’s coast and around its offshore islands. The South Vietnamese were assigned barracks and an airfield as targets and could conduct armed reconnaissance along a portion of Route 12.³⁸

In an effort to improve the efficiency of the scheduled VNAF strikes, CINCPAC requested authority to send reconnaissance planes over VNAF targets before the raids. The Joint Chiefs of Staff lacked authority to give him this permission. They therefore turned down his request but assured him that they would try to secure such approval in future RT programs. On the other hand, the JCS had secured and passed to CINCPAC authority for low-level reconnaissance of the radar targets to be hit by US planes.³⁹

During RT VIII, US aircraft flew missions against the radar sites over a period of several days. After only limited success in their first strikes, they eventually succeeded in destroying part of the enemy’s radar system. In their part of RT VIII, South Vietnamese pilots made a highly successful strike against Dong Hoi airfield. On the return flight from that target, US planes accompanying and supporting the VNAF took occasion to sink several North Vietnamese boats. Aircraft losses, however, were significant—nine US Navy planes and one US Air Force jet.⁴⁰

Early Assessments of the Campaign

At the end of the first month of ROLLING THUNDER, various officials, among them Ambassador Taylor and General Wheeler, offered assessments of what the program had and had not accomplished and made proposals for the future. Visiting Washington at the end of March, Ambassador Taylor observed to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the tempo of ROLLING THUNDER had now reached a “good” level. He believed that in its next stages the campaign should move north and work back and forth across the various target systems. Ambassador Taylor stated that a low-level reconnaissance program should be started to build up a bank of current intelligence in advance of the strikes. The Ambassador also said that the VNAF should mine Haiphong harbor at an early date. He wanted a “prestige” bridge at Thanh Hoa⁴¹ destroyed by bombing, with other bridges connecting North Vietnam with China also being struck eventually. Taylor believed that the MIGs at Phuc Yen

lacked the capability to interfere with ROLLING THUNDER to the extent that had been estimated.

Secretary McNamara agreed with Ambassador Taylor on the need for low-level reconnaissance. He directed the Joint Chiefs to collaborate with his office in developing a blanket request for CINCPAC to conduct unescorted low-level reconnaissance anywhere in North Vietnam. Secretary McNamara ruled, however, that the reconnaissance planes must avoid the MIG patrol areas, Hanoi, and Haiphong. He observed that in about four to twelve weeks, it should become “politically feasible” to mine Haiphong harbor; and in about twelve weeks he hoped to secure agreement on bombing the two main bridges connecting North Vietnam with China. Secretary McNamara felt that this would bring very strong pressure on Hanoi.⁴²

In his assessment of ROLLING THUNDER, General Wheeler informed the Secretary of Defense on 6 April that the air strikes had not reduced North Vietnam’s overall military capabilities in “any major way.” The attacks had destroyed some supplies and ammunition stocks but had not inflicted any critical loss on Hanoi’s capacity for military operations. General Wheeler believed the most damaging blow had been the bombing of the bridges at Thanh Hoa and other locations, which slowed down supply movement to southern North Vietnam. He believed that further strikes against the lines of communication leading south of the 20th parallel would cause a “serious stricture” to enemy logistical activities in the lower portion of North Vietnam, as well as in South Vietnam and Laos.

The Chairman noted that North Vietnam was building up its air defense, thereby increasing its costs in manpower and distracting from its economy (as well as increasing its ability to shoot down US planes—a point General Wheeler did not mention). Outwardly, however, the North Vietnamese government appeared to be unfazed by the US/VNAF air strikes. “In summary,” General Wheeler told the Secretary of Defense, “I think it is fair to state that our strikes to date, while damaging, have not curtailed DRV military capabilities in any major way. The same is true as regards the North Vietnamese economy. The North Vietnamese people exhibit an understandable degree of apprehension for the future. The Hanoi government continues to maintain, at least publicly, stoical determination.”⁴³

A month into the campaign, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approach to ROLLING THUNDER was falling into a pattern. In policy discussions over the previous year, the Joint Chiefs had argued for the rapid application of heavy pressure on North Vietnam, aimed at destroying its capacity, as well as its will, to sustain the war in the South. President Johnson and his civilian advisers had rejected that course in favor of a gradual, cautious escalation of pressure. Faced with this decision, the Joint Chiefs of Staff conformed to the administration’s approach. They pressed for expansion of the bombing and lifting of restrictions, but within the gradualist context President Johnson had established.

Limited Deployment of US Forces

After the Tonkin Gulf reprisals, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and other American officials had recognized that, if the United States launched a major air campaign against North Vietnam, American troops might have to be deployed to protect air bases in South Vietnam from enemy retaliatory attacks. With the launching of *FLAMING DART* and *ROLLING THUNDER*, those defensive deployments quickly followed. Even as the first Marines waded ashore at Da Nang, the administration, responding to ever more dire estimates of the military situation in South Vietnam, took initial steps toward more drastic action. It began considering and making tentative plans for the dispatch of much larger ground forces to South Vietnam to engage in active counterinsurgency combat. At the same time, the administration committed United States air and naval power to more extensive participation in the war.

Marines Go to Da Nang

By February 1965, General Westmoreland was reconsidering MACV's long-standing policy of relying on South Vietnamese forces to protect US installations. With the number of Viet Cong attacks on American forces and facilities increasing, dramatized by the major raid on Pleiku, General Westmoreland believed that the war had reached a new plateau—one on which Americans were in great danger. Added to this was the alarming deterioration in ARVN control in three of South Vietnam's four corps tactical zones. In response to the threat, General Westmoreland detailed increasing numbers of MACV's own personnel to close-in base defense; and he and Ambassador Taylor asked Washington for a full Military Police battalion for the same purpose. (The administration approved the deployment, and the battalion reached Saigon on 19 March.) On 9

February, COMUSMACV informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the United States might have to send in combat forces of at least division strength to protect his personnel and installations. The Joint Chiefs immediately pressed for precise judgments on the number and types of US troops that would be needed.¹

On 11 February, in their recommendations to Secretary McNamara for the first eight weeks of ROLLING THUNDER, the Joint Chiefs of Staff included the early movement of an MEB from Okinawa to Da Nang to defend the air base there. Asked for his views on this proposal, General Westmoreland on the 17th called for immediate landing of the MEB at Da Nang. He informed the Joint Chiefs that the United States could no longer count on the RVNAF to protect US installations and personnel. General Westmoreland saw no immediate need for American troops elsewhere than at Da Nang, but he noted that they might also eventually be required at the Saigon/Bien Hoa/Vung Tau complex and the Nha Trang/Cam Ranh Bay area. Admiral Sharp agreed with COMUSMACV's judgment and so informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Both General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp considered the US base at Da Nang to be most in need of immediate protection. The base played a critical role in support of such programs as YANKEE TEAM, BARREL ROLL, and OPLAN 34A. At the same time, the base, located in I CTZ, was exposed to attack by the Viet Cong, possibly reinforced by troops infiltrated from North Vietnam. The Viet Cong already possessed the capability to sabotage the Da Nang airfield, to bombard it with recoilless rifles and mortars, and even to overrun it in battalion strength. Like General Westmoreland, Admiral Sharp doubted the ability of the RVNAF to stop a serious enemy effort to seize the base.

Admiral Sharp argued that it was important for the United States to act rather than react to this enemy threat. If the United States quickly placed adequate US combat forces in the area, it could deter an attack. But if it waited for a tragedy to occur, the reaction would have to be much greater to restore the security of the area. CINCPAC could readily furnish combat forces since two Marine battalion landing teams (BLTs) were off the South Vietnamese coast at the moment and could quickly be built to MEB strength by air and sea lift. Hence, Admiral Sharp recommended that an MEB be deployed at once to Da Nang.²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted CINCPAC's reasoning. On 20 February, they recommended to the Secretary of Defense that an MEB be sent to South Vietnam at a total strength, including command and control elements, of about 8,500 officers and men. To reconstitute a Special Landing Force afloat when the brigade was deployed on shore, they recommended that a Marine brigade from Hawaii be dispatched to the western Pacific. The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that as a bonus of the deployment to Da Nang, "our readiness posture for other contingencies in a strategically sensitive area of Southeast Asia will be significantly improved." They added that they had additional measures under study and that they would send the Secretary further recommendations.³

In the event, less than the full MEB eventually went in. The reduction had much to do with cautionary notes sounded by Ambassador Taylor. On 22 February, the Ambassador informed Washington authorities that he and General Westmoreland had agreed

that there was no need for US combat troops in South Vietnam except at Da Nang. In addition, Ambassador Taylor had strong reservations about basing “any considerable number” of Marines at Da Nang in contravention of the long-standing United States policy of keeping American ground combat troops out of South Vietnam. Once this policy was breached, Ambassador Taylor argued, it would be very difficult to hold the line. The Saigon government would seek to unload other ground force missions onto the United States. The presence of US combat forces would breed friction with the local population and conflicts would arise with the RVNAF on command relations. Ambassador Taylor pointed out that the French had tried, and failed, to defeat Viet Minh guerrillas. The “white-faced soldier armed equipped and trained as he is, is not [a] suitable guerrilla fighter for Asian forests and jungles,” Ambassador Taylor declared. He doubted that American forces would do any better than had the French. “When I view this array of difficulties,” Ambassador Taylor said, “I am convinced that we should adhere to our past policy of keeping our ground forces out of [a] direct counterinsurgency role.” Nevertheless, the Ambassador appreciated General Westmoreland’s concern for the safety of Da Nang and was willing to support the introduction of a Marine BLT to strengthen the base against overt assault.⁴

Evidently trying to accommodate the Ambassador’s reluctance to insert US combat troops, General Westmoreland on 22 February asked for dispatch of one BLT to Da Nang as soon as possible to protect the construction site of the HAWK battery and to secure the battery when in place. Following this landing, he requested that a second BLT be deployed to provide inner perimeter security at Da Nang airfield, along with a helicopter squadron and minimal command and control elements. No fixed-wing aircraft need be brought in, and the third BLT of the MEB could be held offshore for the time being. The forces on shore would have the mission of occupying “defensive positions on critical terrain features in order to secure the airfield and, as directed, communications facilities, supporting installations, port facilities and landing beaches at Da Nang against attack.”⁵

While endorsing General Westmoreland’s request, Admiral Sharp informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 February that he still believed the entire MEB must be landed at Da Nang as an act of prudence, to be taken before, not after, tragedy occurred. CINCPAC contended that the enemy was as aware as US authorities of the vulnerability of the base at Da Nang. With a strong mobile force around the city providing tight security for the airfield complex and good security for outlying installations, two ancillary benefits would emerge. First, the RVNAF would be encouraged to use its own troops for patrol and security operations; and second, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese would have to regard Da Nang as a tougher target. Admiral Sharp wanted a jet attack squadron on shore, but he was willing to have the MEB phased in gradually. As first priority, an MEB command and control element, a BLT, and a helicopter squadron should be landed at once. US Marine security forces already at Da Nang then could provide a second BLT. A third BLT would land when it could be effectively supported and employed. CINCPAC also asked that a Marine F-4 squadron be deployed with the MEB for close air support. He recommended that the Special Landing Force be kept in the South China Sea on a

96-hour reaction time from South Vietnam and that an MEB be moved from Hawaii to replace the one landed at Da Nang.⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff fully supported Admiral Sharp's recommendations and forwarded them, on the same day they were received, to the Secretary of Defense, urging their adoption. In their only significant change to CINCPAC's proposal, the JCS asked for two jet squadrons instead of one. On 26 February, President Johnson approved deployment of a helicopter squadron and two BLTs to Da Nang. However, he deferred decision on the movement of the remainder of the MEB, the command and support elements, and the jet squadrons.⁷

On 1 March, Ambassador Taylor cleared the deployment of the MEB with Prime Minister Quat. The two officials agreed to state that South Vietnam had requested these troops and that the United States in response was furnishing them. General Westmoreland then discussed the military details with Generals Thieu and Minh. The South Vietnamese officers expressed some concern that civilians in the area (where pro-Buddhist and anti-government sentiment was strong) might react adversely to the US Marines' arrival. The American and Vietnamese commanders agreed that the forces should come in as unobtrusively as possible to minimize local reaction. "The concern of the Vietnamese," General Westmoreland observed, "is that the arrival of this large contingent of Americans could trigger demonstrations with overtones of cessation of hostilities and peace by negotiation."⁸

On 7 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to land at once a surface BLT, a helicopter squadron with MEB command and control elements, and minimum logistic elements. These forces were to "marry up" with Marine combat and service elements already at Da Nang. A second BLT would land to build up the MEB to two BLTs strength. The SLF would remain afloat in the South China Sea. The Marines' mission would be to occupy and defend critical terrain features in order to secure Da Nang airfield, landing beaches, and other American facilities in the area. They were not to engage in pacification or in day-to-day actions against the Viet Cong. Additional forces would deploy only as directed by the Joint Chiefs. Both BLTs landed on 8 March. No hostile demonstrators greeted the Marines, only smiling Vietnamese girls carrying flower leis.⁹

A Larger Role for US Forces: The Johnson Mission

In February 1965, the bulk of Army and USAF units in Vietnam were combat support types. United States policy in theory was that these units, and the military advisers to the RVNAF, would not engage in direct combat with the Viet Cong; although in practice, advisers, FARM GATE pilots, and helicopter crews regularly came under and returned enemy fire. As the Viet Cong made gains during the early months of 1965, US authorities began thinking in terms of using their forces in a direct and more extensive combat role. Admiral Sharp, for example, told the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 February, "... we need a positive statement of national policy and, specifically, a command decision as

to whether or not we are or will participate actively in the fighting in RVN, or whether we will continue to adhere to our long standing policy that this is a Vietnamese war and that we are only advisers." He pointed out that the recent decision to allow limited use of US jets in South Vietnam had openly involved the Air Force in the war.¹⁰

On 26 February, at the White House meeting at which he ordered the Marine landing at Da Nang, President Johnson made it clear that the United States would do "everything possible to maximize our military efforts to reverse [the] present unfavorable situation" in Vietnam. Besides increasing the "tempo and effectiveness" of strikes against North Vietnam, the United States would "increase substantially our military efforts in South Vietnam." Among measures to the latter end, officials at the meeting discussed in "an exploratory way" the possibility of sending in more US advisers at the combat unit level, providing more helicopters for both surveillance and fire support, further expanding US jet operations in the South, and employing US naval vessels to assist the South Vietnamese in cutting off seaborne infiltration. Informing Admiral Sharp of the results of this meeting, General Wheeler concluded: "The entire conference reflected determination to press forward despite difficulties to achieve the limited objectives set by the US in Southeast Asia. At the same time, there was evident concern that we are not doing enough to achieve these objectives."¹¹

In the course of deliberations about additional measures, President Johnson on 2 March decided to send the Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, to Vietnam. General Johnson was to confer with Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland concerning "what more can be done within South Vietnam." The general brought with him a list of additional actions prepared in Washington. On behalf of the President, Secretary McNamara asked Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland to prepare a list of their own, assuming "no limitations on funds, equipment or personnel." Secretary McNamara told the Ambassador and COMUSMACV that "the President wants us to examine all possible additional actions—political, military, and economic—to see what more can be done in South Vietnam." More bluntly, after the final meeting before General Johnson's departure for Saigon, the President poked his finger into the Army Chief's chest and exhorted him to "get things bubbling" in Vietnam.¹²

Accompanied by a party of fourteen civilian and military officials, General Johnson arrived in Saigon on 5 March. He spent the next week in conferences with Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland, met with the mission council and the senior South Vietnamese leaders, and heard extensive briefings from the MACV staff.¹³

On the first day of meetings, Ambassador Taylor outlined the factors retarding the pacification program. Ambassador Taylor told General Johnson that the basic unsolved problem was the Saigon government's inability to protect its people. Unless the people were safe and realized the fact, the Ambassador declared, no other programs in South Vietnam could succeed. If the people were protected adequately, all other problems could be solved in a reasonable length of time. Ambassador Taylor attributed the lack of security to four circumstances: insufficiently trained South Vietnamese military, paramilitary, and police forces; growing Viet Cong strength from effective recruiting and

North Vietnamese infiltration; ineffective pacification programs resulting from Saigon governmental instability; and popular apathy and dwindling morale—“the consequence of a long war with no end in sight.”

Ambassador Taylor reiterated that the heart of the overall problem remained North Vietnam's support of the Viet Cong, which could only be stopped by military pressure on the North. He cited historical factors as a main reason for the instability in Saigon. The country had no heritage of loyalty to a single government or leader; and US aid, no matter how massive, was not going to change that circumstance in a short time. Ambassador Taylor told General Johnson that the United States must explore remedial measures for South Vietnam's ailments and listed 13 specific ones. Among the military measures to be explored, Ambassador Taylor included the use of US manpower to offset shortages in the RVNAF and an increase in tempo for both BARREL ROLL and ROLLING THUNDER.¹⁴

In his discussions with General Johnson, General Westmoreland repeated the main points of an estimate of the situation he had sent to General Wheeler on 6 March. The estimate was not optimistic. General Westmoreland declared that the military initiative now lay with the enemy. The communists had consolidated political gains in the countryside, had increased their armed strength, and had improved their organization, weaponry, and logistic capability. The people were becoming convinced of the inevitability of a Viet Cong victory, in part because RVNAF losses were widely publicized while those of the Viet Cong were not. Looking to the future, General Westmoreland forecast an intensified enemy offensive throughout South Vietnam, particularly in the northern and central parts of the country. He anticipated a further expansion of Viet Cong numbers and a regrouping of their main force units into larger formations. The enemy would aim at isolating the RVNAF in pockets, thus cutting them off from the population, their supplies, and communications. If present trends continued with no new elements introduced, COMUSMACV concluded, within six months the RVNAF would be essentially a series of “islands of strength” clustered around the district and provincial capitals, which would be jammed with refugees in a “generally subverted countryside.” And pressure would grow for the Saigon government to negotiate a settlement with the Viet Cong.

General Westmoreland observed that the lack of a strong South Vietnamese government made coordinated, effective national resistance to the Viet Cong nearly impossible. The southern republic had done remarkably well in sustaining any government at all but had survived only because of the resiliency of the people and the lingering momentum of previous years. Given this grim political and military picture, “we are headed toward a VC takeover of the country, sooner or later, if we continue down the present road at the present level of effort.” The collapse could take place “within a year.” On the other hand, the Saigon government, “with US assistance might be able to hold out in its major bases and province towns for several years.”

Turning to what should be done, General Westmoreland stated that the United States, as a matter of policy, must “buy time” in the South until the pressures on North Vietnam could have an effect. The United States must prevent the ARVN from being defeated in open combat by committing its own air forces and should use its navy to stop

the infiltration of ammunition and other bulk supplies to the Viet Cong by ocean-going vessels. US ground troops, in addition to the MEB at Da Nang, might be needed elsewhere in South Vietnam “for identical purposes or indeed to prevent a collapse in some particular area at a critical time.” General Westmoreland called for additional measures to increase US capability in target acquisition, research, and analysis. He noted that the MACV staff was carefully considering other steps, such as: 1) use of cluster bomb unit (CBU)-1 munitions and nonlethal chemical and biological agents; 2) addition of three more UH-1B helicopter companies, one to each corps (using the Marine squadron at Da Nang for one corps); 3) addition of forward air controllers (FACs) and observation aircraft to provide a company/squadron for each corps; and 4) addition of a half squadron of C-130s for in-country airlift. Separately from this estimate, General Westmoreland submitted to General Johnson a list of possible actions that included employment of US troops as corps and general reserve reaction forces, to defend enclaves, and to provide “ground security for critical areas.”

COMUSMACV acknowledged that his suggestions, if adopted, would bring into being a new basic US policy toward the war in South Vietnam. The United States would be committing itself to do whatever was necessary militarily to prevent defeat. But in General Westmoreland’s mind, these steps were already being taken and pointed toward the evolution of this new policy. “If a policy of direct US support and involvement is announced and if the measures discussed above are taken,” he stated, “it is entirely possible that the adverse trends would be reversed. The VC are not 10 feet tall; they have problems which must be formidable.”¹⁵

By sending the Army Chief of Staff to investigate additional military measures in South Vietnam, President Johnson appeared to be trying to skew the debate toward ground forces. If so, the general did not disappoint him. General Johnson left Vietnam convinced that the situation required American ground troops in substantial numbers and with a combat mission. In Hawaii, on his way back to the United States, he told the staff of US Army Pacific: “I am the first Chief of Staff, I think, since World War II who believes that if it is in the interest of the United States to hold South Vietnam . . . , then it is in the interest of the United States to commit ground troops to Asia.” Johnson pronounced “fictional” the Army’s post-Korea reluctance to engage in Asian land wars. “Where the US interest requires it that is where the Army belongs, and . . . that’s where I am going to recommend that it go. That’s our job.” Because it incorporated this conviction, General Johnson’s report to the President ranked with General Taylor’s report of 1961 to President Kennedy and with the Bundy report of the preceding month in its impact upon United States policy.¹⁶

In his report, dated 14 March, General Johnson repeated substantially what Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland had said about the situation in South Vietnam, although he expanded on some of their views. He urged that the United States adopt measures under three categories: 1) measures to arrest the deterioration; 2) measures to free ARVN forces for offensive operations; and 3) measures to contain infiltration by land.

Under the first category, General Johnson proposed 21 specific military measures. These included introduction of more aircraft; removal of certain of the restrictions on ROLLING THUNDER; stepping up unconventional operations against North Vietnam; expansion of US Seventh Fleet participation, particularly air, in South Vietnam; and a reorientation of BARREL ROLL to increase its effectiveness. He also suggested revision of procedures for funding and construction and other broad measures to build up the US base in South Vietnam. These broad measures included accelerated construction of new jet airfields, increasing logistic support capability, and reorientation of the logistic system from north-south to east-west.

In the second and third categories, General Johnson raised the issue of committing US troops. Under the second category, the general noted that the Viet Cong were attacking more frequently in larger formations, often of one or more battalions. To counter them, the ARVN needed to be freed from guard duties for employment along more suitable military lines. “The time has come to decide,” General Johnson declared, “how much the United States is willing to commit to the security of South Vietnam within South Vietnam.” He continued: “A clarification of US policy is required as to what we expect the Vietnamese to do for themselves and what the United States will provide as complementary forces.”

The Army Chief of Staff suggested two alternatives for deployment of a tailored American division force to free some ARVN units for offensives against the Viet Cong in the critical II CTZ, the central highlands of South Vietnam. The first alternative was to deploy US combat units to take over security at the Bien Hoa/Tan Son Nhut complex, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Pleiku. In General Johnson’s judgment, this action, which would free about six ARVN battalions and 25 Regional Force companies, would be militarily insufficient. However, he considered it to be all that was “politically feasible within the US at this time.” The second alternative called for deployment of a US division force into the central highlands provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac. This would allow the movement of two ARVN divisions and eleven ARVN battalions into the heavily populated coastal regions of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Phu Bon provinces, where the Viet Cong had recently increased their pressure significantly.

To stop infiltration—the third category of actions—General Johnson again proposed use of US and other foreign troops. He suggested that the US invoke the SEATO treaty and establish an International Force, including Americans, south of the 17th parallel across Quang Tri Province and the Laos panhandle to the Mekong River. This cordon would directly block the Ho Chi Minh Trail. General Johnson suggested further that if the SEATO approach were not feasible, the United States should place four of its own divisions in the same geographical area with the same mission. “Time is running out swiftly in Vietnam,” he warned, “and temporizing or expedient measures will not suffice.... The United States possesses capabilities which, if applied with speed, vigor, and imagination, can redress the present military imbalance without excessive risk of widening the conflict.”¹⁷

Expanding Plans for a Ground Troop Commitment

The President met with Secretary of Defense McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the afternoon of 15 March to discuss General Johnson's recommendations. The meeting was marked by close questioning concerning the situation in various areas of South Vietnam, the reasons for the deteriorating security position, and measures which could be taken to stem and reverse the adverse trends. In a cable describing this meeting, General Wheeler stated that President Johnson viewed the outlook as bleak, but "one which must and will be overcome." The President had made it clear that the United States would provide anything that would improve the posture of the Saigon government and the US in Vietnam. He had approved, in principle, the 21 specific actions General Johnson had recommended to arrest the deteriorating situation.

Four points, above and beyond those included in General Johnson's recommendations, emerged from this meeting with the President. The President held the Joint Chiefs of Staff responsible for the success of the war against the Viet Cong and he was currently dissatisfied with the progress being made. It now appeared that the RVNAF lacked the capability to defeat the insurgents without direct participation of US combat units. President Johnson seemed willing to provide whatever support was necessary to defeat the enemy in South Vietnam. On the other hand, he did not want to get more deeply engaged with Communist China in the process, if this were avoidable. Overall, General Wheeler described the President's attitude as one of "stark determination to do everything possible to better our situation and to attain our objective of 'making these people leave their neighbors alone.'"¹⁸

General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were considering the two alternative US ground force deployments that General Johnson had included in his report. In addition, they were looking at the possibility of involving a South Korean division as the nucleus of a SEATO force. The Chairman stated that General Greene, the Marine Corps Commandant, had proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the United States establish a series of about six "beach heads" along the South Vietnamese coast from Da Nang south to the Mekong Delta, each occupied by US combat forces of appropriate size. General Greene had pointed out that access to these areas from the sea would insure their supply and support and provide a means of withdrawal if needed.

General Wheeler commented that these proposals would modify existing policy in that they would commit US troops, in force, against the enemy. To be workable, therefore, whichever proposal was approved would require some sort of combined United States and South Vietnamese command. On reflection, the Chairman concluded,

I find that many of the reasons supporting our past practices have lost validity in the light of the situation facing us in South Vietnam. In other words, I believe that we must reexamine our past policies, measure their validity against our performance and that of the enemy and modify them as needed to stem and reverse an adverse tide.¹⁹

As Washington officials discussed General Johnson's proposals for using American troops, General Westmoreland presented a proposal of his own. Hitherto cautious in his recommendations on this subject, COMUSMACV considered that the Army Chief of Staff's suggestions reflected "much of my thinking" and had opened the door for a more ambitious request from the field. In a message to General Wheeler on 17 March, followed at the end of the month by a formal "Commander's Estimate of the Situation," General Westmoreland laid out his plan.

Repeating much of his situation estimate of 6 March, the MACV commander argued that the United States must send in ground troops to stave off a South Vietnamese collapse until the RVNAF completed its projected 1965 expansion and/or ROLLING THUNDER brought Hanoi to terms. To this end, he suggested deploying a US Army division to conduct offensive operations in the Central Highlands or, alternatively, to secure the main coastal cities of II CTZ. In addition, General Westmoreland asked for a separate Army brigade to protect Bien Hoa and Vung Tau in III CTZ and operate in defense of the HOP TAC pacification zone. For I CTZ, he called for deployment of a third Marine battalion to Da Nang and of a fourth Marine battalion to secure the airfield and Army communications intelligence unit at Phu Bai north of Da Nang. With the two Marine battalions already at Da Nang, the requested units would amount to a force of 13 Army and 4 Marine battalions plus supporting elements. Their presence would release at least 10 ARVN battalions—roughly a division—for redeployment elsewhere or to form a RVNAF central reserve. General Westmoreland urged that all these units be in South Vietnam no later than mid-June 1965. He warned that if ROLLING THUNDER had not achieved its objective by that time, "additional deployments of US and third country forces should be considered," including the introduction of the full Marine Expeditionary Force into I Corps.²⁰

On 18 March, following up on one of his proposals, General Westmoreland sought Ambassador Taylor's agreement to landing the third BLT of the MEB at Phu Bai. Ambassador Taylor concurred but reiterated his reservations about the wisdom of committing US combat troops to South Vietnam. The Ambassador recognized that the understrength RVNAF might have to be supplemented by foreign troops, and that commitment of a US division would shore up the badly deteriorating I and II CTZs, boost South Vietnamese civilian morale, and end talk that the United States was not serious in its efforts to help Saigon. Nevertheless, he was also aware of the possible adverse effects of such a commitment. The insertion of US combat troops would increase US involvement, expose more American personnel to danger, and invite greater losses. It would also raise sensitive questions of command, and might encourage the South Vietnamese to "let the United States do it." There were other disadvantages as well, but the total effect for good or bad could not be measured until the possible missions for a US division were examined. The two obvious possibilities were use of the division in the high plateau or in defending key enclaves along the coast. In the first instance, aside from easier operating conditions, American troops could use their superior mobility and firepower effectively in cutting off infiltration. In the latter case, the troops would have a "rather inglorious

static defensive mission,” operating in a heavily populated area and fragmented to the point that command and control could become awkward.

Ambassador Taylor concluded that deployment of a US division to South Vietnam would not be desirable unless clear and tangible advantages outweighed the numerous disadvantages. The United States must determine how many of its combat troops it would take to close the RVNAF’s manpower gap. Obviously, an American division would make some contribution, but it was by no means certain that it would be enough to reverse the downward trend. If the United States did decide to deploy the division, the best place for it would be the highlands, even though that would be the more exposed position and potentially the site of “a kind of Dien Bien Phu” if the Viet Cong cut off the roads to the coast. The coastal enclave idea was safer and simpler but less impressive and potentially less productive. Ambassador Taylor suggested that the two deployment possibilities might be combined in some way with the establishment of a coastal base area linked with a position inland.²¹

Admiral Sharp also was reluctant to move US troops very far from the South Vietnamese coast. On 18 March, he agreed with General Johnson’s view that deployment of American soldiers into the Bien Hoa-Tan Son Nhut complex would be useful; but it would have to be carefully arranged with Saigon. As to other deployments, CINCPAC held that no US combat troops should be moved into the plateau area until the ports of Nha Trang and Qui Nhon, the vital points of entry to the highlands, were fully secured. Any US forces sent to the highlands should be supplied by means other than air, which was undependable and already overtaxed. Admiral Sharp declared that “US assumption of responsibility for the defense of the provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac would position major combatant US ground forces in a key area of Viet Cong interest and activity, and would impose major logistic problems.” This should not be done until the United States had assurance of full logistic support based on the coastal towns and was convinced that it could keep the land lines of communication open.²²

Even before they received CINCPAC’s views, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at their meeting on 17 March, directed the Joint Staff to develop, as a matter of priority, a plan for employing US and allied forces in a combat role in South Vietnam. The plan was to include a Marine Expeditionary Force in the Da Nang area, a US Army division force in the high plateau centering on Pleiku, and a South Korean division force in the Bien Hoa-Vung Tau-Saigon area. Using this concept as a basis, the Joint Staff developed a draft memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense recommending the specified deployments.

The Air Force Chief of Staff, General McConnell, did not concur with the draft. He did not believe the Joint Chiefs of Staff were ready to deploy an Army division to Pleiku. Although the Joint Chiefs had discussed this deployment at the 17 March meeting, they had reached no decisions; and questions remained as to which units were to be deployed, the method of deployment, the concept of employment, and logistic support. In addition, the military advisability of setting this division down in an area surrounded and controlled by the Viet Cong was still an issue. General McConnell wanted the paper

changed to show deployment of an Army division with supporting forces “to develop and expand additional coastal enclaves south of Da Nang to provide security for important installations and for counterinsurgency operations.” The Air Force chief also proposed adding to the memorandum to the Secretary of Defense a recommendation to increase the intensity and severity of ROLLING THUNDER and to accelerate the deployment of four of the nine squadrons called for in the eight week program.²³

On 19 March, after considerable discussion, the Joint Chiefs of Staff—in a tradeoff that would be repeated on this issue often in the future—agreed to add to their memorandum the wording General McConnell desired on intensifying ROLLING THUNDER and accelerating the deployment of the four squadrons. In return, the Air Force Chief of Staff withdrew his objection to deployment of an Army division to Pleiku. The Joint Chiefs then approved the memorandum and sent it to the Secretary of Defense on 20 March.

The Joint Chiefs informed the Secretary of Defense that they now considered that US combat troops must be introduced into South Vietnam in sufficient strength to achieve “an effective margin of combat power” and to let the enemy know that the United States intended to stand by its Saigon ally. Participation by South Korean and other third country forces, if offered, would be valuable both psychologically and as actual combat assistance. The Joint Chiefs then recommended the following deployments and actions:

- a. Expand mission of Marine elements at Da Nang to include counterinsurgency combat operations. Deploy remainder of the III Marine Expeditionary Force to the Da Nang area as requested by CINCPAC, with the same missions.
- b. Deploy, as soon as proper logistic support is insured, a US Army division with necessary supporting forces from the continental United States for employment in the central plateau, centered on the Pleiku area, for counterinsurgency combat operations.
- c. Deploy, as soon as practicable, a Republic of Korea Army division force to South Vietnam for counterinsurgency and base security operations.
- d. Deploy, as requested by CINCPAC, four of the nine Air Force squadrons....²⁴

General Wheeler immediately notified CINCPAC of the recommendations the Joint Chiefs had made and asked Admiral Sharp to give his views, as soon as possible, on the logistic requirements and command arrangements necessary to carry out the JCS plan. Admiral Sharp in turn sent General Wheeler’s message to General Westmoreland seeking COMUSMACV’s views. The admiral suggested that General Westmoreland consider deploying an Army division to Qui Nhon initially to establish a logistic base, insure the security of the area, and carry out aggressive patrolling. After the base was established, the US division would move to the central plateau while the Korean division took over security at Qui Nhon. Admiral Sharp suggested other alternative deployments for the Koreans in coastal enclaves and asked for suggestions on command relationships between the Koreans, the US Marines, and the ARVN. COMUSMACV would have operational control of the Marines.²⁵

In his reply, General Westmoreland recommended that the III MEF be stationed around Da Nang and the Army division in the Qui Nhon-Pleiku area. General Westmoreland

thought that the South Korean division might best be used to provide security for the new jet airfield under construction at Chu Lai, south of Da Nang. These deployments would also allow the opening of the coastal railroad and highway from Qui Nhon to Hue. As to command arrangements, General Westmoreland and the commander of the RVNAF should act together on a "coordinate/cooperative" basis with each retaining command of his national forces. The MACV commander envisioned the establishment of a small combined United States and South Vietnamese staff at the highest level, to coordinate plans and actions. For this staff, which would have limited directive powers, General Westmoreland suggested an American chief with a Vietnamese deputy.

Below that level, command and control arrangements would be played by ear, with US and ARVN units in the same area operating along lines agreed to by the respective intermediate commanders. The intermediate headquarters would maintain close liaison, possibly through local combined coordinating staffs, with all directives issued through national channels. Because of the language problem, among others, the South Korean units would be under US operational control. These forces initially would perform only area security missions. General Westmoreland foresaw attaching the Korean division to the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), with the assistant MEF division commander located with the Korean commander in his headquarters. The concept thus presented was, General Westmoreland stated, only an interim arrangement, susceptible to modification "if and when it becomes politically palatable or militarily essential" to have the United States take full command of all the allied forces. He believed that he would have "de facto" control of the RVNAF in bilateral operations at any event, through the American advisers and the provision of logistic and combat support.²⁶

On 27 March, Ambassador Taylor went into detail on his ideas for employing US forces. He had concluded, he informed the Secretary of State, that the existing operational units of the RVNAF were incapable of coping with the Viet Cong threat. The United States, therefore, must decide what kind of strategy it would pursue during 1965: whether to base that strategy on the hope that ROLLING THUNDER would bring Hanoi to heel, whether to concentrate on reversing the downward trend in certain critical provinces, or whether to inject all possible US military strength into South Vietnam "to go for broke to win rapidly." He then discussed the alternatives he had presented earlier in March for the use of US forces, citing again the advantages of each. He also discussed the merits of combining some of these ideas, such as the use of mobile reserves operating out of offensive enclaves. If the United States decided to send additional ground forces, the Ambassador concluded, he would favor their employment "in accordance with the Offensive Enclave-Mobile Reaction" idea.²⁷

Reporting to the Chairman on 31 March, the Director, Joint Staff, stated that additional approvals for deployment of US forces to South Vietnam had reached a total of 32,686. Requests for further authorizations totaling 3,882 were pending approval by the Secretary of Defense. This augmentation was independent of the combat forces then currently being considered. The additional authorizations that would be required for a

combat posture in South Vietnam amounted to 77,814. If approved, they would bring the total authorized American strength in the country to 116,341.²⁸

On 29 March, at a meeting in Washington, Ambassador Taylor discussed troop deployments with Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Wheeler summarized the earlier Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations on US and “third country” forces. The Marines at Da Nang should be built up to full MEF strength and their mission should be expanded to include active counterinsurgency. An Army division should be sent into the plateau area as soon as “logistically appropriate” to perform a pacification mission. The Chairman also suggested deployment of a South Korean division and four additional US tactical fighter squadrons as space and logistic support became available. He emphasized the “urgent necessity” of establishing a logistic command in South Vietnam and the earliest possible construction of the airfield at Chu Lai and an additional runway at Da Nang. General Wheeler noted that the facts of “political and logistic” life would dictate the time phasing of this buildup.

Ambassador Taylor observed that a three-division deployment “seemed high,” that Premier Quat “was not persuaded that more troops were necessary,” and that anti-American sentiment lay “just under the surface” in South Vietnam. There were, he said, two “very real limitations” on the number and rate of introduction of US and third country forces. The first was “the absorptive capacity of the country” and the second was “logistical limitations.” The Ambassador suggested that the size of the force be left open and that planning proceed on the basis of an orderly buildup as political and logistic problems were resolved. On the logistic question, General Wheeler replied that it was important to establish “a goal against which logistics planning could proceed.”

The conferees then exchanged views on the missions and operating methods of United States forces. Ambassador Taylor described his ideas under the general headings of “The Defensive Enclave” and the “Offensive Reserve—Strike Mission.” He advocated establishing several enclaves along the coast and assigning them a combination offensive counterinsurgency and strike role. To limit the requirement for troops on the ground in South Vietnam, the Ambassador favored keeping ready reserve forces afloat off the coast and at bases on Okinawa for quick air reinforcement, if needed. General Johnson disagreed with employing US forces under the offensive reserve/strike mission initially, because of the proven lack of combat intelligence. He advocated instead setting up model territorial pacification operations in the three plateau provinces. Secretary McNamara thought that at the outset planning should be accomplished for a number of offensive enclaves along the coast. As American forces gained experience and developed their logistic support, their mission could be expanded and the establishment of plateau enclaves could be considered.

After this discussion, Secretary McNamara “stated that he was impressed with the adverse force ratios and favored deployment of US forces. . . .” He declared that the MEB at Da Nang should be filled out to include support elements, thus making it logistically self-sufficient. He believed that more US Army forces, probably somewhere between a brigade and a division, would be needed to relieve the ARVN for offensive pacification

missions. Further US deployments, the Defense Secretary emphasized, “must be accompanied by deployment of Koreans for reasons of domestic reaction”; although he was not sure how or where third country forces should be stationed or at what rate they should come in. Mr. McNamara concluded that all additional forces should be introduced as rapidly as possible commensurate with political acceptability, logistic support, and the identification of necessary missions for them.²⁹

US Air Power Unleashed

At the end of March, except for the defensive role of the Marines at Da Nang, the commitment of United States ground forces to the fight in Vietnam remained at the discussion stage. That was not the case with American air and naval power. By the end of March, US jets had entered the battle in South Vietnam, and the US Navy was preparing for a major role in combating enemy seaborne infiltration.

On 27 January, the administration had authorized COMUSMACV to launch strikes with US jets in emergency situations but required General Westmoreland and Ambassador Taylor to approve each individual mission. During February, General Westmoreland used this authority twice, once to hit a Viet Cong troop concentration and once to relieve a hard-pressed Ranger force. These initial jet strikes had favorable military effects and elicited no visible adverse South Vietnamese governmental or popular reaction.³⁰

Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland then pressed for elimination of the cumbersome mission-by-mission approval requirement. They urged that US jet strikes be requested and conducted on a routine basis through the existing MACV/VNAF tactical air control system. On 26 February, Admiral Sharp advised the Joint Chiefs that the greatest single action the United States could take to improve the security situation in South Vietnam would be to make full use of its air power. The admiral believed that US air power could harass the Viet Cong and destroy their supplies to the point that they would spend all their time and energy trying to evade air attacks.³¹

General Westmoreland reported on 27 February that the few US jet strikes conducted so far had had a salutary morale effect on South Vietnamese forces. He cited the many advantages of employing jet aircraft, including the speed of reaction time, increased number of strikes and increased ordnance delivery capabilities, improved night strike capability, and greater strike accuracy resulting from the inherent stability of the jet plane as a gun platform. He acknowledged that use of jets would violate the Geneva Accords of 1954 and might encourage the RVNAF to rely too greatly on US forces. Nevertheless, he favored the full employment of US air power in South Vietnam.³²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred with the views of the field commanders. On 6 March, they so informed the Secretary of Defense and recommended sending a message to CINCPAC authorizing him to use his aircraft to reinforce the VNAF and/or to support RVNAF operations when he judged it prudent to do so. Secretary McNamara approved this recommendation. On 9 March, the Joint Chiefs granted to CINCPAC authority to use

US aircraft in South Vietnam as he judged prudent. For diplomatic reasons, however, they stipulated that strikes in South Vietnam would not originate directly from bases in Thailand.³³

At this time, the role of the USAF FARM GATE unit also underwent change. FARM GATE's 50 A1E aircraft were flying daily air strikes against the Viet Cong. Although piloted by Americans, these planes carried South Vietnamese insignia and were required to have VNAF crewmen on board, ostensibly for training, on all combat flights. On 27 February, General Westmoreland pointed out that the combined crew requirement was complicating air operations, frequently slowing reaction time and reducing the number of sorties flown. The VNAF personnel were supposed to relieve USAF missions of the "stigma" of unilateral effort and in some cases were helpful in communications in spanning the language barrier. However, some spoke no English and only a few were fluent enough to be reliable for this purpose. In many cases, the Vietnamese lacked discipline and motivation. Most resisted flying two sorties daily and several had refused to do so. This was a critical limitation at a time when emergency requirements for additional FARM GATE sorties were continually arising, often late in the day after the initially scheduled missions had been completed.³⁴

On 6 March, along with their recommendation for employment of the jets, the Joint Chiefs informed Secretary McNamara that they believed the ground rules for FARM GATE operations had now been overtaken by events. Out of operational necessity, the air commando squadrons now were devoting 80 percent of their effort to combat rather than to training. Their mission, like that of other US air elements in South Vietnam, had become one of close support of Saigon's forces. The South Vietnamese sought this support; and since the Viet Cong had long claimed that the entire air war was being conducted by the United States, a formal change of mission would bring no additional propaganda value to the enemy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, therefore, that the air commando squadrons be specifically charged with combat operations in support of the RVNAF as well as with their training functions. The US planes should be permanently marked with USAF insignia for both in- and out-of-country operations and should be authorized to fly missions without VNAF personnel on board. Secretary McNamara approved these recommendations on 9 March.³⁵

Following these decisions, American tactical air power routinely came into action in virtually every major engagement in South Vietnam. As the enemy increasingly sought to fight battles of annihilation against ARVN units, US aircraft partially frustrated their efforts. US air strikes made Viet Cong attacks costly in casualties and prevented the enemy from keeping his forces concentrated to follow up tactical successes. During the spring and early summer of 1965, while the Johnson administration debated plans for ground troop intervention, American air power held back the enemy. In June, General Westmoreland declared that maintenance of the government's position in a number of critical areas "is becoming more and more dependent upon air." "Air capabilities," he continued, "constitute the current difference between keeping the V.C. buildup under reasonable control and letting the enemy get away from us throughout most of the countryside."³⁶

The Beginning of MARKET TIME

Since late 1961, the North Vietnamese navy had been sending weapons and supplies into South Vietnam by sea as well as land, employing vessels disguised as civilian fishing boats or other commercial craft. By the end of 1963, the enemy had delivered 25 shipments by this route, totaling more than 1,400 tons of weapons, including mortars, recoilless rifles, and 12.7 mm machine guns. Much of this cargo went to III and IV CTZs, areas not yet reached by the overland supply routes, facilitating the Viet Cong main force buildup there. US officials had long suspected, without much proof, that this activity was going on. However, Saigon's measures against sea infiltration had been largely ineffective, owing mainly to the inadequate strength and apathetic performance of the Vietnamese Navy (VNN).³⁷

At the beginning of 1965, the VNN had available for coastal surveillance about 16 Sea Force ships and 200 Coastal Force junks. According to a US Navy survey, however, fewer than 10 percent of these craft actually were at sea on anti-infiltration patrol at any one time. A weak command and administrative structure and personnel inadequacies hampered the VNN's operations. For example, the province chiefs, who controlled the Coastal Force junks, did not always assign them delineated zones of surveillance or set patrol areas on the basis of political considerations. As a result, the Coastal Force junks were poorly distributed.³⁸

Under COMUSMACV, the Chief, Naval Advisory Group (CHNAVGP), provided assistance and advice to the South Vietnamese Navy. He reported to COMUSMACV in early 1965 many weaknesses in the VNN, including inadequate communications and poor leadership and command procedures. His reconnaissance planes had verified instances in which the VNN was failing to perform the counter sea infiltration mission. The Coastal Force, operating with limited resources, was being used improperly. Its vessels merely gathered and reported information on infiltration rather than taking direct action against it. Altogether, the VNN lacked the leadership, resources, and organization to effectively counter North Vietnamese seaborne smuggling. If the enemy were indeed bringing in substantial amounts of materiel and if this infiltration were to be curbed, the United States obviously would have to take a more direct hand in the operations. However, until US authorities could discover a major act of North Vietnamese sea infiltration, they were not inclined to press the matter of greater US involvement in maritime interdiction.³⁹

The occasion for action soon came. On 16 February 1965, the allies captured an armed steel-hulled vessel in Phung Ro Bay in Phu Yen Province. The vessel carried large quantities of modern weapons and ammunition, including recoilless rifles, submachine guns, and grenades, most of Chinese Communist origin. Some of the captured munitions had manufacturing dates of October and November 1964 stamped on them. Further search of the bay area revealed much more contraband on shore, evidence of other landings of supplies in the area. These discoveries constituted solid proof of the extent of enemy sea infiltration and led to drastic changes in US policy.⁴⁰

On 26 February, after a Joint Chiefs of Staff discussion of the issue, the Chairman asked Admiral Sharp to recommend steps to arrest sea infiltration. CINCPAC immediately proposed that the US Seventh Fleet “sanitize” the coastline of South Vietnam from the 17th parallel to the Cambodian border. The fleet should operate in coordination with the VNN, with CHNAVGP acting as liaison between the two forces. Admiral Sharp also recommended US Navy surface patrols off the 17th parallel, Vung Tau, and in the vicinity of the South Vietnam/Cambodia border in the Gulf of Thailand. US carrier-based planes should conduct dawn-to-dusk surveillance, going north of the 17th parallel as necessary to spot approaching traffic. The South Vietnamese government should be asked to declare a 40-mile wide restricted area around its coastline, in which VNN or possibly US vessels would stop and search suspicious craft.

On 11 March, without awaiting formal approval, US naval forces established a patrol of South Vietnam’s seacoast. However, because the current US rules of engagement for Southeast Asia did not authorize boarding, search, or seizure of ships on the high seas, the American forces confined their activities to detecting and tracking suspicious vessels and reporting them to the Vietnamese Navy. VNN craft then were supposed to stop and search the suspect vessels to determine if they were carrying arms or other supplies destined for the Viet Cong. If the VNN found prohibited items, it seized or destroyed these vessels as appropriate.⁴¹

On 15 March, Admiral Sharp pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the new family of Communist bloc weapons that the Viet Cong were receiving would require even greater logistic support from the North. The admiral suspected this would mean increased efforts to infiltrate supplies by sea. He reiterated his recommendation that the South Vietnamese coast be “sanitized” by setting up a barrier of US and VNN ships. Admiral Sharp envisioned random surface patrols, round-the-clock air patrols, and photo reconnaissance of suspected landing areas. United States ships and planes would concentrate on locating ocean shipping headed for South Vietnam or discharging cargo along the coast. CINCPAC listed the numbers and types of ships that would be needed for this increased effort. He recommended amphibious raids against the Viet Cong, as well as naval bombardment of Viet Cong targets. He reminded the Joint Chiefs that the current rules of engagement limited United States vessels to surveillance of the coastal area and urged that Saigon be induced to make a request for American assistance so that the US role might be expanded.⁴²

Also on 15 March, General Johnson, as part of his recommendations following his Vietnam trip, called for increased air and naval reconnaissance and harassing operations against the Viet Cong controlled coastal areas associated with infiltration. He proposed that elements of the Seventh Fleet set up sea and air patrols and suggested a program of cash awards for the capture of North Vietnamese junks. President Johnson approved this recommendation on the 15th. On 18 March, in line with the President’s action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC’s concept for sanitization of the South Vietnamese coast; but they instructed him to adhere for the present to the current rules of engagement for Southeast Asia.⁴³

The administration moved at once to seek an enlargement of the US maritime anti-infiltration role. On 31 March, Ambassador Taylor, who was visiting in Washington, cabled instructions to his Deputy in Saigon, U. Alexis Johnson, to suggest to Premier Quat the possibility of a change in US Navy sea surveillance operations. Johnson was to propose that US personnel be authorized to stop, board, and search South Vietnamese vessels as agents of the Saigon government. South Vietnamese military personnel could be on board US vessels to do the actual boarding and searching, if the Premier found that more acceptable.⁴⁴

On 1 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out to the Secretary of Defense the advantages of acquiring from South Vietnam authority to stop and search all of that country's vessels in international waters. In addition, American ships should have authority to stop and search South Vietnamese, North Vietnamese, or private vessels of other nations within South Vietnam's territorial waters and to seize or, if necessary, to destroy vessels carrying arms or supplies to the Viet Cong. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said that VNN liaison and interrogation personnel should be placed on the US ships. They recommended that Secretary McNamara ask the Secretary of State to seek Saigon's approval of these actions, stipulating that, if it were deemed advisable, the VNN personnel embarked on American ships could conduct the actual visit, search, and seizure of suspected vessels.⁴⁵

The State Department acted along the lines the Joint Chiefs had recommended. On 2 April, the Department cabled Ambassador Johnson that the Quat government should be asked to: 1) request that the US assist in maintaining the integrity of South Vietnam's coastal waters; 2) grant authority for US naval ships to stop and search any South Vietnamese vessel in international waters and to seize, or, if necessary, destroy those found to be carrying arms or other supplies for the Viet Cong; 3) grant authority for US naval ships to stop and search any South Vietnamese, North Vietnamese, or private vessels of other nations within South Vietnam's territorial waters and to seize, or, if necessary, destroy those found to be carrying arms or other supplies for the Viet Cong; and 4) provide South Vietnamese liaison and interrogation personnel for assignment to each US naval ship engaged in the counter infiltration patrol.⁴⁶

That same evening, Ambassador Johnson reported that the Saigon government viewed the US proposals favorably. As instructed, the Ambassador had stressed the need for an official South Vietnamese request for United States assistance. It was agreed that the Deputy Ambassador would draft both the South Vietnamese request for assistance and a US government reply.⁴⁷

On 8 April, the State and Defense Departments jointly instructed Ambassador Taylor to modify the request to Saigon to insure compliance with accepted international legal principles and to increase operational flexibility. This would involve the South Vietnamese announcing their compliance with the maritime provisions of the Geneva Conventions and customary international law. The Saigon government would announce that it had asked the United States for help in countering sea infiltration. It would further declare its territorial waters up to the three-mile limit a "Defensive Sea Area" in which it would, with US help, stop and search any vessel of any nation

suspected of supporting the Viet Cong. If necessary, it would destroy any ship carrying arms or other supplies to the enemy. Ambassador Taylor was to suggest also that Quat's government declare its intention to enforce its customs, fiscal, and immigration laws within a 12-mile contiguous zone along its coast, setting forth the specific actions it would take for this purpose. The government also should specify actions that it would take beyond the 12-mile zone to prevent any infringement of its laws by vessels flying the South Vietnamese flag or reasonably believed to be disguised South Vietnamese vessels. Wherever United States ships provided assistance in any of these cases, South Vietnamese representatives would be present.⁴⁸

On 23 April, the South Vietnamese government submitted a formal request for American assistance. Within 24 hours, Ambassador Taylor informed Saigon that the United States had approved the request and that the assistance would be forthcoming. Four days later, South Vietnam announced its intent to enforce Decree No. 81/NG to insure the security and defense of its territorial waters. This decree encompassed all of the provisions that the United States had proposed.⁴⁹

With the legal formalities in place, the United States expanded the naval operations that had begun on a limited scale in March into a full-scale program of air and sea activities in coordination with the South Vietnamese, known as MARKET TIME. CINCPAC exercised overall command and control of MARKET TIME, with the chain of command running through CINCPACFLT to CTF-71. The latter headquarters had immediate responsibility for anti sea infiltration operations during the first part of the year. However, the Secretary of Defense decided to transfer operational responsibility for MARKET TIME to COMUSMACV. This change would take advantage of the location of MACV's Naval Advisory Group in South Vietnam and of the group's experience in working with the Vietnamese Navy, and it would give General Westmoreland greater control of an activity closely related to his counterinsurgency campaign.⁵⁰

On 30 April, General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that Secretary McNamara wanted the transfer of MARKET TIME to COMUSMACV to be completed by 1 August. The Secretary and the Chairman realized that General Westmoreland did not have the capability to assume immediate control of the operation; hence, CTF-71 would retain that responsibility during the transition period. Meanwhile, General Westmoreland was to improve VNN capabilities to participate in MARKET TIME, establish a communications net to link ships and shore stations, organize an operations center, and assemble an intelligence network to support the campaign. The Secretary of Defense authorized an augmentation of the Naval Advisory Group to meet the increased requirements flowing from MARKET TIME.⁵¹

By the end of March, American air and naval forces had actively joined the campaign against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. American ground forces, however, had yet to be committed. Marines were guarding the base at Da Nang but under rules of engagement that restricted them to positional defense; and the number of infantry on the ground remained limited. The decision to send more American troops to South Vietnam to pursue and attack the Viet Cong had yet to be made but would come soon.

The Logistics of Escalation

As both Ambassador Taylor and General Wheeler had emphasized, the administration, in considering ground force deployments to South Vietnam, had to consider logistic constraints. At the beginning of 1965, no US base existed in the country capable of supporting major combat forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized very early that the existing logistic support system, minimal even for the current military effort, would have to be revamped and strengthened before troops could be deployed, even under the limited concepts first considered. Long term, the entire logistic infrastructure in Southeast Asia would require great expansion before the United States could carry out its contingency plans to meet a wider threat in the region. In late 1964 and early 1965, the Joint Chiefs addressed themselves primarily to the narrower problem in South Vietnam: providing, in advance, a structure adequate to support additional men and units and, hopefully, to constitute a base for further expansion. At the same time, they examined requirements for placing various Department of Defense finance and procurement systems on a war footing.

General Westmoreland Assesses His Problems

In a detailed study sent to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late October 1964, General Westmoreland identified and catalogued the defects in the American logistic system in South Vietnam. Originally oriented to support the RVNAF, the system had been shaped by expediency and the semi-autonomous nature of US agencies in the country. It was fragmented into 14 discrete, not particularly complementary, systems. Four of them were quasi-military (CIA, USOM, CARE, and the Deputy Officer in Charge of Construction (DOICC)), and the remaining ten were military (three RVNAF, seven US). Most of the US military subsystems had their focal point in the Saigon area, so that advisers and units “up-country” often received inadequate support. Under MACV, two subordinate

commands had principal responsibility for logistic support of forces. The US Army Support Command (USASCV) provided combat support to the RVNAF, while the Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon (HSAS), a Navy organization, serviced US forces in South Vietnam.

General Westmoreland cited for CINCPAC and the JCS the principal “immediate shortcomings” of the US common-user system: 1) inadequate supervision of the handling of American cargoes at the up-country minor ports; 2) inadequate coordination of logistic functions among multiple MACV commands; 3) the inefficiency of a system that lacked up-country field depots and operated entirely on a retail basis from Saigon; and 4) incomplete common-user supply and service support of US forces by HSAS. He described the effects of each deficiency upon his command, urging that they be remedied as soon as possible. To improve the system, General Westmoreland recommended: 1) expansion of the existing systems in volume to accommodate increased US strength in South Vietnam; 2) establishment of an integrated up-country retail common-user logistic system; 3) expansion of the wholesale common-user base system to include more supply categories and services not provided by HSAS; 4) integration of up-country retail and base wholesale common-user supply systems; 5) elimination of duplications of support functions, especially between HSAS and the MACV Headquarters Commandant; and 6) replacement of HSAS with a US Army logistic command.¹

While General Westmoreland seemed to be calling mainly for a reorganization and revamping of responsibilities and functions within the existing logistic system, and for several thousand trained specialists to man it and make it work, his recommendations had far broader implications. Any significant expansion of US strength in South Vietnam obviously would require millions of dollars worth of construction for cantonments, depots, storage areas, and bases, for air fields and roads, and for port and harbor improvements. The United States would have to increase stock levels of all types of essential supplies, establish maintenance and control facilities, and make ready distribution systems. To support anything greater than a small number of additional advisers, the United States would need to acquire major items of equipment and make large improvements to its forces’ communications systems.

Proposals for Logistic Expansion

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed in principle with General Westmoreland’s assessment and recommendations, and they did not consider it “militarily prudent” to await a contingency before reorganizing MACV’s logistic support structure. They immediately directed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to develop a detailed reorganization plan, defining the requirement for the Army logistic command and taking account of President Johnson’s great interest in third country forces, which also would require support. On 23 December, Admiral Sharp forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a MACV plan, which

he considered sound and realistic. The MACV J-4 visited Washington on the 28th to brief the Joint Staff on the plan.

General Westmoreland asked for an Army logistic command of about 2,100 men and also for an Army engineer construction group of 2,400. He argued that the logistic command, while not replacing all the existing systems, at least could serve as a single source for common-use items, unify some facilities maintenance and other functions, and operate a more efficient supply transportation and distribution system. With the engineer group, MACV would no longer have to depend on civilian contractors to meet its growing construction needs.²

On 15 January 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve, in principle, the introduction of both the Army logistic command and the engineer construction group. Repeating General Westmoreland's argument, the Joint Chiefs declared that the logistic command would provide a structure capable of expansion of common-user support, while the engineer group would "alleviate a shortfall" in US construction resources in South Vietnam. By sending a logistic command to Vietnam, the United States would be preparing for "future adjustments in ... strength and changes in method or tempo of operations." The construction group would augment the "saturated indigenous contract construction capability" and could work under hazardous conditions at which civilian contractors would probably balk. The Joint Chiefs of Staff asked that an advance section of the logistic command, about 230 men, be sent at once to South Vietnam, with the main body and the construction group to follow on a schedule then being worked out.³

The proposed deployment hit a roadblock in the person of Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance. On 26 January, Mr. Vance informed the Chairman that he was not clear on the real logistic capabilities in South Vietnam and on just what improvements were needed. The next day, he told General Wheeler that, even if the logistic command and the construction group were deployed, they would not replace any of the other 14 systems but would merely superimpose another. Mr. Vance desired to simplify and make more effective the logistic establishment in Vietnam. To pin down precisely the problems involved, he declared his intention to send Mr. Glenn Gibson, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Installation and Logistics (I&L)), to Saigon to talk with General Westmoreland's logisticians. Mr. Vance asked that the J-4, Lieutenant General Richard D. Meyer, accompany Mr. Gibson; the Chairman agreed. That same day, General Wheeler observed to the Joint Chiefs that the United States was getting itself into a difficult logistics situation in South Vietnam.⁴

In Vietnam, Mr. Gibson and General Meyer interviewed every major commander, as well as CINCPAC and his component commanders and Ambassador Taylor. Reporting to the Deputy Secretary of Defense on 5 February, they confirmed that logistic deficiencies in "several functional areas," even for support of forces already in South Vietnam, were serious enough to degrade the operational effectiveness of combat units, if any should be deployed. They believed, however, that any corrective measures must be in consonance with contingency plans and should "facilitate rather than impede possible

future accelerated and augmented US operations in Vietnam.” Hence, their proposals were cautious and did not lead to any swift amelioration of deficiencies.

The survey team agreed that the US Army was best prepared to coordinate and manage common supply and that an Army logistics command was the best vehicle for performing this function. Nevertheless, they recommended to Mr. Vance that, for the present, he authorize deployment of only a small advance party of the logistic command. When appropriate, the command could be built up by transferring personnel already in South Vietnam performing “housekeeping” functions. The team noted that no facilities were available for deployment of the construction group or for the majority of the logistic command units, nor were funds available to construct such facilities. They recommended against deploying the engineer group, since commercial contractors “possibly” could expand their capability to take care of all necessary construction. In general, the survey team advocated use of indigenous and US civilian contract workers instead of US military personnel wherever possible.

Deputy Secretary Vance accepted the survey team’s reasoning. On 12 February, he disapproved introduction of the engineer group. He approved in principle introduction of the logistic command but authorized early deployment of only 75 men and officers. Mr. Vance directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to conduct additional studies of the COMUSMACV plan and to recommend to the Secretary of Defense actions to improve the logistic posture as swiftly as possible while keeping down deployments. He appointed the Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L) as the OSD focal point for all necessary actions to simplify procedures, remove unnecessary administrative “constraints,” and recommend staffing for logistic support functions in South Vietnam.⁵

As administration deliberations about more US troops for Vietnam continued, so did discussion of General Westmoreland’s logistic requests. On 19 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended further augmentation of the Army logistic command by 543 men and officers. A few days later, on 27 March, with a decision on further deployments and the possible use of US forces in direct combat apparently imminent, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary of Defense to authorize the full 2,100 man logistic command as soon as possible and to reconsider the decision with respect to the construction group. On the same day, in a personal message to General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp called for a US logistic force of 18–20,000 personnel in South Vietnam to support one Army division, the III MEF, the South Korean division, and additional air forces in South Vietnam and Thailand. These men were in addition to the logistic elements already in South Vietnam but included the proposed logistic command and construction group. President Johnson soon folded this proposal into a broader decision on US troop deployments and roles.⁶

The Meyer Report

On 5 February, in a separate report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Meyer explained, in greater detail than in the survey team report, the state of logistic affairs

in South Vietnam. He particularly emphasized the specific deficiencies and requirements. In most instances, the problems he identified were not capable of quick or easy solution; US officials would have to take drastic and expensive measures over an extended period to remedy the deficiencies. General Meyer's report outlined a program of action to improve the US logistic base in South Vietnam.

According to General Meyer, the shortage of real estate and facilities was the greatest single hindrance to US force deployments and logistic support in Vietnam. Facilities might be programmed, funded, and constructed through at least nine different channels. Regardless of the channel, projects required long lead times to secure funding, design, and materials, as well as site selection, leading to unusually lengthy delays in completion. In February 1965, there were approximately \$46 million worth of approved and funded construction programs in South Vietnam. Another \$140 million in proposals were waiting funding and approval. General Meyer noted that Raymond-Morrison-Knudsen (RMK), the US civilian construction contractor in South Vietnam, probably could expand its capability far beyond the currently projected workload—hence his refusal to support deployment of the Army engineer group.

General Meyer declared that the various US components in country did not cooperate and had a tendency to “go it alone” on construction without coordinating through MACV, leading to a competition for real estate and delays in needed projects. MACV had an immediate need for a technical staff capable of: 1) making a master plan for all installation development in South Vietnam; 2) coordinating facility sitings and real estate acquisitions; 3) coordinating and approving all component construction programs; and 4) establishing priorities for all facilities designed and constructed by the Deputy Officer in Charge of Construction.

All Service and Military Assistance Programs planning for South Vietnam, General Meyer noted, until recently had been based on the assumption that most US forces would be withdrawn by June 1965. When that assumption was abandoned, the US organizations in Vietnam had engaged in constant adjustment, ad hoc solutions, and expensive crash actions, particularly with regard to construction. General Meyer told the JCS that the US should now develop an integrated construction program to support currently known requirements, using all available sources of funds and should revise existing approved programs as necessary. “Long-range logistic planning should not be confused with short-range political actions and reactions, or on long-range military political objectives,” he cautioned. “While the latter might well be to finish the job as soon as possible, long lead time actions (construction and other logistic programs) should be developed over at least a three year period.”

In General Meyer's view, the unconventional US military management organization compounded supply and logistic problems in South Vietnam. The amalgamation of MACV and the MAAG in 1964 had created, in effect, a fifth Service operating without backup structure and with ad hoc procedures. The 2nd Air Division, which operated as a conventional Air Force component command, had the least administrative difficulty. The US Army Support Command, Vietnam (USASCV), functioned principally as an Army

component, with an overextended span of control, yet lacked the full capability of the 2nd Air Division. The US Marine Corps and the US Navy units in South Vietnam, which were small in numbers and essentially self-sufficient, had no major logistic problems. The MACV advisers dwelt in “no-man’s land” and had no support authorized through Service channels.

General Meyer urged the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC to remedy these structural peculiarities by: 1) making MACV a true area unified commander under CINCPAC; 2) confirming the 2nd Air Division commander as the USAF component commander in South Vietnam; 3) redesignating USASCV as US Army, Vietnam, and giving it the same status and capability as 2nd Air Division; 4) retaining the channels of Service command and backup support through 13th Air Force in the Philippines and US Army, Ryukyu Islands, on Okinawa; 5) giving the HSAS commander the additional duty of Commander, Naval Forces Ashore, Vietnam; and 6) as soon as practicable, and on a corps area or other appropriate geographical basis, transferring the funding of logistic support of the MACV advisers to their own Service components. He also suggested phasing out the logistic responsibilities of the MACV Headquarters Commandant and establishing fiscal and funding procedures to relieve field commanders of working with the current cumbersome inter-Service support agreements.

Within the overall US structure in South Vietnam, General Meyer saw an urgent need for long-range logistic planning at the top level. Only thus could order be established under the circumstances of an increase in the US effort, the mutual dependence of the US and South Vietnamese elements, and the impact of “possible changes in direction.” As a vehicle for this purpose, General Meyer recommended creation of a logistic planning and advisory council under the US Mission Council, with membership from the Embassy, USOM, MACV, 2nd Air Division, USASCV, and HSAS at a minimum. This council would establish joint and combined long-range logistic objectives, standards, and policies affecting all US interests. It would determine mutual support, available or required, from individual plans and programs. It would exploit civil assistance programs to assist the military effort where mutually beneficial and would relate changes in military plans and strengths to logistic capabilities.

General Meyer concluded with recommendations for improving US equipment maintenance capabilities in South Vietnam, which then were practically nonexistent outside the Saigon area. He also urged the expansion of facilities for receipt, storage, and issue of ammunition—an essential step in view of possible US combat force commitments. The Joint Chiefs of Staff passed General Meyer’s report to the Joint Staff for their use in planning for projected deployments to South Vietnam.⁷

When he returned from South Vietnam in mid-March, the Army Chief of Staff reinforced General Meyer’s observations on logistic deficiencies. As had the J-4, General Johnson noted the seriousness of the construction problem. Among his recommendations, which the President approved, General Johnson suggested that MACV be given “quick release” construction authority and funds to speed completion of projects with tight deadlines. He proposed the establishment of a MACV-controlled stockpile of

construction materials and equipment within three or four days' sailing time of South Vietnam. At the same time, General Johnson emphasized the need to reorient the supply flow in South Vietnam from north-south to east-west in order to shorten delivery times and decrease reliance on Saigon. To this end, he advocated dredging the harbors of Da Nang, Qui Nhon, and Nha Trang so that ocean-going ships could land supplies directly at these up-country ports.⁸

The Military Logistics Council

In proposing a top-level logistics council in South Vietnam, General Meyer was calling on his own experience as a member of the Military Logistics Council (MLC) in the Pentagon. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had established the MLC as an informal coordination body in April 1963. Its membership comprised the J-4; the Special Assistant for Strategic Mobility, Joint Staff (SASM); the Director, Defense Supply Agency (DSA); and the logistic chiefs of each of the Services. The MLC served as a forum for discussion of logistic matters and problems of mutual interest. While the council had no power to take actions in its own right, it encompassed men in key positions who commanded the widest range of military logistics knowledge in the Department of Defense. Hence, the MLC had an influence that enabled it to identify and solve many of the logistics problems, large and small, that developed in connection with the war in South Vietnam. The MLC met regularly to consider these problems and was instrumental in expediting solutions through Service channels or through joint action.⁹

In February 1965, as a result of a proposal by the Chairman to the Service Chiefs, the JCS designated the MLC as the central point of contact between the Joint Staff and the Service staffs on Southeast Asia logistics matters. The council would provide the Services with a medium for transmitting information and informally coordinating their logistic positions. In cases of disagreement, the MLC would submit logistics problems to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for resolution.¹⁰

New Airfields in South Vietnam

All projected improvements to the logistic base in South Vietnam contributed to AUS readiness to conduct operations under CINCPAC OPLANs 32-64 and 39-65 for countering any concerted communist attack on Southeast Asia. In late February, at the direction of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L), the Joint Staff, the Services, and the DSA analyzed the ability of the United States to implement these contingency plans as of 20 February 1965. In this analysis, logistics were a major consideration. In South Vietnam, the study identified the following broad requirements: 1) improvements to rail and road nets; 2) improvements to secondary ports and provision of additional harbor

craft; 3) construction and/or improvement of airfields at Bien Hoa, Da Nang, Chu Lai, Tam Ky, Tan Son Nhut, and Pleiku; and 4) construction of a hospital facility at Saigon.¹¹

Airfield expansion in South Vietnam had been under consideration for some time. In late 1964, CINCPAC had told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, if the United States intended to remain in Southeast Asia, it would have to develop a stronger and more responsive system of airfields. He had recommended construction of a new jet-capable airfield at Chu Lai at an estimated cost of \$6.5 million and of a second jet-capable runway at Da Nang parallel to the existing one at a cost of about \$3.5 million. On 11 November 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve these projects, because of the contemplated increase in US deployments and the need to enhance capability to cope “more flexibly with a wide range of future exigencies.” They also urged that funds be made available for architectural and engineering studies in connection with these projects.¹²

Secretary McNamara generally agreed with the need for airbase expansion in Southeast Asia, and he approved interim funding for the architect-engineer studies for Da Nang and Chu Lai. He deferred a decision on actual construction, however, to await the outcome of those studies and to evaluate the need for those facilities “in light of the current situation.”¹³

Early in 1965, with expanded US air operations in prospect, it became more and more obvious that the United States needed additional air bases in South Vietnam. The US had increased the number of personnel and aircraft of all Services in the country, crowding the three major airfields. In response to this situation, CINCPAC provided the Joint Chiefs of Staff with a timetable for compressing the design and construction work on the Chu Lai field. Admiral Sharp declared that, if funds were made available in April, by June the design work would be sufficiently advanced that actual construction could begin. On this schedule, the entire project could be completed by June 1966. The Joint Chiefs immediately passed this information on to Secretary McNamara, stating that “the changing military situation and fluid political environment in Southeast Asia underscored the importance of emergency preparations.” They pointed out that Da Nang, Tan Son Nhut, and Bien Hoa air bases, the only jet-capable fields in South Vietnam, were approaching the saturation point. The United States had the use of five airfields in Thailand; but these had limitations, including longer flying times to targets and restrictions imposed by the Thai government.

Bases at Da Nang and Chu Lai, the Joint Chiefs believed, offered major military advantages. Located in I CTZ, both could be supported by sea over the beach from US bases on Okinawa and in the Philippines. They were ideally located for strikes against North Vietnam or south China. In view of the “constant increase of communist activity in Southeast Asia, the need to prepare for a wide variety of courses of action which includes sizeable air operations, the high density of aircraft of all Services and RVNAF and low dispersal capability,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense reconsider his deferral of the projects at Chu Lai and Da Nang. They further

recommended that the projects be funded under a special contingency authorization or from MAP or AID, and not out of a Service budget.¹⁴

On 18 March, Secretary McNamara approved the JCS recommendations for the new airfield at Chu Lai and the additional runway and connecting taxiways at Da Nang. He ordered that construction begin as soon as possible. He ruled, however, that because the projects had been "Navy sponsored" from the start and were intended for predominant Marine use under CINCPAC OPLANS, the Navy Department would be the sponsoring Service and furnish funds from its military construction program.¹⁵

Groundwork for an Expanded War

Besides dealing with construction and other immediate logistic readiness issues, the Joint Chiefs of Staff addressed the broader measures required to lay the groundwork for an expanded war in South Vietnam. Thus far, US military, economic, and political programs in Southeast Asia had been geared to a situation in which US forces were not directly involved in heavy combat; but the Joint Chiefs realized that the United States could find itself in a full-scale war in the region as a result of its own actions and enemy responses. On 16 March, after talking with the Army Chief of Staff, General Wheeler told the Director, Joint Staff, that the government had to take early action to shift its procedures and operations to a footing more suitable for the prosecution of major hostilities. The government would have to make substantial adjustments in military programs and probably also in programming methods and program execution. General Wheeler instructed the Director to have the Joint Staff prepare specific recommendations for adjustments that could be made within the authority of the Secretary of Defense and the President. The Chairman also directed the Joint Staff to identify changes that would require legislation, funding, military personnel, and any additional authorizations, including standby authority.¹⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff called at once on the field commanders to describe problems they were having within their areas of responsibility as they tried to carry on wartime operations under peacetime procedures. Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland answered promptly, and the Joint Staff used their views extensively in the preparation of its study.¹⁷

As a result of this study, on 2 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff set forth in detail for the Secretary of Defense the problems that existed in bringing support of operations in South Vietnam up to a wartime footing. They told Secretary McNamara, "The effectiveness of US military actions in the measure and scope now required to prosecute the war ... will be enhanced by the adjustment of those present peacetime US policies and procedures" which had governed the support of South Vietnam. "We are in a war," the JCS continued, "in which a loss would be viewed world-wide as a US defeat. We must not permit this to happen." Consequently, the Joint Chiefs considered it "prudent that immediate steps be taken to remove all administrative and procedural impediments that hamper us in the prosecution of this war." They laid out for the Secretary the "substantial adjustments" that were required in present policies and procedures.

With respect to funding the war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reminded the Secretary that money for operations in Southeast Asia came through several funding channels and was restricted as to its use and controlled by various administrative procedures. The FY 1965 Military Assistance Program and related fiscal support had been developed for a noncombat military situation. The individual Services were paying for the combat operations now taking place by reprogramming their respective peacetime budgets and the MAP. Each Service thus had to expend considerable administrative effort and cut back on its other priority programs to meet the needs of Southeast Asia. The Army, for example, could not build up reserve supplies and, indeed, could barely maintain its existing levels. Added to the diversion of operating funds for combat support, the attrition of equipment and supplies from battle losses was occurring at a rate far exceeding that planned for peacetime.

Construction funding also was a problem. Under normal procedures, military construction projects for Southeast Asia took about two years from determination of a requirement to approval of building the facility. Congress had granted authority to approve and program emergency construction projects; but had limited this authority to approximately \$41 million during the remainder of FY 65, an amount well short of current construction requirements. The Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that these conditions could not be tolerated during “war type” actions. The present system entailed delay, denied flexibility to commanders, and required that details pass through several echelons to the national level for decision. “Limitations and restrictions which hinder the prosecution of the war must be removed,” the JCS concluded.

The Joint Chiefs specified authorities that the Secretary of Defense already possessed that he could use to remedy some of these conditions. For example, Congress had granted him authority to transfer up to \$200 million between appropriations. With the President’s approval, he could provide funds on a deficiency basis to pay for military personnel increases beyond those provided in annual appropriations. Further, the President could suspend the apportionment process which released funds on a time-phased basis. He also could direct the Secretary of Defense to submit supplemental appropriation requests to Congress. Finally, the Defense Department could incur deficiencies without dollar limit in any current fiscal year to pay for fuel, subsistence, transportation, clothing, and medical supplies for US forces beyond the amount of appropriations available. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also specified for Secretary McNamara actions he could take without delay to augment Service accounts.

The Joint Chiefs informed Secretary McNamara that the Military Assistance Program’s administrative and legal procedures were too cumbersome to support active warfare. The MAP involved long lead time for planning and implementation. Its highly centralized management was not susceptible to rapid changes in requirements for money and material, which were occurring constantly in Southeast Asia, not only in kind but in magnitude. Immediate demands in South Vietnam exceeded approved levels for materiel planning, programming, and management, yet the complicated, relatively unresponsive system remained unchanged. The MAP system needed reforms to free it

of its close fiscal control and administrative overhead requirements and make it more flexible, particularly in South Vietnam but also in Thailand and Laos.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted several critical rigidities in the MAP. Under the MAP, major pieces of equipment were funded as separate line items, imposing burdensome procedures on the Services, the unified commands, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. MAP deviation procedures were very complicated, since they were designed to maintain an "audit trail" of obligations and expenditures as well as "what happened and why" when program requirements changed. All changes to the MAP for South Vietnam eventually were recorded in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Both Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland considered these deviation procedures an undesirable administrative burden.

The Services could not respond readily to wartime MAP demands, because, with few exceptions, they had not been authorized to procure and stock materiel in anticipation of MAP requirements. Perforce, the Services had drawn down their own stocks or taken extraordinary procurement actions. Finally, the Foreign Assistance Act provided that any grant-aid MAP item costing more than \$100,000 could be furnished to a country only if the Chief of the MAAG certified in writing within six months to 30 days prior to delivery that the recipient was capable of using the item effectively.

The United States had reprogrammed funds within the world-wide MAP to meet the demands of the war in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs noted that the FY 1965 MAP, for example, had met requirements for Vietnam only by seriously reducing the programs of other countries. From an original \$205.8 million established in July 1964, the FY 1965 program for Vietnam had grown to \$278.8 million by 16 February 1965; and CINCPAC estimated actual requirements as of 2 April 1965 at \$327.5 million. MAP requirements for other countries, such as Korea, Nationalist China, Greece, and Turkey had declined, but those countries were important to US collective defense arrangements. Any cuts in their already reduced programs could have serious political repercussions, as well as creating uncertainty in the minds of other US allies as to American sincerity and true intentions. Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he immediately increase funding for both MAP and Service programs in Southeast Asia through the use of his appropriation transfer authority. They also recommended that he develop supplemental appropriation requests for submission to Congress at an early date.

In conclusion, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the situation in South Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos was beyond the scope of the MAP as presently set up. The MAP system required a level of detailed planning and centralized management warranted only under peacetime conditions. With its requirement for close fiscal control and resultant delays, the MAP system denied responsible commanders the flexibility they needed in a wartime situation. The Joint Chiefs recommended that "MAP procedures for the RVN, Thailand, and Laos, and all other MAP-supported International Military Assistance Forces which may be deployed to Southeast Asia, should be streamlined and separated from the world-wide MAP."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff then addressed the issue of improving communications in South Vietnam. They reviewed for Secretary McNamara the actions taken in 1961 and 1962 to build up systems for command and control. The United States had put in place a tropospheric scatter system, a US tactical operations-intelligence radio network, a tactical air control system, a commercial microwave communications system in northeast Thailand and the Mekong Delta of South Vietnam, and had distributed hamlet radios. It was using communications satellites operationally and had extended a submarine cable into the area.

Nevertheless, further improvements were necessary to meet the growing demands on communications systems. As in the case of military construction, the Defense Department machinery for approving communications projects costing more than \$100,000 was cumbersome and slow. For example, one project, the “Integrated US Wideband Communications System for Southeast Asia,” which CINCPAC first had called for in October 1964 and the JCS had approved a month later, still was undergoing administrative processing. CINCPAC had requested other projects as well, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff currently were reviewing them. If these projects were approved, the Department of Defense needed to develop short-cuts so that they might be implemented much more quickly than normal procedures would allow.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff called the Secretary’s attention to a serious shortage of cryptographically secure voice communications equipment in South Vietnam. The equipment in-country was almost completely occupied and in constant use. Among measures needed to solve this problem, the JCS suggested the withdrawal of secure equipment from other areas, particularly the continental United States, for redistribution to PACOM, and funding for increased production of a new generation of voice security equipment and ancillary devices adapted to PACOM employment.

Turning to transportation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that the systems within the United States and connecting the US to PACOM and Southeast Asia were modern, well organized, and capable of rapid expansion. The JCS advised the Secretary that, to support an increased effort in Vietnam, the system probably would require augmentation from military reserve and civilian commercial sources. This would be complicated by the fact that the Secretary of Defense had established a ceiling for FY 1966 on funding of commercial contract airlift. For expansion of the war in Vietnam, the Defense Department would have to change its Five Year Force Structure and Financial Program so that elements of the active forces scheduled for transfer to the reserves could be kept on active status. These included C-124 and KC-97 aircraft and some troopships. In addition, Defense should expedite delivery of some new aircraft, particularly the C-141, through accelerated production.

The United States would have to take prompt action to increase the limited capacity of South Vietnam’s ports and airfields to receive and discharge cargo and personnel. To assist in this, the Joint Chiefs said, the US should accelerate the deployment of the engineer and transportation troops the JCS had requested on 15 January. Given the limited facilities in Vietnamese ports for receipt and discharge of vessels, it would be

necessary to unload ships in stream and over the beach. Lighterage craft were on the way to PACOM from the United States, but the active Army lacked sufficient organized units to keep these boats operating without depleting the forces supporting other missions.

Finally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff turned to the issue of the US balance of payments as it affected the war effort. On 1 October 1964, the Secretary of Defense had told the Chairman, "In view of the uncertainties involved in Southeast Asia at this time, it is my intention that balance of payments considerations should not adversely affect the combat effectiveness of our forces directly or imminently engaged in Southeast Asia." Keeping this in mind, the Joint Chiefs, in their 2 April memorandum, recommended that the Secretary adjust the balance of payments goals for contractual services so as to separate operational costs in Southeast Asia from the achievement of totals established for other areas. "Balance of payments restrictions," they said, "should not limit the expenditure of funds in the RVN or in those areas in direct support of the war in that area."¹⁸

The Joint Chiefs of Staff offered these recommendations almost simultaneously with presidential decisions that were to make the United States a primary participant in the fight against the Viet Cong and North Vietnam. Secretary McNamara had already indicated his readiness to support many of the adjustments that the Joint Chiefs were now proposing, all of which had fiscal implications. In a memorandum dated 1 March 1965, the Secretary of Defense had told secretaries and military chiefs of the Services and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that there was an unlimited appropriation available for financing aid to South Vietnam. "Under no circumstances," he said, "is lack of money to stand in the way of aid to that nation." Such assistance would be provided wherever it was needed, either through the MAP or through the "application of US forces and their associated equipment." The events of the ensuing months would test whether McNamara was as good as his word.

Deployment Planning, March–June 1965

During the first quarter of 1965, President Johnson had made important decisions and taken significant actions. In these months, he had ordered the bombing of North Vietnam and had removed the restrictions on the use of US planes and pilots in South Vietnam. It became increasingly apparent during this period that, barring sudden and drastic improvements in the military situation, the administration's logical next step could be sending American ground forces to fight alongside the RVNAF. The planning and recommendations for US force deployments that had taken place during March, while predicated on the need to protect American forces and installations, had strongly reflected such a realization. Early in April, the President, responding to military advice, began to move, tentatively and experimentally at first, toward sending American troops into battle in South Vietnam.

In this period, specific authorities to deploy United States forces were evolutionary and slower in coming than the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed advisable. The authority to send units, especially major units, met resistance within government councils. Exact statements of authority were difficult to pin down since these were often expressed vaguely as approvals "for planning purposes" and "in principle," developed over a period of time in official discussions without a definite decision being identified. This procedure led occasionally to misunderstandings concerning just what units, or how many men, had actually been approved for shipment as of a specific date. The need for forces was not always clearly understood nor was there, apparently, enough appreciation of the timing problem. In some cases, the JCS had either to assume that authority had been granted, or that it soon would be granted, in order to get under way the very complicated and time-consuming process of taking a unit from garrison, readying it for shipment, and placing it in South Vietnam, when it was needed, in combat ready condition. Of course, the Joint Chiefs never actually directed movements until the authority had been

clearly established; but had they waited for the final word before directing preliminary preparations, delays in arrival would have been considerably greater than they were.

During the spring of 1965, a number of considerations and events had an inhibiting effect on deployment decisions. First, officials were concerned about possible adverse South Vietnamese governmental and popular reactions to a too large and rapid influx of foreign troops. Such an influx might also stimulate the communist bloc to increased military activity. Then the administration had to consider the potential drain on strategic reserves in the United States and the possible effects of a Vietnam engagement on US commitments to NATO and on certain contingency plans. Important too was the question of logistics—that deployments should not outrun support capabilities. Officials feared that too-swift deployments might place US forces in exposed and dangerous positions and lead to increased American casualty rates. Finally, during April and May 1965, the President and his national security team were preoccupied with a large-scale US military intervention in the Dominican Republic to stave off what they feared was an imminent Communist coup.¹

In later months, other factors would become important. The effect of large deployments on South Vietnam's economy proved particularly troublesome. The administration had to grapple with the politically difficult issues of a reserve call-up and extension of active duty tours, not to mention the nagging questions of force levels and the national military posture. However, by mid-1965, the administration had achieved a consensus on the need for deployments to South Vietnam and had done much to smooth out the detailed processes of planning, recommendations, and actions.

The Decisions of 1 April

At a National Security Council meeting at the White House on the night of 1 April, the question of how many US combat forces should be deployed and what role they should play in the war came to a head. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had assumed that the President's approval of General Johnson's 21 recommendations two weeks earlier had opened the way for more direct and effective actions in South Vietnam, but not all presidential advisers shared that assumption. The discussions centered around a paper prepared in the State Department and revised by members of the White House staff, setting forth a more limited course of action.

Besides addressing the next steps in US diplomacy on Vietnam, this paper rejected the immediate deployment of the full three-division force that the JCS were recommending. "Because the reaction of the GVN and the South Vietnamese people to any major US combat deployment is uncertain, as is the likely net effectiveness of US and third country combat forces in the Vietnamese environment," the Secretaries of State and Defense recommended approval at this time of only the first step in the larger program: deployment of two additional Marine battalions, one Marine aircraft squadron, and the 18,000–20,000 logistical troops earlier proposed. In addition, the United States should

begin negotiations with the Republic of Korea for a Korean regimental combat team. These actions would require about 60 days, at the end of which the administration could consider further steps. While deferring the larger program, the United States should make detailed logistic plans for the “possible later introduction” of the remainder of the Marine Expeditionary Force, a US Army division, a South Korean division, and a British Commonwealth brigade.²

General Wheeler objected strongly to this program. He reminded the President that on 15 March, it had been agreed that the United States was losing in South Vietnam. To reverse this trend, the US must establish military control of selected critical areas in the country, and the only way to do that was to go ahead and introduce the three divisions. The other participants in the 1 April meeting disagreed with the Chairman, rejecting immediate deployment of the divisions. President Johnson, however, did approve sending two additional Marine BLTs to Da Nang and Phu Bai, along with one Marine F-4 squadron and MEB command and control elements. He also authorized dispatch of 18,000–20,000 logistic troops to sustain US forces already in South Vietnam, to prepare a logistics base, and to support the deployment of up to three US/Allied divisions. The President directed further that delivery of aircraft and helicopter reinforcements be expedited. He instructed the Secretary of State to see what could be done to induce South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand to deploy rapidly “significant combat elements” to South Vietnam “in parallel” with the deployment of US Marines. Most important for the future, the President authorized an expansion of the Marines’ mission in South Vietnam to include “counterinsurgency combat operations.” On 6 April, these decisions were formally embodied in NSAM 328.³

On 3 April, Secretary of State Rusk and Ambassador Taylor attempted to define more precisely the Marines’ enlarged mission. They worked on the premise “that the intention was for the Marines to play a bigger and more active role than the Marines now deployed at Da Nang.” Secretary Rusk envisioned that the Marines initially would engage in “aggressive patrolling” around their bases, always accompanied by South Vietnamese troops and gradually moving deeper into the countryside. They also would act as a “mobile reserve to support ARVN operations as this appeared useful.” That same day, the State and Defense Departments jointly informed the US Embassy in Saigon of the deployments decided upon on 1 April. The departments declared that the Marine mission had been expanded “to include engagement in counterinsurgency combat operations,” under a concept to be developed in the field “in accord with high level Washington discussions to be communicated by Ambassador Taylor.” Pacing of the deployments would be “critical” so as to avoid the impression of a “rapid massive buildup” while getting the Marines into South Vietnam as soon as possible after Ambassador Taylor secured permission from Saigon. Deployments of non-Marine forces “will be spaced over [a] period [of] time with publicity re all deployments kept at lowest key possible.”⁴

Although President Johnson had not approved deployment of the three-division force, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued planning for it. On 2 April, the Chairman

instructed the Joint Staff to draw up plans for deployment of a full MEF, an Army division, and a South Korean division. Three days later, the Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs for a schedule setting forth in detail the actions necessary to introduce two or three divisions into South Vietnam “at the earliest practicable date.”⁵

As of early April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had thus far recommended the deployment to South Vietnam “when needed” of 39,000 Marines to increase the MEB to an MEF; an Army airmobile division of 26,000; and a Korean division force of 21,000. They had “concurred” in the introduction of one Australian infantry battalion with supporting units; one New Zealand artillery battery; one New Zealand tank troop; and other New Zealand supporting units. The Joint Chiefs also had recommended deployment of a brigade from the 25th Infantry Division to Thailand. Cumulatively over the previous two months, the JCS had recommended deployment of the following Air Force units to Southeast Asia and WESTPAC: 5 tactical fighter squadrons to Ubon, Kadena, Kung Kuan, and Takhli; 4 TFS to Clark and Kadena; 2 RTF to Clark/Tan Son Nhut and Kadena; 5 EC-121s to Taiwan; 1 TFS to Itazuke, and 2 TFS to Taiwan.⁶

The CINCPAC Deployment Conference, 9–10 April

Underlying all their considerations of combat troop deployments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized the logistics weaknesses in South Vietnam highlighted in General Meyer’s and General Johnson’s reports. The Joint Chiefs were determined that combat forces would not be sent in at a rate that would exceed the capability of the logistics base. It was necessary, therefore, to determine just what this base must be. At the same time, in coordination with field commanders and Services, the JCS had to work out the priorities for troop deployment and the optimum deployment plans. In order to develop answers on these matters, the Joint Chiefs directed that a deployment conference be held at CINCPAC headquarters starting on 9 April, with officers from the Joint Staff, the Services, the major commands, and the Defense Transportation Agency attending.

On 6 April, the Director, Joint Staff, General David A. Burchinal, USAF, communicated to Admiral Sharp the sense of urgency the Joint Chiefs felt about deployments and about the need for sound but swift planning to accomplish them. “There is real concern,” Burchinal said, “that the situation in I and II Corps may fall apart faster than we have taken cognizance of in our current preliminary planning.” Citing the Secretary of Defense’s call for a detailed plan to get US forces into South Vietnam “at the earliest practicable date,” Burchinal told CINCPAC, “We want to ram these log units in as rapidly as MACV wants them and we can send them. All here recognize the distinct possibility that we may have to send in the Marine and US Army division forces plus the balance of the air to meet a suddenly developing situation ... whether or not what we would like to have as a prepared logistics base has been established.”⁷

In the terms of reference for the deployment conference, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stipulated that plans be developed under two alternative movement schedules: 1) maximum feasible resources within present DOD authorities; and 2) the National Emergency level of transport capability. They also directed the conference to give priority attention to plans and movement schedules for the logistical and supporting units that CINCPAC required to sustain personnel and forces already in or approved for deployment to South Vietnam, to receive and support a three-division force, and to receive and support other US forces. In a separate message, the JCS told CINCPAC that they wanted "expedited preparation" of a feasible time-phased deployment schedule for the 2,100-man Army Logistic Command, the 2,400-man Engineer Construction Group, and the rest of the 20,000-man logistic force that had been authorized. The Joint Chiefs assured CINCPAC that deployment of the logistic forces was not contingent upon approval to deploy combat forces. Nevertheless, the planning for combat forces must go on concurrently with that for the logistic deployments. Both of these deployments might turn out to be concurrent; hence CINCPAC was to maintain maximum flexibility in the availability of airlift.⁸

At the Honolulu conference, from 8–10 April, the representatives of the concerned commands and agencies developed a plan for deployment of logistic and combat forces to Southeast Asia, which went forward to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the 10th. Pointing to the capabilities of the Viet Cong, the North Vietnamese, and the Chinese Communists to seize all or parts of South Vietnam, the plan presented a deployment concept to meet the threat, to improve US posture to deter overt aggression, and to provide a capability for countering aggression should it occur. To meet the current situation, the United States and its allies should station ground forces in critically threatened areas of South Vietnam and a small combatant ground force in Thailand, as well as additional air units in South Vietnam, Thailand, and the western Pacific. Incorporating ideas from MACV, the plan envisioned that US ground troops would initially take on base protection missions then, once the bases were secure, phase into counterinsurgency operations in coordination with the RVNAF. American forces would mount operations from secure, logistically supportable bases in a campaign of increasing strength against the Viet Cong.

The deployments would occur in progressive increments which could be so controlled that if certain forces obviously were not needed they could be cancelled. The progressive deployments would fall into four phases. In Phase 1, the troops would increase security of vital US installations, establish US coastal enclaves, and support RVNAF operations from the enclaves. In Phase 2, they would conduct operations from the coastal bases. In Phase 3, the troops would secure inland bases and areas, which they would improve and from which they would operate in Phase 4. Initial deployments would take place through the coastal enclaves. The plan listed the major units and supporting forces and the enclaves through which they would be introduced. When the plan reached Washington, the JCS passed it to the Director, J-4, for consideration in connection with the overall deployment study desired by the Secretary of Defense.⁹

The 173rd Airborne Brigade

The CINCPAC conference incorporated in its recommendations a request from General Westmoreland for deployment of a US Army brigade to protect American installations at Bien Hoa and Vung Tau. On 11 April, the MACV commander repeated this request in a separate message to CINCPAC, nominating the Okinawa-based 173rd Airborne Brigade, PACOM's mobile reserve, for the mission. General Westmoreland told Admiral Sharp that the brigade's deployment was as much a military necessity as that of the Marines to Da Nang/Phu Bai. He cited the threat posed by strong Viet Cong main force units in the eastern III CTZ (units that had mauled the ARVN at Binh Gia earlier in the year), which could attack the HOP TAC pacification zone and important US and South Vietnamese installations in the region. The two major US bases at Bien Hoa/Vung Tau were essential for current operations and for the safety of American personnel in the Saigon area. For example, Bien Hoa, which had suffered a heavy attack in November 1964, was the major USAF and VNAF fighter base. All the A-1Es (close air support aircraft) were based there. The B-57s at Bien Hoa flew over 75 percent of the in-country jet support of the RVNAF. An Army brigade stationed in the area would not only strengthen its security but could be flown quickly to the central highlands in the event of a major Viet Cong attack there.¹⁰

Admiral Sharp agreed with General Westmoreland and recommended that the 173rd Airborne Brigade be sent at once. CINCPAC asked also that action be taken at the same time to replace the 173rd in South Vietnam as soon as possible with a US Army brigade from the United States. The 173rd then would return to Okinawa and resume its role as PACOM reserve. On 13 April, after the Joint Chiefs of Staff had endorsed Admiral Sharp's request, Secretary McNamara approved, subject to country clearance, the deployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau from Okinawa.¹¹

The JCS Deployment Plan

Meeting on 12 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff addressed themselves to the preliminary recommendations of the J-4 on the deployment study. They directed that the deployment concept, based on that of the CINCPAC plan, be expanded into a three division/nine squadron plan and time schedule. The plan should consider creating a combined tactical headquarters in northern South Vietnam to coordinate counterinsurgency operations near both the I Corps and II Corps enclaves. It should provide for countering major North Vietnamese attacks, either from across the Demilitarized Zone or from in-country assembly areas. The plan should give special attention to General Westmoreland's request for early deployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. (As mentioned, that deployment was approved the next day.) The J-4 should plan on deploying the airmobile division, as recommended by the Chief of Staff, Army, and on having the first Regimental Combat Team (RCT) of the South Korean division in South Vietnam

in 180 days. Plans should provide for deployment of the 18,000–20,000 logistic troops to establish the base for the three division forces, which would be landed in enclaves in the Hue/Phu Bai/Da Nang area, the Chu Lai/Qui Nhon/Nha Trang area, and the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area.¹²

On 14 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff assigned to CINCSTRIKE and the Commander in Chief, Middle East, Africa South of the Sahara, and South Asia (USCINCMEAFSA)¹³ responsibility for deployment of Army and Air Force units based in the United States. After the troop lists had been finally settled and authority granted for deployment, and after the Army and Air Force chiefs of staff had determined units to be combat ready, they would transfer operational command of these units to CINCSTRIKE and USCINCMEAFSA.¹⁴

On 17 April, the Joint Chiefs forwarded to Secretary McNamara the deployment plan which he had requested on 5 April. The concept, based essentially on the CINCPAC conference's plan and earlier advocated by the Commandant, Marine Corps, called for the introduction of US forces into secure bases along the South Vietnamese coast, from which they would conduct "combat counterinsurgency operations" against the Viet Cong. To provide the base needed to support the combat elements, some logistic forces would have to go in first. Other US ground troops, with their support elements, would be needed in Thailand to "add deterrent strength," and to have forces in the area in the event of a North Vietnamese or Chinese Communist attack. Air Force units should be deployed forward in the Western Pacific to deter aggression, to strengthen forces engaged in Laos and North and South Vietnam, and to improve reconnaissance and airlift capabilities. The concept of operations for the forces in South Vietnam paralleled that of the CINCPAC plan and provided for the same four phases. Initial locations for the first units would be: 1) III MEF at Hue/Da Nang/Chu Lai; 2) US Airmobile Division at Qui Nhon/Nha Trang; 3) Republic of Korea (ROK) division force at Quang Ngai/Chu Lai; and 4) 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa/Vung Tau.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw that in the enclaves combat troops would have to land early to provide security for the initial and subsequent logistic unit deployments, and for construction and maintenance operations. The III MEF would secure airfields, conduct combat counterinsurgency operations, and be prepared to repel any overt North Vietnamese or Chinese attacks in its area of responsibility. From its bases in coastal II CTZ, the Army airmobile division would also operate against the enemy "as directed by COMUSMACV in the highlands or elsewhere as required by the situation," but only when "logistically feasible." The division should stay ready to defend in the central highlands if the North Vietnamese or Chinese came down and would help keep friendly control of coastal communications. The South Korean division would enter the Quang Ngai/Chu Lai area only after the US Marines had secured it; once ashore, the division would expand into the Tam Ky area and conduct base security and counterinsurgency operations. After deployment to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau, the 173rd Airborne Brigade was to be replaced by another Army brigade from the United States as soon as practicable in order to return to Okinawa. Anticipating the possible need for a higher echelon field command, the JCS informed the Secretary of Defense that a

tailored-down US Army corps headquarters and minimal corps troops would be sent to South Vietnam when and if required.

The deployments that the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended conformed to the troop list proposed by CINCPAC. Definite movement schedules could not be set until the Secretary had made final deployment decisions, and the priority of shipment and method of travel would depend on CINCPAC's requests. The initial proposed deployments would include 17,100 logistic troops, as well as 14,000 Marines for the MEF and the 4,000-man airborne brigade. If necessary decisions and country clearances were forthcoming, the United States would have more than 35,000 men in South Vietnam by 15 July. In addition, a brigade of the 25th Infantry Division would be dispatched to Thailand, where it would provide security and stability in that country's northeast region.

The Joint Chiefs pointed out the formidable logistic requirements of the proposed force. Forty percent of Military Air Transport Service (MATS) capability would have to be reserved for movement of essential resupply, channel, and special mission traffic, and to provide flexibility to meet emergencies. Air and sea lift requirements for movement of resupply and replacements would increase proportionately as these deployments took place. Of necessity, only the most urgently needed personnel and supply items would travel by airlift. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense approve their plan as a basis for further planning.¹⁵

Ambassador Taylor Objects

These deployment plans ran into an obstacle in the person of Ambassador Taylor. The Ambassador had participated actively in the NSC discussions leading to the President's decision to send more US troops and to commit some US forces to combat. In principle, Ambassador Taylor supported this change in policy, but he wanted to go slowly in implementing it. He doubted that the military situation in South Vietnam, which appeared to be improving during April, called for the introduction right away of large numbers of US fighting men.¹⁶

Ambassador Taylor agreed that the 18,000–20,000-man logistic buildup was desirable and urged its rapid implementation. He believed that the engineers “can be very useful in SVN whether or not we ever introduce additional divisions.” He did not believe, however, that US divisions were needed urgently. Ambassador Taylor did not fear, for example, that I and II Corps were “about to fall apart.” And in any event, if a debacle were going to occur in the next few months, the United States could not complete logistic preparations in time to stop it. Evidently not privy to the extent of the planning taking place in Washington, the Ambassador understood that “if the Marines demonstrate effectiveness in operating out of Da Nang in an offensive counterinsurgency role, other offensive enclaves may be established along the coast and garrisoned with brigade-size contingents for employment similar to the Marines.” He recommended that the United States start logistic preparations at once to establish support for US brigades at Bien

Hoa/Vung Tau and at Qui Nhon. This would allow later introduction of larger forces if necessary. Ambassador Taylor wanted this done rapidly enough to make a contribution “to the situation which is now unfolding.”¹⁷

The lack of synchronization on troop deployments between Washington and Saigon became apparent on 14 April. On that date, following a luncheon meeting the previous day with the President, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that at the “earliest feasible” time after receipt of country clearance, he should deploy the 173rd Airborne Brigade and necessary supporting elements to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau. The brigade’s mission was to include counterinsurgency combat operations.¹⁸

When Ambassador Taylor saw this instruction to Admiral Sharp, which Mr. Bundy later declared was a premature action by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he was puzzled. He cabled Washington, also on 14 April, saying, “This comes as a complete surprise in view of the understanding reached in Washington that we would experiment with the Marines in a counterinsurgency role before bringing in other US contingents.” Ambassador Taylor recommended that the deployment of the 173rd be held up “until we can sort out all matters relating to it.”¹⁹

Ambassador Taylor was even more surprised and displeased when Marine reinforcements landed at Da Nang with 155 mm and 8-inch howitzers and with tanks. Ambassador Taylor objected to Secretary Rusk that “This action is highly embarrassing to me and contravenes the decisions bearing on the Marine deployments taken in Washington during my recent visit as I understand them.” The inclusion of heavy weapons in the Marine armament, Ambassador Taylor pointed out, was inappropriate for counterinsurgency and would encourage critics of US policy who charged that the United States was more interested in fighting Red China than the Viet Cong. Ambassador Taylor was particularly concerned about Prime Minister Quat’s possible reaction. He did not consider it wise to take the weapons out now, however, since that would only compound the mistake by drawing attention to it. “I shall try to explain this affair to Quat in such a way as not to encourage the suspicion that we are slipping units into SVN without his knowledge.”²⁰

In another cable on 14 April, the Ambassador declared that he was disturbed by the pace of recent actions to introduce US ground forces into South Vietnam. He charged that this created an impression of eagerness in some quarters that he found difficult to understand. “I should think,” he said, “that for both military and political reasons we should be most reluctant to tie down Army/Marine units in this country and would do so only after the presentation of the most convincing evidence of the necessity.”

Before the first Marine landing at Da Nang, Ambassador Taylor asserted, there had been four reasons for putting in American troops. The initial deployment had fulfilled one of these—the need to convince Saigon of the United States’ determination to stand by it. Three other possible reasons remained: 1) the need to perform military tasks that the RVNAF could not handle; 2) the need to perform military tasks faster than the RVNAF could do without assistance; and 3) the desirability of providing forces to meet possible future crises and contingencies. Ambassador Taylor warned that these three arguments

could be used to justify almost unlimited US ground force deployments. The mounting number of US troops could sap South Vietnamese initiative and turn the counterinsurgency into a US war against the Viet Cong. The Chinese could use these deployments as an excuse for pressing military reinforcements on Hanoi. Frictions could grow between South Vietnam and its allies, and it would become increasingly difficult to keep South Vietnamese and US policies on parallel lines. Overall, the Ambassador concluded:

A consideration of the disadvantages convinces me that, while logistic preparations should be made now to be able to receive additional forces, the forces themselves should be held outside of SVN just as long as possible and until their need is uncontroversial. From a purely military point of view, it is essentially wasteful of the specialized mobility of Marines and airborne troops to commit them prematurely to restricted land areas. Politically, it is undesirable to seek authority for their introduction until a clear and specific need exists which assures them an unreserved welcome from their GVN hosts.²¹

Prompted by Ambassador Taylor's objections, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reiterated to the Secretary of Defense their support for US troop deployments. Their views, forwarded to Secretary McNamara on 15 April, constituted a rationale for actions already taken and those planned. With respect to the Ambassador's call for delay in sending the 173rd Airborne Brigade, the Joint Chiefs pointed to the precarious state of security at the major US air operational and logistic installations in the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area. ARVN forces could not reliably protect these facilities except by diverting troops from counterinsurgency operations. Deployment of the airborne brigade, recommended by both General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp, was in accord with approved contingency plans. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, therefore, advocated the earliest possible deployment of this unit, both for a security mission and to participate in counterinsurgency combat operations when ready.

Answering the Ambassador's objection to inserting combat forces additional to the Marines already ashore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the situation in South Vietnam clearly required the deployment of more soldiers and Marines. More troops were needed to protect the approved base developments at Chu Lai and to provide at the same time the maneuver units for the approved counterinsurgency operations against the Viet Cong. Still more men were needed to guard the planned expansion of the logistics base in the Qui Nhon/Nha Trang area. This deployment, a brigade of two battalions, should be completed during April and May. The Joint Chiefs expressed confidence that the Ambassador could induce Prime Minister Quat to approve acceptance of these forces.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff asserted that the landing of Marine armor and artillery, although causing surprise and embarrassment to the Ambassador, was a military necessity. The Marines had deployed with their standard equipment. "At no time," the Joint Chiefs said, had they proposed that these units be landed in South Vietnam "in any configuration other than fully combat-equipped and combat-ready."²²

The White House also responded forcefully to Ambassador Taylor's objections. On 15 April, McGeorge Bundy, the President's assistant for national security, informed

Ambassador Taylor that President Johnson was all in favor of further troop deployments. The President, Mr. Bundy declared, believed that additional US troops “are important if not decisive reinforcement.” President Johnson had not seen any negative results from the deployments to date and did not “wish to wait any longer than is essential for genuine GVN agreement.” The President had always intended, however, that before any deployment would be made, Ambassador Taylor would review it first with Prime Minister Quat. Mr. Bundy added, “We regret any contrary impression given by our messages in recent days.”²³

Experimental Programs

On the same day that Mr. Bundy reaffirmed President Johnson’s inclination toward further troop deployments, the State and Defense Departments sent a joint message to Saigon. In it they laid out for the US Embassy and MACV an ambitious new program, approved by the President, of “experimental steps” to turn around the “deteriorating situation” in South Vietnam. The departments called for early deployment of the brigade to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau and also for introduction of “battalion or multi-battalion” forces into two or three additional locations along South Vietnam’s coast. “The purpose of these deployments will be to experiment further with US forces in a counter-insurgency role, in addition to providing security for the Base [sic].”

The departments then instructed the authorities in Saigon to consider several other experimental steps, all inspired by the President. The first would be encadrement of South Vietnamese units with American troops. General Westmoreland was to prepare two plans for this, one to integrate about 50 US soldiers into each of several ARVN battalions, the other involving combined operations of about three US battalions with three or more ARVN combat battalions. At the same time, COMUSMACV was to work with South Vietnamese officials on a substantial expansion of Saigon’s military recruiting campaign, making full use of US experts and methods. In cooperation with the Surgeon General of the US Army, General Westmoreland was to develop an experimental program for expanding medical services in the countryside, using mobile dispensaries. Under still another new program, the MACV commander was to plan for introducing US Army civil affairs personnel into one or two province governments, hopefully to promote stability and to start and maintain much-needed political, economic, and security programs. In a further experiment, MACV was to plan for direct distribution of food to South Vietnamese regular and territorial personnel and their families. Ambassador Taylor was to discuss all these experimental programs urgently with Prime Minister Quat; General Westmoreland was to prepare to discuss his plans for the military measures with General Wheeler at a conference in Honolulu scheduled for the following week.²⁴

This program met with prompt, negative reaction from the American authorities in Saigon. On 17 April, Ambassador Taylor vehemently objected to the new measures, which he characterized as “the product of Washington initiative flogged to a new level

by a President determined to get prompt results.” Piled on all the other US programs instituted or authorized in the past several months, Ambassador Taylor said, the new initiatives were far more than the two month-old Quat government could possibly manage. The Ambassador repeated his concern over the hasty introduction of more United States combat forces and noted that the other programs either met no real need or duplicated work the US Mission and MACV were already doing. Ambassador Taylor reserved particular indignation for the proposal to insert Army civil affairs personnel in the provinces. “What,” he asked, “do the authors of this cable think the mission has been doing over the months and years? We have presumably the best qualified personnel the Washington agencies ... can find working in the provinces seven days a week at precisely the tasks described ...” The Ambassador concluded with a plea: “Can’t we be better protected from our friends? I know that everyone wants to help but there’s such a thing as killing with kindness. In particular, we want to stay alive here because we think we’re winning—and will continue to win unless helped to death.”²⁵

The rest of the US Mission and COMUSMACV echoed Ambassador Taylor’s objections. Representing all the US agencies operating in South Vietnam, the Mission Council repeated the Ambassador’s points, and its members added that they had “no feeling of a great crisis arising from present developments that requires us to cast aside our present carefully thought-out programs in favor of crash projects of doubtful value.” For his part, General Westmoreland strongly opposed the proposals to insert American soldiers into ARVN units. Such action, he said, would duplicate much of MACV’s existing advisory effort and would cause morale and logistic problems for both Americans and South Vietnamese out of all proportion to any military benefit. The general was, however, open to brigading US and ARVN battalions for combat operations; his staff already had this measure under study. In response to these protests, President Johnson on the 17th suspended action on all the experimental programs pending decisions at a forthcoming high-level conference to meet at Honolulu on 19–20 April.²⁶

More Confusion over Troop Deployments

Just before the Honolulu conference convened, an episode occurred that illustrated the continuing confusion over what had been decided about troop deployments. On 17 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that the deployment of about 5,000 more Marines had been approved for planning purposes “at the highest level.” General Wheeler learned of this message at a preconference briefing in Honolulu. The Chairman immediately cabled his assistant in Washington, Lieutenant General Andrew J. Goodpaster, USA, stating that he knew of no such approval for sending additional Marines and asking for an explanation.²⁷

General Goodpaster replied the next day that the JCS had acted on the assumption, after a meeting with the President, that Mr. Johnson had granted approval for 5,000 additional Marines. After the meeting, the Joint Chiefs, in the absence of the Chairman,

“compared their recollections of discussion of additional Marines with the President.” Their consensus was that the Commandant, Marine Corps, had advised the President that more than the 9,000 Marines then in South Vietnam would be needed if the Marines were to conduct counterinsurgency combat operations. The existing force would be unable to do much beyond local security. The Commandant had suggested putting in the remainder of the Marine division, amounting to about 22,000 men. President Johnson had stated that this was beyond what he could do. But he had said, the Joint Chiefs had agreed (although their discussion of the matter had been “diffuse”), that he “would agree to go up to 5,000.” This discussion at the White House had been coupled with talk of having US and ARVN battalions engage in combined operations.

“Although not all of these points were recalled with the same clarity by all of the Chiefs,” General Goodpaster told General Wheeler, “they did put this together as their understanding of the matter.” The Marine Commandant, General Greene, now suggested that the matter of the composition and concept for employment of the additional Marines be discussed at the Honolulu conference. Presidential adviser Bundy, who had been present during the meeting with the President, did not recall endorsement of any particular size of Marine force. Mr. Bundy also believed that the issue should be resolved at Honolulu.²⁸

The Honolulu Conference, 19–20 April

To sort out the differing official views on troop deployments and to discuss the JCS three-division plan with CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, Secretary McNamara, with the President’s approval, convened a conference at PACOM headquarters in Honolulu. On 19–20 April, the Defense Secretary held two days of discussions with Ambassador Taylor, General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland. William Bundy of the State Department and John McNaughton of Defense also attended. The men hammered out a set of recommendations that Secretary McNamara on 21 April summarized in a memorandum for the President.²⁹

The conferees agreed that North Vietnam and the Viet Cong were unlikely “to capitulate, or come to a position acceptable to us, in less than six months” and that it would take an evident Communist failure in the South as well as bombing in the North to bring the enemy to terms. Further, “it will take more than six months, perhaps a year or two, to demonstrate VC failure in the South.” As to ROLLING THUNDER, the attendees united in recommending continuation of the air strikes at about the existing tempo. They declared the bombing program “essential to our campaign—both psychologically and physically” but that it “cannot be expected to do the job alone.”

In South Vietnam, success would be achieved by denying the enemy victory. The participants at Honolulu agreed that this would require more US troops to reinforce the RVNAF while it continued to build up, but they differed on how many. Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp favored early implementation of the full

three-division program, while Secretary McNamara and Ambassador Taylor saw no need for such large numbers at that point. After much discussion, the conferees decided to reduce considerably the scale of the initial deployment from that recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In his memorandum to the President, Secretary McNamara reported that “all recommend” that, in addition to the 33,500 US and 2,000 South Korean troops already in-country, forces be deployed on the following schedule: 1 US Army brigade (4,000 men) at Bien Hoa/Vung Tau, closing 1 May; 3 Marine air squadrons and 3 Marine battalions (6,200) at Chu Lai, closing 5 May; 1 Australian battalion (1,250) at Vung Tau, closing 21 May; 1 US Army brigade (4,000) at Qui Nhon/Nha Trang, closing 15 June; and 1 Korean RCT (4,000) at Quang Ngai, closing 15 June. Adding to these forces those augmentation and logistic troops already approved and the logistics troops not yet approved, Secretary McNamara derived a total force in South Vietnam of 82,000 US and 7,250 third country troops. Secretary McNamara listed as “possible later deployments, not recommended now,” the US Army airmobile division and a corps headquarters, the remainder of a Korean infantry division, and the remainder of the Marine Expeditionary Force. Finally, the Secretary of Defense urged the President to inform the Congressional leadership of the contemplated deployments and of the changed mission of American forces in South Vietnam.

Secretary McNamara reported to the President the conferees’ conclusions on the experimental programs advanced on 15 April. The officials rejected insertion of individual US soldiers into ARVN units as “neither required nor feasible” but noted that MACV had other forms of combined operations under study. They also declared that South Vietnam had no need of American armed forces recruiting experts and that RVNAF recruitment and training generally were improving. Ambassador Taylor welcomed the proposal for expanding rural health services and was ready to work with the Army Surgeon General to implement it. On the insertion of US Army civil affairs personnel into provincial governments, the conferees saw value in trying new civil/military pacification teams in three provinces but suggested that the Ambassador decide on what additional specialists were needed to staff them. Finally, they saw no requirement for new food distributions to RVNAF troops and their families, none of whom showed signs of acute need in that respect. The US Mission, however, would study improvement of South Vietnamese military fringe benefits.³⁰

On 21 and 22 April, President Johnson discussed Secretary McNamara’s recommendations with his principal civilian and military advisers. The Secretary of Defense explained and defended his recommendations. General Wheeler “stated that the JCS unanimously supported the April 21st paper. He said it was necessary to deploy the additional men and to make preparations for still more men. He made no comment on the tempo of the bombing.” George Ball of the State Department and McGeorge Bundy of the White House staff expressed concern that the proposals constituted a major US escalation that carried risk of a severe Chinese and/or Soviet reaction; Mr. Ball urged pursuit of negotiations as an alternative. Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) McCone,

while endorsing the troop deployments, declared that they should be accompanied by “more dynamic action” against the North. Otherwise, the United States “would drift into a combat situation where victory would be dubious and from which we could not extricate ourselves.” President Johnson worried at length about the reaction of the US press and public and of foreign countries to the expanded program. He sensed a decline of congressional support for administration policy and urged all present to make more effort to publicize the government’s side of the story.³¹

As he often did with difficult issues, President Johnson moved slowly on formally approving Secretary McNamara’s recommendations, deciding early but waiting to announce his decision until he had brought all interested parties on board. Thus, on 22 April, the State Department informed Ambassador Taylor, “For your wholly private information, and subject to private Congressional consultation, the President is inclined to favor McNamara’s recommendations, but before making a decision on them he wished to obtain the opinion of the GVN.” The President himself told Ambassador Taylor at about the same time, “It is not our intention to announce the whole program now but rather to announce individual deployments at appropriate times.”³²

Following the incremental approach, on 30 April the State and Defense Departments transmitted to Ambassador Taylor the presidential decision on the first stage of Secretary McNamara’s recommended deployments. The departments informed the Ambassador that in early May, “at your call,” three battalion equivalents were to deploy into Bien Hoa/Vung Tau and three battalion equivalents into Chu Lai. Marine aircraft units would follow later in May. “Decision as to deployment of additional US battalions in June will be postponed until later, when decision is required to meet deployment schedule.” Anticipating the first stage of deployments, General Wheeler had instructed the Joint Staff on the 28th to draft a “go ahead” message to CINCPAC for them. This message would be “surfaced” only after the Secretary of Defense approved these deployments. McNamara did so, and the President approved the cable on the morning of 30 April. The Joint Chiefs of Staff then ordered CINCPAC to execute the troop movements.³³

With the deployment of the battalions to Chu Lai, the III Marine Expeditionary Force would have ashore seven of its nine infantry battalions. Upon completion of the Chu Lai airstrip, seven squadrons of Marine aircraft would be in South Vietnam. The Marine Corps, therefore, asked to deploy to Da Nang a reduced strength Force/Division/Wing headquarters to include two major generals, one commanding the division and the other commanding the aircraft wing. This was the standard Marine command structure for a Marine air/ground team of this size. General Westmoreland had no objections to this arrangement. However, since the press would undoubtedly report that a Marine division had been deployed, COMUSMACV wanted to be sure that the Joint Chiefs of Staff fully understood and approved such a deployment.³⁴

No issue arose over the deployment of the Marine headquarters, but a question arose over its name. On 5 May, General Westmoreland informed the Joint Chiefs that, at a Mission Council meeting, members had expressed concern over the use of the term Marine Expeditionary Force. The word “Expeditionary” in the title would remind the

Vietnamese of the French Expeditionary Force (*Corps Expeditionnaire Francais en Extreme Orient*), an organization infamous in Vietnamese history. Therefore, Westmoreland suggested that the name of the III MEF be changed.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that they had no objection to deployment of the force, division, and wing headquarters, including the general officers. They asked the Marine Corps commandant, General Greene, to propose a new name for the III MEF. After consulting his own staff, General Greene chose the title III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF); and the JCS transmitted the revised name to General Westmoreland. The replacement of “expeditionary” with “amphibious” in their titles applied to all other Marine organizations in South Vietnam or deploying there in the future. Thus, a Marine Expeditionary Brigade would be known henceforth as a Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB).³⁵

The deployments authorized at the end of April went forward on schedule. On 6 May, the III MAF established its headquarters at Da Nang, soon followed by the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. Additional Marines landed at Chu Lai on 7 May. That same day, the US Army 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived at Bien Hoa. More Marine air units, the Australian battalion, and large numbers of support troops followed shortly thereafter.³⁶

A New JCS Plan, 30 April

As the President moved toward a decision on the first deployments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff revised their three-division plan to conform to the Honolulu conference recommendations. Presented to Secretary McNamara on 30 April, the new plan followed the general concept of the Joint Chiefs proposal of 17 April; but instead of divisions it called for deployment of two US Army brigades, an MEB, a South Korean RCT, an Australian/New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) battalion force, and logistic and augmentation forces of about 32,000 men and officers. Although the Joint Chiefs reduced the forces from the original plan, the Marine, Army, and ROK units were still to enter and secure the originally proposed enclaves. The ANZAC battalion would join the US airborne brigade at Bien Hoa/Vung Tau. The Joint Chiefs listed as possible later deployments the Army airmobile division and corps headquarters, to arrive by 1 August, and the remainder of the Korean division and the III MEF, to be in-country by 1 October. The JCS recommended that Secretary McNamara approve for implementation the deployments proposed. They also asked him to authorize deployment of the I MEF from the US west coast to constitute a reserve force in WESTPAC, replacing the III MEF as it went to South Vietnam.³⁷

On 15 May, Secretary McNamara approved for planning purposes the deployments that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended on 30 April. In addition, he authorized the “continuation of the preparation cycle” for deployment of the Army brigade to Qui Nhon, and the deployment of individual personnel augmentations. These two actions would bring the total authorized US manpower strength in South Vietnam to over 69,000. Secre-

tary McNamara also approved the shift of elements of the I MEF from the United States to WESTPAC to replace elements of the III MEF sent to South Vietnam. He informed the Joint Chiefs that approval for deployment of the ANZAC battalion and the Korean RCT already existed. "The other deployments described," the Secretary of Defense concluded, "will be considered in conjunction with continuing high-level deliberations on the Southeast Asian situation and as further requested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff."³⁸

Expanding the Logistics Base

In the light of troop deployments authorized and contemplated, expansion of the US logistics base in South Vietnam took on greater urgency. Accordingly, in mid-April the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended other actions beyond the introduction of the approved logistic troops. They considered that the ports of Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon, Da Nang, and Nha Trang should be developed to support the expected input of men and supplies. They recommended "minimum essential base development" in the prospective enclaves and the improvement of airfields, including those at Tam Ky, for light aviation. As an additional jet field, they urged the quick development of Chu Lai by the immediate installation of a Short Expeditionary Landing Field (SELF)³⁹ The Defense Department had already approved the prepositioning of US Army lighters at selected ports and was in the process of deploying the units.⁴⁰

For POL supplies, the United States would have to construct unloading and storage facilities at Da Nang, Quang Ngai, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Vung Tau, and storage facilities at Saigon, Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut, and Pleiku. The Army engineer construction group would begin work on high priority projects for COMUSMACV. Construction capability would expand as follow-on construction units were approved for deployment. Navy Mobile Construction (SEABEE) units attached to III MEF would install the SELF. To meet additional airfield construction requirements, as many as two or more construction battalions might be needed in South Vietnam.

To increase US logistic capability in Southeast Asia, the JCS recommended broader actions outside South Vietnam. Among these were: 1) expediting country-to-country agreements for the acquisition of real estate; 2) increasing POL and ammunition storage capacity at Subic Bay in the Philippines; 3) preparing and improving LST [Landing Ship, Tank] ramps at Iwakuni, Japan; 4) improving pier and beach-outload facilities at Okinawa; 5) providing facilities for aerial port detachments at King Kuan; 6) suspending gold flow restrictions in the PACOM area to allow offshore procurement of supplies and services for US troops in South Vietnam; and 7) increasing the capability of Okinawa and the Philippine Islands as offshore supporting bases.⁴¹

In April, at the Joint Chiefs of Staff request, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland examined how and to what extent the US logistic base in South Vietnam should be expanded to support US and third country troops and how to coordinate such expansion with the RVNAF. The United States had to choose the best among current logistic

procedures and determine whether its forces and the RVNAF could make combined use of existing logistic facilities. In this connection, the Army had expressed “considerable doubt” as to the feasibility and desirability of combined use of facilities.

On 7 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested to CINCPAC that the United States might share South Vietnamese depot and supply installations. They also suggested that the title to stocks of consumables in such facilities might revert to the United States until the materiel was actually issued to each country’s forces. Under such an arrangement, the Joint Chiefs noted, “US personnel could take over management and essentially, if not actually, combined command or coordination of mutually occupied logistic facilities if major stockages were of common user consumables.” This course of action would afford the US immediate use of existing facilities, although some might not be capable of expansion. It would simplify the Services’ programming of all consumables and would allow establishment of in-country stock levels on the basis of aggregate consumption forecasts for all allied forces. On the other hand, substantial opposition from the RVNAF high command could certainly be expected. The Joint Chiefs asked Admiral Sharp to comment on these procedures.⁴²

In reply, CINCPAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he was currently planning on the optimum use of existing and operating facilities. However, just how much the United States could control these facilities would have to be determined at the time of need and on a case-by-case basis. Admiral Sharp seriously doubted that the RVNAF would agree to turn over their logistic support facilities to the United States any more than the United States would agree to turn over command of its combat forces to the South Vietnamese. Moreover, RVNAF facilities were already overcrowded or too small, and many of them were poorly located to support US forces as envisioned under current deployment plans. Admiral Sharp also pointed out that access to the base depot area near Saigon was “less than fully secure.”

The best way to expand the US logistic system in South Vietnam, CINCPAC believed, would be to establish as rapidly as possible a framework that could be expanded to support any US effort. This would require a base complex at a deep-water seacoast port, centrally located and under US control. Admiral Sharp stated that the only feasible location for such a facility would be Cam Ranh Bay. When the base depot became operational, the United States could establish a control point for all supplies, with a central stock record office and transceiver point to keep track of all incoming shipments. The office would control the flow of all critical MAP equipment and the common user consumables for all deployed forces. It also could manage the issue to the RVNAF of these items “in such a manner as to best serve US interests and apply the required logistical leverage.” If a large amount of common user commodities, such as ammunition, were involved, selected supply lines could be completely integrated and the system expanded as necessary so that key items might be controlled without sending all supply through the base depot.

By leaving the present RVNAF depot system intact, but co-locating US facilities at these installations when feasible and in the best interests of the United States, the RVNAF objections to an American takeover of the logistic system could be overcome.

CINCPAC pointed out that development of a base at Cam Ranh Bay, which at present lacked even minimum facilities, would be expensive and require a “significant construction effort.” The Services would have to fund pipelining and control the MAP equipment, including common user consumables and depot stocks. Sizeable combat forces would be tied down in providing security for the complex. Distribution from the depot to field depots would mainly be done by coastal shipping in LSTs. “In summary,” Admiral Sharp said, “I believe it is essential to begin establishment of a base depot complex at a deep-water port (Cam Ranh Bay) to support US forces initially. The depot activity and control would be capable of expansion.”⁴³

Development of Cam Ranh Bay

In April and May, as more and more US troops began arriving in South Vietnam along with a mushrooming tonnage of supplies and equipment, it became apparent that Saigon’s logistic facilities would soon be overwhelmed. With the prospect of a still greater flow of men and supplies in the months just ahead, the need for an additional deep-water port, more centrally located to support the forces and contemplated operations, grew to near-crisis proportions. The most suitable location for such a facility was Cam Ranh Bay, which had all the necessary attributes for a major military port. US officials had been considering Cam Ranh for this purpose since 1964, even before the present urgency had arisen.

On 19 May 1965, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) asked the Joint Staff to evaluate the requirement for a logistic base at Cam Ranh Bay on two assumptions: 1) that the additional deployments then being considered would be authorized; and 2) that no further major deployment would be made. On 21 May, General Wheeler informed Secretary McNamara that “a requirement for a US installation at Cam Ranh Bay exists under either of the assumptions” Under the first assumption, the base would be expanded to accommodate the additional troops, including those for OPLAN 32-64; under the second assumption, a requirement for base facilities on a reduced scale would still exist. A supplemental appropriation already contained provision for \$7 million for ammunition handling and port facilities at Cam Ranh Bay. CINCPAC was planning to consolidate at Cam Ranh some of the logistic facilities programmed for Qui Nhon and Nha Trang. He was doing this because General Westmoreland had determined recently that the forces then being planned for the Qui Nhon and Nha Trang enclaves could secure Cam Ranh Bay against the Viet Cong. Admiral Sharp was in the process of preparing an outline base development plan for Cam Ranh Bay. Under these circumstances, General Wheeler told Secretary McNamara, “it is believed appropriate for the Ambassador to initiate discussions with the Prime Minister to advise him of the US intent to establish a deep water port and ammunition storage facilities at Cam Ranh Bay,” with possible expansion “to provide other logistic services to the United States, Republic of Vietnam, and third country forces.”⁴⁴

Secretary McNamara had suggested that the Cam Ranh Bay development include a logistic and combat airfield. CINCPAC, therefore, was also conducting a preliminary engineering survey for such a field in the northern end of the Cam Ranh Peninsula.⁴⁵

On 30 May, CINCPAC submitted a detailed statement and review of the need for the Cam Ranh Bay development, with recommendations for a logistics complex, a jet-capable combat/logistics airfield, and deployment of the additional forces that would be needed or could be stationed there. From this base, the United States could maintain central control of common-user items for all deployed forces, including key items for the RVNAF. This deep-water port could receive shipments directly from the United States, Okinawa, and other Pacific bases and distribute them throughout the year by coastal shipping and by air and land lines of communication. Using MAP funds, the United States had already constructed a large deep-water pier at the bay for its own use. Because of the natural contour of the beach, dry ramp beaching of LSTs was also possible.

All development, excluding the airfield, would cost an estimated \$19 million, of which \$7 million had already been programmed. Another \$9.6 million in the Army military construction program was being shifted from the logistic and support facilities initially scheduled at Vung Tau. Additional funds to meet the cost of development, Admiral Sharp anticipated, could be taken from other facilities currently programmed for other locations but which “more appropriately should be constructed at Cam Ranh Bay.”

Admiral Sharp then recommended: 1) approval of planning to develop the Cam Ranh Bay area as the major US port and logistic complex in South Vietnam; 2) construction and development on an emergency basis of a jet-capable combat and logistics airfield at Cam Ranh Bay; 3) authorization to divert to that area some of the logistics forces previously approved for other places; 4) immediate diversion to Cam Ranh Bay of one infantry battalion to provide security; and 5) securing the Saigon government’s approval of the logistics complex and clearance for the necessary US combat forces.⁴⁶

On 8 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that the Secretary of Defense had approved all of his recommendations for the development of Cam Ranh Bay. The United States had obtained the necessary clearances from Saigon. The Joint Chiefs did not believe that Admiral Sharp required any additional authorizations to move approved units from one location in South Vietnam to another. However, the Joint Chiefs did need a revised troop list as soon as possible. They asked CINCPAC to furnish them the base development outline plan for Cam Ranh Bay not later than 15 June in order to make maximum use of FY 1965 fiscal resources.⁴⁷

Work on the new base got under way promptly. On 9 June, Secretary McNamara informed General Wheeler that he wanted to proceed as rapidly as possible in developing Cam Ranh Bay. That same day, two battalions of combat engineers landed at the bay and construction began. Within approximately 90 days, US forces would transform Cam Ranh Bay from an area of sand dunes and sparse vegetation to a major port/logistical complex. Plans called for a continued high rate of construction during 1966.⁴⁸

An Ominous Forecast

On 8 May, as implementation of the recommendations of 20 April was getting under way, the new Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Admiral William F. Raborn,⁴⁹ sent the President an ominous forecast of coming events. Admiral Raborn endorsed his predecessor John McCone's argument that heavier bombing of North Vietnam should accompany any expanded US ground force commitment in South Vietnam. If it did not, he foresaw an unpleasant prospect:

The envisaged US ground force holding operation will buy time for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, but it will also give the enemy time to improve his capabilities—including the infiltration of more units of the “People’s Army of North Vietnam” If our air attacks against the North are confined within the limits recommended in the Secretary of Defense’s memorandum, we will in effect be pressing the conflict on the ground where our capabilities enjoy the least comparative advantage. In these circumstances—and given the enemy’s known resolve and skill concerning attrition tactics over the long term—I am concerned that we will find ourselves pinned down, with little choice left among possible subsequent courses of action: i.e., disengagement at very high cost, or broadening the conflict in quantum jumps We can expect requirements for an ever-increasing commitment of US personnel, but we cannot reasonably predict that this will materially improve the chances for victory. In the final analysis, the submission of the Viet Cong can only be brought about by forcing Hanoi to the necessary decision.

“We may,” Admiral Raborn declared, “become bogged down in a military effort which we cannot win, and from which we cannot easily extricate ourselves.” During the next few months, events would bear out many points in Admiral Raborn’s forecast.⁵⁰

Into the Battle, June 1965– February 1966

Until mid-1965, the Johnson administration moved deliberately toward committing American ground forces to combat in South Vietnam. The President and his advisers acted on the rationale that US troops would temporarily supplement the RVNAF while Saigon's forces built up their own strength. In June and July 1965, however, South Vietnam was hit simultaneously by an expanding enemy military offensive and an internal governmental crisis. In response, the American administration abandoned its gradualist approach to the ground war. It decided to commit large numbers of US troops as rapidly as possible, not merely to reinforce the RVNAF but instead to assume indefinitely the dominant role in ground operations.

South Vietnam in Crisis

After a temporary pause in April and early May to train and refit, the Viet Cong, reinforced by a steady flow of North Vietnamese units and supplies, launched a new offensive during the late spring and summer of 1965. This offensive, according to Hanoi's official historians, was aimed at "maintaining the initiative, inflicting greater defeats on the puppet regular army, and administering an initial thrashing to the American aggressor army." Mixing small-unit attacks, popular uprisings to destroy strategic hamlets, and large-scale main force assaults, the enemy sought to bleed Saigon's forces and compress them into urban strong points while Communist cadres and guerrillas extended their domination of the countryside.¹

As Communist pressure mounted, the government's military position deteriorated rapidly throughout most of the country. The enemy held the initiative in all four corps tactical zones even after the arrival of the first US troops. In the I CTZ, the Viet Cong cut

almost all the main transportation routes. Coastal Route 1, the principal north-south highway, was impassable throughout much of the corps area of responsibility. The railroad was operable only between Hue and Da Nang. Effectively, the government controlled only the major cities. In II CTZ, the Viet Cong forced the ARVN to abandon several districts, besides severing or interdicting the region's major land lines of communication. ARVN commanders in the zone more and more went on the defensive, and the government controlled only a small part of the population, concentrated largely along the coast. The story was much the same further south in III Corps. All the major roads and most of the minor ones were either cut or under continual harassment. Government control in the countryside was confined largely to the Hop Tac pacification zone around Saigon. Only in IV CTZ, the Mekong Delta, did the government seem to be holding its own. There the Communists, who did not regard the Delta as a decisive military battlefield, applied just enough pressure to tie down three ARVN divisions. The enemy had the capability to conduct multi-battalion operations at will in all the corps areas.²

In these larger actions, the enemy displayed continuing improvement in weaponry and tactical proficiency, as well as a willingness to accept heavy casualties in pursuit of their objectives. In three battles during May and June, Viet Cong main force regiments fought the ARVN in sustained engagements and inflicted heavy losses. At Song Be and Dong Xoai north of Saigon in III Corps and at Ba Gia in southern I Corps, the enemy attacked district towns or other outposts. Then they ambushed and mauled government relief forces, which too often arrived piecemeal and were cut up the same way. At Dong Xoai, the worst government defeat, over 400 ARVN soldiers died before the Viet Cong successfully broke contact and withdrew.³

The enemy was steadily growing in strength. In April, US intelligence confirmed the presence in South Vietnam of a regiment of the North Vietnamese *325th Division*, believed to have entered the country during December and January. Unconfirmed reports indicated that two other regiments of the division were also in the South. In fact, the regiments had arrived and others were on the way down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. US officials believed that Hanoi was sending its regular units to assist the Viet Cong in increasing the tempo of their campaign and to hasten a Communist victory. On 14 July, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, received an appraisal of enemy strength that identified 10 main force regimental headquarters, including the North Vietnamese one, 65 battalions (about 400 men each), 188 companies, and 144 platoons with a total manpower strength of about 48,550. Another 17,600 personnel were believed engaged in combat support operations. American intelligence estimated that the enemy had increased his strength in organized combat units over 50 percent since mid-1964, and behind the formed units stood many thousands of local guerrillas and political cadres.⁴

As enemy strength grew, that of the RVNAF began to shrink, due to casualties in the intensified fighting and soaring desertion rates. Events had overtaken the RVNAF expansion plans adopted in late 1964. In June, General Westmoreland perforce suspended creation of the authorized new units in favor of restoring existing battalions to an approximation of full strength. With the approval of CINCPAC and the JCS, he deferred

activation of 11 battalions scheduled for the next several months and used the manpower instead as replacements. To produce still more replacements quickly, the Saigon government shortened basic recruit training from 12 weeks to 9 and battalion training from 21 weeks to 18. None of these measures, however, prevented a steady worsening of the strength ratio between government and enemy forces. In absolute numbers, the RVNAF still was larger than its adversary; but the ratio of superiority needed to advance pacification was rapidly disappearing. Still more damaging, the enemy main force, free of defense requirements, often could achieve local numerical superiority over the ARVN.⁵

Even as the military situation worsened, the civilian government in Saigon collapsed. During the spring, Premier Phan Huy Quat's regime had shown encouraging signs of stability and increasing authority. On 5 May, the RVNAF generals dissolved their Armed Forces Council in order, they claimed, to concentrate on the war as it became more decisive. At the same time, the military members of the cabinet and the National Legislative Council announced plans to resign their positions and pledge support for the legal government. For the first time in over four months, the government would be completely in civilian hands.⁶

The emergence of a civilian government in Saigon proved to be only a prelude to yet another political upheaval. Following the dissolution of the AFC, Premier Quat precipitated a crisis when he tried to dismiss two of his cabinet ministers. Chief of State Phan Khac Suu refused to confirm the dismissals, claiming they were illegal under the terms of the Provisional Charter. Mr. Suu suggested that Premier Quat resign instead, and then Mr. Suu would reappoint him, leaving him free to create a new cabinet. The political impasse, which could not be resolved because of imprecise wording of the interim constitutional Charter, rapidly assumed crisis proportions. A growing number of dissident elements, especially the militant Catholic refugees, who accused the Premier of discriminating against them, coalesced behind Mr. Suu in opposition to Premier Quat. US officials believed that the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects also were involved in the campaign against the Premier. Ambassador Taylor warned Premier Quat that Catholic sentiment against him was very strong and the longer he postponed reaching an agreement with them the greater would be the pressure they mounted against him.⁷

The deadlock continued through late May and early June. Finally Mr. Quat, in desperation, obtained his cabinet's agreement to invite the generals to mediate the dispute. On 11 June, a delegation of generals met with the Prime Minister, his cabinet, the National Legislative Council, and Chief of State Suu. The military leaders decided to assume control of the government, the civilian members of which would resign. They also dissolved the NLC, thus ending the "civil solution" to the governing of South Vietnam and placing the military once more in the center of politics.⁸

Most of the officers who forced out Quat and Suu were members of the "Young Turk" clique that had emerged in late 1964. They possessed certain characteristics besides their relative youth: they were mostly from central or north Vietnam and shared an intellectual affinity with Buddhist leader Tri Quang; they were strongly nationalistic with overtones of xenophobia; they were disillusioned with the recent experiment with

civilian rule; they wanted decisive governmental action producing immediate, concrete results; and they were authoritarian, tending to oversimplify the complexity of government and questioning the ability of the antiquated South Vietnamese bureaucracy to meet the challenges facing their country. The new leaders wanted a lean, simplified, and authoritarian government directed by younger men whose prime purpose would be to gear the nation for war.⁹

On 14 June, the RVNAF issued a decree outlining the new government. Supreme authority was vested in a Congress of the Armed Forces made up, like the old AFC, of all RVNAF general officers. Below this body and created by it was a ten-member directory, the Council for Leadership of the Nation, chaired by Major General Nguyen Van Thieu. The chief policy-making body, the Council was composed of Capital region and Corps commanders, the Chief of the Joint General Staff, the Minister of Defense, a Secretary-General, and Vice Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky as Commissioner for the Executive, or Prime Minister. Marshal Ky in turn would select a largely civilian cabinet responsible to the Council, which would implement the government's policies. The armed forces promised to "hand over power to the people's elected representatives the day security and order are re-established, liberty assured, and the Communists completely crushed." On 19 June, Prime Minister Ky presented his cabinet and announced a 26-point program to place the country on a war footing. In trips to Hue and Nha Trang in the days following his accession to power, Prime Minister Ky issued calls for austerity, integrity, and mobilization for victory.¹⁰

The military takeover of June 1965 marked the end of the post-Diem interregnum in Saigon and the beginning of a movement toward governmental stability and ultimately an elected constitutional regime. At the time, however, the leaders of the United States mission viewed this fifth South Vietnamese government in eighteen months with caution and some trepidation. The Americans regarded the two dominant figures of the new government, General Thieu and Marshal Ky, as of questionable intentions and ability. General Thieu, Premier Quat's former Defense Minister, had performed acceptably as a division and corps commander but politically was an unknown quantity. Vice Air Marshal Ky had been a leading Young Turk and had made a creditable record as head of the VNAF. However, he was impulsive and outspoken, in contrast to the reserved Thieu, and affected purple flight suits and pearl-handled revolvers. Ambassador Taylor declared himself "disturbed" by Ky's selection as Prime Minister. "While he is a well-motivated, courageous, and patriotic officer who has matured considerably over the past two years, he is completely without the background and experience necessary for an assignment as difficult as this one." Despite their doubts, the American team in Saigon prepared to give all possible practical and moral support to the new regime, but they had little hope for immediate improvements. With the RVNAF leaders again preoccupied with politics, South Vietnam's capacity to counter the intensifying Communist military offensive was particularly in doubt. General Westmoreland later stated: "With governments coming and going as if Saigon was a revolving door, I could see little possibility of the South Vietnamese overcoming the military crisis."¹¹

ARC LIGHT: The B-52s Enter the Fight

During the spring and early summer, General Westmoreland relied primarily on his US air power to reinforce the RVNAF against the enemy offensive. To supplement his tactical fighter-bombers, he acquired a major new air weapon: B-52 heavy bombers of the Strategic Air Command. On 11 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed CINCSAC to deploy 30 of the nuclear bombers, refitted to carry large conventional bomb loads, to Anderson AFB, Guam, and 30 KC-135 jet tankers to Kadena AFB, Okinawa, for possible use against North Vietnam. The JCS also had authorized additional tanker aircraft to support this movement and ordered CINCSAC to ready the B-52s for operations immediately upon arrival.¹²

Just how these SAC planes would be used remained under active discussion during the first half of 1965. Military planners generally favored employing them against North Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed this measure as early as November 1964 and, again, in February 1965 in the first ROLLING THUNDER program. State Department officials, however, had opposed sending the B-52s against North Vietnam. They argued that the use of strategic bombers would represent a much higher level of military action against the North than use of tactical aircraft and might cause a more drastic Soviet or Chinese reaction. Other factors also militated against using the B-52s in ROLLING THUNDER. B-52 bombing techniques required offset aiming points, or specific ground reference locations to assist in hitting the target, which were difficult to find in the North. Some of the President's advisers doubted that B-52s could bomb as accurately as claimed, and all recognized the serious propaganda consequences that might follow the shooting down of a B-52 over North Vietnam. The administration therefore eliminated the B-52s from the ROLLING THUNDER program.¹³

General John D. Ryan, USAF, CINCSAC, had never favored using his strategic bombers in a conventional role. Keeping the 30 B-52s on Guam and 30 KC-135 tankers on Okinawa in a conventional alert posture undermined the overall readiness of his forces. Accordingly, on 29 March, General Ryan informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he proposed to remove one-third of both types of these planes. In view of recent events in Southeast Asia and of other actions in progress to increase PACOM's conventional capabilities, the Joint Chiefs ordered CINCSAC not to redeploy any forces from that area. Meanwhile, other events were occurring that would eventually lead to commitment of the big bombers to what amounted to a tactical role in South rather than North Vietnam.¹⁴

In South Vietnam, the B-52s offered a solution to a tactical problem. The Viet Cong had built elaborate headquarters complexes and troop assembly camps spread over extensive jungle areas. These bases sheltered military region headquarters and entire battalions, as well as groups of buildings, foxholes and trenches, tunnels, and underground storage depots. Rough terrain and thick jungle hid these complexes from air observation; and the targets were widely dispersed and difficult to pinpoint even when located on maps or aerial photographs, preventing fighter-bombers from attacking

them effectively. Nevertheless, successful bombing of these bases would deal a serious blow to the enemy. Accordingly, early in March 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began considering the use of B-52s against area targets in South Vietnam. With their ability to deliver large payloads over wide areas in a short time and to bomb accurately from high altitudes, their invulnerability to anti-aircraft fire, and their all-weather capability, the B-52s appeared ideally suited for these missions.¹⁵

In April, General Westmoreland massed most of his available tactical aircraft against a single Viet Cong base area with poor results, thus making it clear that fighter-bombers were unsuited for such attacks. When the MACV commander met with Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler at Honolulu on 19–20 April, he urged the employment of B-52s against these base area targets.¹⁶

Ten days later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and CINCSAC that, in light of the current situation, the B-52s could be used for area saturation attacks against known Viet Cong occupied installations and facilities for which precise target data for pinpoint bombing strikes was not available. They requested CINCSAC to develop a capability to use B-52s in area saturation attacks and to coordinate with CINCPAC on plans for employment of the heavy bombers in South Vietnam. On 6 May, at Defense Department direction, CINCSAC and CINCPAC representatives met in Hawaii and agreed on targeting and coordination procedures. SAC retained command of its bombers and would plan and carry out strikes in support of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. Each mission would have to be approved by either President Johnson or Secretary McNamara.¹⁷

On 14 May, General Westmoreland made his first request for a B-52 strike. He told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that his intelligence section was developing information locating the headquarters of the 325th PAVN Division and two Viet Cong military region headquarters, which included a large number of troops. The enemy, he argued, was known to fear air strikes. The best way to keep him off balance and prevent unexpected large Viet Cong attacks would be to maintain constant pressure on the enemy's base areas. To do this, General Westmoreland stated, "we must provide a capability which will permit us to deliver a well planned pattern of bombs over large areas and preferably within a short period of time." The MACV commander had already discussed this problem with SAC representatives at Honolulu and believed that SAC's conventional pattern bombing tactics would be ideal for the proposed mission. "I strongly recommend, therefore," he concluded, "that as a matter of urgency, we be authorized to employ SAC B-52 aircraft against selected targets in RVN." General Westmoreland specifically recommended strikes against area targets in Kontum Province (II CTZ) and War Zone D (III CTZ).¹⁸

Ambassador Taylor concurred in the use of B-52s in strikes in South Vietnam and foresaw no problem in getting the Saigon government's approval. He pointed out, however, that employment of B-52s would have some international political implications and that the State Department would want to take a careful look at the proposal. The main problem might be Japanese objections to the use of Okinawa as a base for supporting

the missions. Admiral Sharp strongly backed General Westmoreland's recommendation and asked authority to have SAC conduct the necessary radar photography over the target areas to assist in strike planning.¹⁹

On 17 May, the JCS approved a single reconnaissance sortie, SHORT SPRINT, over Kontum province. But shortly thereafter, the targets in the Kontum area dispersed, and as a result, the sortie was cancelled. On 10 June, COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC of several new and significant targets. He asked that preliminary actions be taken so that B-52s could strike one of these as soon as it appeared sufficiently lucrative. Coincidentally, that very day the Joint Chiefs had approved in principle the use of B-52s in South Vietnam provided suitable targets could be located. They asked CINCPAC for full operational details on these latest targets. The most promising appeared to be a densely wooded area, two by four kilometers in size, northwest of Saigon. General Westmoreland believed that the area was a launching point for Viet Cong attacks and contained the headquarters of the Saigon-Cholon VC Military Committee, which directed operations in that part of South Vietnam. He also thought that this area concealed three battalions of enemy troops. On 15 June, he asked that the B-52s strike this area "to blunt a monsoon offensive in the area north of Saigon."²⁰

After approval by higher authority, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the strike, code named ARC LIGHT I, executed on the morning of 18 June. On schedule, 30 bombers took off from Guam on the mission. Two aircraft collided in mid-air en route to the target, with the loss of most of their crews, and one aborted. Twenty-seven reached the target and dropped a total of 1,530 bombs. Results were anticlimactic. Ground teams, penetrating the area within hours after the attack, found no evidence that the raid had caused any Viet Cong casualties or damaged any installations. The Joint Chiefs noted that a spate of prestrike message traffic and telephone calls might very well have tipped off the enemy to the impending operation.²¹

Like the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Westmoreland believed that ARC LIGHT strikes would achieve better results with improved pre-attack security and more rapid planning and authorization. At Admiral Sharp's urging, the MACV commander promptly proposed an additional mission so as to "establish a pattern for the employment of this capability." On 23 June, the President approved the next strike, ARC LIGHT II, adding his hope that the attack would achieve better results than the first.²²

As Admiral Sharp had wished, ARC LIGHT strikes settled into a pattern. On 14 July, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued general planning instructions for the conduct of the missions and assigned specific responsibilities to CINCPAC and CINCSAC. Eight days later, they authorized the conduct of routine B-52 reconnaissance flights over South Vietnam. During July, SAC bombers flew five ARC LIGHT missions against targets developed by COMUSMACV; and by 17 August a total of nine missions had been flown. In spite of Air Staff objections to the diversion of strategic bombers to conventional tactical operations, ARC LIGHT had joined MACV's arsenal of weapons.²³

A New Call for US Reinforcements

Even before the Quat government fell and the B-52s went into action, Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland had concluded that large US ground reinforcements were essential to South Vietnam's survival of its current military crisis and to the achievement of American objectives in the war. On 3 June, Ambassador Taylor reported that he and his colleagues did not "believe that any feasible amount of bombing of the North is of itself likely to cause the DRV to cease and desist in its actions in the South." Hanoi would back down "only when, along with a sense of mounting pain from the bombings, there is also a conviction on their part that the tide has turned or soon will turn against them in the South." These two conditions, Ambassador Taylor concluded, "have not yet been met and our job in the coming months will be to bring them about. This may take a long time and we should not expect quick results."²⁴

Two days later, the Ambassador transmitted to Washington an estimate of the political and military situation drafted by the mission intelligence council and concurred in by himself, Deputy Ambassador Johnson, and General Westmoreland. In the estimate, the mission reviewed the troubles of the Quat government and the mounting Communist military offensive. The estimate declared that the enemy was seeking to destroy the ARVN piecemeal and to extend Viet Cong control of rural areas by "constricting" government forces to the principal towns and cities. He had yet to commit his full main force strength. The mission saw signs that ARVN morale was deteriorating and warned that "the cumulative psychological impact of a series of significant ARVN defeats could lead to a collapse in ARVN's will to continue to fight, despite the presence in South Vietnam of US forces. To ward against the possibility of such a collapse, it will probably be necessary to commit US ground forces to action."²⁵

Concerned by General Taylor's assessments, the administration called the Ambassador back to Washington for another policy review, to be held on 8 June. Meanwhile, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to reopen the issue of deploying some of the forces specified but not recommended at the 20 April Honolulu conference, in particular more Marines for III MAF and the Army airmobile division for the central highlands. On 4 June, General Wheeler requested from COMUSMACV and CINCPAC their views on deploying the division and their estimate of when the US logistic base in South Vietnam would be capable of supporting it.²⁶

On 7 June, General Westmoreland responded to the Chairman with an urgent request for more American and third country troops—many more. He repeated the mission's assessment that the Viet Cong were gaining ground and that enemy strength and aggressiveness were growing while ARVN numbers and morale were declining. With the force ratio changing in the enemy's favor, General Westmoreland declared, "the GVN cannot stand up successfully to this kind of pressure without reinforcement." The MACV commander stated:

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 [be] 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 The basic purpose of the additional deployments recommended ... is to give us a substantial and hard hitting offensive capability on the ground to convince the VC that they cannot win.

General Westmoreland divided his troop request into two groups: those on which "decisions should be made now" and further actions "on which planning should start and on which separate recommendations will be forthcoming." In the first group, he included the remaining ground and air elements of III MAF (8,000 personnel), the Army airmobile division and logistic supporting elements (21,000 personnel), an Army corps headquarters (1,500 personnel), the South Korean Marine RCT (4,000 personnel), and the balance of the South Korean division (14,500 personnel), along with large contingents of logistic support troops and additional tactical fighter squadrons. General Westmoreland wanted to keep the 173rd Airborne Brigade in South Vietnam until the airmobile division arrived and was ready for operations. Of these forces, the Marines would go to I CTZ and the other combat units would reinforce II CTZ, which General Westmoreland considered most in need of more ground troops. In the second group, the MACV commander included three US Army antiaircraft missile battalions, the remainder of the 1st Infantry Division or the 101st Airborne Division, and an additional Marine amphibious brigade for III MAF, plus still more tactical air units and support forces, including helicopter units.²⁷

From discussions with CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the ensuing weeks, General Westmoreland's troop request underwent some refinement and clarification. General Westmoreland asked to keep the 173rd Airborne Brigade indefinitely after other Army combat units arrived. In the end, General Westmoreland's troop request for the rest of 1965 included supporting elements and 44 maneuver battalions (34 American, 9 South Korean, and 1 Australian). These units were all to be in South Vietnam by the end of the year. Of those battalions, 7 US Marine, 2 US Army, and 1 Australian already were in the country. Under previous authorizations, 6 more US Army battalions and a South Korean RCT would deploy during July. General Westmoreland wanted the remaining forces to be sent during August, September, and October.

During June, General Westmoreland outlined his concept for employing these forces. He envisioned a military division of labor. "My concept," he declared, "is basically to employ US forces, together with Vietnamese airborne and marine battalions of the general reserve, against the hardcore North Vietnam/Viet Cong forces in reaction and search and destroy operations, and thus permit the concentration of Vietnamese troops in the heavily populated areas." In the absence of American and third country reinforcements, the ARVN had faced the dilemma of either concentrating, to the neglect of pacification, to meet the main force threat or remaining spread out for territorial security at the risk of piecemeal destruction by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong big units. Under General Westmoreland's proposed arrangement, the bulk of the ARVN and the territorial forces

could operate against the Viet Cong guerrillas and political cadres, hopefully improving rural security and advancing pacification while shielded by their allies.²⁸

Admiral Sharp and the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported General Westmoreland's request. CINCPAC concurred on 7 June. On the 11th, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to Secretary McNamara deployment of all the units in COMUSMACV's "decision should be made now" group but reserved comment on the units in the second, less urgent, category. As he had done in previous troop debates, General McConnell, the Air Force Chief of Staff, argued against sending more US soldiers to fight in South Vietnam without intensifying the air assault on the North. The Joint Chiefs accordingly added to their recommendation a call for heavier bombing of North Vietnam.²⁹

Toward the Rubicon

Robert McNamara recalled that of the thousands of cables he received as Secretary of Defense, General Westmoreland's 7 June request for troops "disturbed me most." The administration now was "forced to make a decision. We could no longer postpone a choice about which path to take." President Johnson, nevertheless, attempted to do just that. He was deeply reluctant to commit himself and his country, at heavy domestic and international political cost, to a war with at best doubtful prospects of success. At the same time, the President did not want to lose South Vietnam, equally for fear of domestic and international consequences. Accordingly, President Johnson spun out for more than a month the deliberations over General Westmoreland's request. He tried to escape his dilemma by making decisions incrementally and announcing them to the public the same way. Thereby, he preserved an illusion that he retained freedom of action, but in fact he steadily closed off his options. Throughout, he was unhappy with the situation and the advice he was receiving. On 21 June, he told Mr. McNamara:

I think that in time ... it's going to be difficult for us to very long prosecute effectively a war that far away from home with the divisions that we have here and particularly the potential divisions I'm very depressed about it because I see no program from either Defense or State that gives me much hope of doing anything except just praying and grasping to hold on during [the] monsoon [season] and hope they'll quit. And I don't believe they're ever goin' [sic] to quit. And I don't see ... that we have any ... plan for victory militarily or diplomatically³⁰

During frequent meetings of the policy principals, usually including General Wheeler, the administration's first reaction was to give General Westmoreland less than what he had requested. At a meeting on 8 June, with Ambassador Taylor attending, Secretary McNamara recommended sending enough troops to bring total US strength in South Vietnam to about 95,000, whereas General Westmoreland's two increments, if both deployed, would bring American numbers to more than 150,000. Conveniently, Mr. McNamara's

suggested number about equaled what it would be logistically feasible to introduce into South Vietnam between June and the end of September, allowing postponement of a decision on the rest. Secretary of State Rusk, Ambassador Taylor, and the President's other advisers concurred in this approach. Accordingly, at Secretary McNamara's direction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 17 June prepared a deployment plan that would raise US forces from the previously authorized 69,593 to approximately 117,000, with the majority of the troops scheduled to arrive in South Vietnam in the next several months. This program would add seven US maneuver battalions, bringing the total to 22—half of General Westmoreland's goal. It also provided for an increase of 1,250 in allied forces, bringing their total to 19,750 by 1 November 1965.³¹

Neither the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington nor COMUSMACV and CINCPAC in the field believed that the partial deployment plan would be sufficient. At General Wheeler's urging, General Westmoreland elaborated upon his requirement for the full number of troops and upon his plans for using them. He emphasized that his recommendations of 7 June were measures needed merely to stabilize the situation. To carry the war to the enemy, he would require still more ground and air forces. The MACV commander declared that the struggle had become a war of attrition. Short of a decision to employ nuclear weapons "against sources and channels of enemy power," he stated on 24 June, no likelihood existed of achieving "a quick, favorable end to the war." The United States must face up to the fact that it was in for a long struggle and one that would involve increasing numbers of US troops. Supporting COMUSMACV's call for additional forces, Admiral Sharp stated that the full force of 34 US and 10 third country maneuver battalions was required.³²

Even as the administration debated General Westmoreland's reinforcement request, it made other decisions that moved the United States closer to an all-out shooting war. In one of the most important of these actions, it reaffirmed and broadened COMUSMACV's authority to use his American troops in offensive combat. In early April, President Johnson had expanded the troops' mission from defense of US bases to counterinsurgency combat operations; and General Westmoreland then made plans to move the Marines and the 173rd Airborne Brigade step-by-step from security to their enlarged role.³³

The administration, however, did not publicly announce the mission change until 8 June, when a State Department briefing officer did so at a press conference. His almost casual reference caused a congressional and media uproar, with charges that the administration was sliding the country into full-scale war without an open debate. To appease the critics, administration officials, among them Secretary of State Rusk, issued statements to the effect that the troops' mission had not changed and remained primarily the defense of US bases. These pronouncements alarmed and confused General Westmoreland, who was considering committing his battalions to assist the ARVN in the battle then raging at Dong Xoai. The general sought clarification of his authority. After several exchanges of messages, Secretary Rusk, at Ambassador Taylor's request, clarified the administration's position. On 26 June, Mr. Rusk informed the Ambassador that COMUSMACV could commit US troops "independently of or in conjunction with"

the South Vietnamese “in any situation in which the use of such troops is requested by an appropriate GVN commander and when, in COMUSMACV’s judgment, their use is necessary to strengthen the relative position of GVN forces.” For practical purposes, the administration thus gave the MACV commander a free hand to conduct both unilateral and combined operations for any purpose anywhere in South Vietnam.³⁴

Meanwhile, the reinforcement debate continued in Washington, against the background of the change of government in Saigon and continuing reports of South Vietnamese military setbacks. On 23 June, a critical high-level meeting took place at which Secretary McNamara was present but General Wheeler was not. Discussing policy alternatives that would be open to the administration at the end of summer, all present accepted the need for additional US forces. Under Secretary of State George Ball argued, as he had in an earlier memorandum for the President, for holding the troop level at a maximum of 100,000. If that were not enough to turn the tide, Ball favored cutting US losses by negotiating a way out of South Vietnam and falling back to Thailand. Secretaries McNamara and Rusk retorted that Thailand could not be held if South Vietnam were given up. Reversing his earlier position, McNamara advocated granting General Westmoreland’s full troop request and increasing the bombing of North Vietnam while at the same time launching a more intensive negotiating effort. At the end, President Johnson, who had not interjected his own views, directed Mr. McNamara and Mr. Ball to produce studies respectively of military and diplomatic moves over the next three months and beyond, for presentation the following week.³⁵

In a memorandum completed on 26 June and presented in a revised version to the President on 1 July, Secretary McNamara laid out a “program of expanded military and political moves with respect to Vietnam.” He defined the United States’ objective as “to create conditions for a favorable settlement by demonstrating to the VC/DRV that the odds are against their winning.” Under existing conditions, this objective was not being achieved “largely because the ratio of guerrilla to anti-guerrilla forces is unfavorable to the government.” The United States now had three possible courses of action: 1) “cut our losses and withdraw under the best conditions that can be arranged”; 2) continue at about the present US force level, “holding on and playing for the breaks while recognizing that our position will probably grow weaker”; or 3) “expand substantially the US military pressure against the Viet Cong in the South and the North Vietnamese in the North and at the same time launch a vigorous effort on the political side to get negotiations started.” As the President had requested, Secretary McNamara outlined the details of the third approach.

The core of Secretary McNamara’s military program was to increase US and South Vietnamese ground force strength “enough to prove to the VC that they cannot win and thus to turn the tide of the war.” To that end, the administration should decide “now to bring the US/3d country deployments to 44 battalions within the next few months.” The buildup, which should re-establish the military balance by the end of December, would include the units General Westmoreland had requested, notably the airmobile division, as well as additional helicopter companies and other support troops. Secretary McNamara noted that General Westmoreland probably would require still more men in

1966 but had not yet prepared a solid estimate of the number. To support this buildup, the United States should call up about 100,000 reservists and extend tours of duty in all Services. Against North Vietnam, the Defense Secretary recommended much heavier bombing of communications and war-supporting facilities, as well as aerial mining of the major ports. Besides these military measures, Secretary McNamara recommended political moves to “open a dialogue with Hanoi, Peking, and the VC”; to keep the Soviet Union from increasing its military support of North Vietnam; and to solidify support of American policy by the US public, allies, and friends and keep international opposition at a “manageable” level.³⁶

In line with Mr. McNamara’s proposals, on 2 July, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested that the Secretary of Defense approve an additional deployment program “to insure that the VC/DRV cannot win in South Vietnam at their present level of commitment.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff called for the deployment of the Air Mobile Division, the remainder of the 1st Infantry Division (one brigade of the division was already approved for Qui Nhon), one MAB, a Marine fighter attack squadron, and 8,000 additional support troops. In addition, they recommended movement to South Vietnam of three artillery battalions, three HAWK battalions, four additional attack squadrons, various helicopter units, a corps headquarters, and still more logistic support. Under this plan, total United States forces in South Vietnam would amount to about 175,000 men, including 34 maneuver battalions. The Joint Chiefs repeated the requirement for 19,750 allied troops, including a South Korean division of six maneuver battalions and four other third country maneuver battalions.³⁷

On 2 July, President Johnson met at the White House with Secretaries McNamara and Rusk, George Ball, and McGeorge Bundy to discuss the Vietnam policy papers submitted to him the previous day. The papers included Mr. McNamara’s recommendation for stronger military action, Ball’s advocacy of a diplomatic search for a way out, and separate observations by Mr. Rusk and Mr. Bundy. The President again delayed a final decision until the end of July, by which time important domestic legislation would have cleared Congress. In the meantime, he dispatched Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler to Saigon to evaluate the situation and review military plans; Ambassador at Large Averell Harriman to Moscow to explore reconvening the Geneva Conference; and Mr. Ball to Paris to try to make contact with Hanoi’s representatives there. (Neither diplomatic mission produced any results.)³⁸

Before leaving for Saigon in mid-July, Secretary McNamara took two significant actions. He laid down for the Joint Chiefs a schedule and guidance “leading toward” a national decision on additional deployments. The schedule provided that, following Secretary McNamara’s return, there would be discussions with the State Department and White House between 22 and 26 July, with a Presidential decision tentatively set for the 26th. The Secretary of Defense stated that the rationale for force increases remained “what it has been under three Presidents: To provide whatever support is necessary to assist South Vietnam in preserving its freedom.” At the same time, Secretary McNamara put Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance to work on detailed plans for a reserve

call-up, extension of tours of duty, and increased draft calls to support provision of all the troops Westmoreland had requested. The Defense Secretary directed that there would be no net reduction in US troops and equipment in Europe and that a presidential declaration of emergency should be avoided in favor of congressional action similar to that taken in the Berlin crisis of 1961.³⁹

These initiatives by Mr. McNamara pointed toward an open-ended US commitment to ground combat in South Vietnam. In still another indication of the direction in which the administration was moving, on 29 June, Secretary McNamara, through General Wheeler, asked Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland what forces, beyond those already requested, they would need during 1966 to prove to the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong that they could not win in South Vietnam. Separately, the Defense Secretary told CINCPAC that the United States should not “depend upon further ARVN buildup since thus far it had not been sufficient to offset losses plus VC gains and further it was too unreliable a factor.” In response, General Westmoreland declared that the 44 battalion program would be enough to re-establish the military balance but would not “cause the enemy to back off.” He put the MACV staff to work on an estimate of additional troop requirements for 1966. Based more on guesses and assumptions than hard data, the staff produced a recommended 1966 reinforcement of 24 US maneuver battalions plus combat and logistic support units and tactical air squadrons, a total of about 100,000 additional men. General Westmoreland incorporated this estimate, his original 44-battalion request, and his assessment of their effects on the military situation, into a briefing to be presented to Secretary McNamara.⁴⁰

Besides General Wheeler, a new US Ambassador to South Vietnam joined Secretary McNamara on his July trip to Saigon. When he accepted the Saigon post in mid-1964, Ambassador Taylor had committed himself to serve for only one year. In mid-1965, with his year’s service completed, General Taylor submitted his resignation. Although there was speculation that Ambassador Taylor had resigned because of policy differences with President Johnson, both men publicly denied this; and in fact personal and family considerations apparently motivated the general. On 8 July, President Johnson announced that Henry Cabot Lodge, Taylor’s predecessor as Ambassador to South Vietnam, now would be his successor. Preparing for his Senate confirmation hearings, Mr. Lodge, who would not take over his position until August, accompanied Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler to Saigon for a fresh look at the situation and an opportunity to participate in decisions he would be helping to carry out.⁴¹

The 44-Battalion Request Approved

Secretary McNamara and his party arrived in Saigon on 16 July and plunged at once into five days of conferences with senior US civilian and military officials and with leaders of the new South Vietnamese regime. In preparation for his trip, the Secretary of Defense had informed Ambassador Taylor that the “main purpose” of his visit would be

to receive mission recommendations, in numbers and types of units and total personnel, for US force deployments during the rest of 1965, along with “probable” requirements for 1966. Throughout the meetings, recalled the MACV Chief of Staff, Major General William B. Rosson, USA, discussion “revolved almost exclusively around the need for a major US effort—one calling for greater assets, greater vigor, greater effectiveness ... McNamara himself was dynamic and convincing—one who had a tremendous grasp for detail and who exuded confidence and a positive approach.”⁴²

In his briefing, General Westmoreland told the visiting officials that the RVNAF no longer held the military initiative and that the South Vietnamese people were losing confidence in their government because of the armed forces’ decreasing ability to protect critical rural areas and lines of communication. The only way to arrest this unfavorable trend, General Westmoreland said, was to greatly increase US and third country troop strength.

COMUSMACV cast his force requirements in a two-phased plan that had Ambassador Taylor’s approval. Phase I included the forces needed to “stem the tide,” i.e., halt the Viet Cong offensive, and would cover the remainder of 1965. Phase II represented the forces to “turn the tide”—make sufficient viable progress in high priority areas to convince the enemy that he could not win. Phase II forces would be deployed during the first half of 1966. The Phase I ground forces included 44 maneuver battalions, 26 combat support battalions (22 artillery and four air defense), 13 engineer battalions, 20 US Army helicopter companies, seven USMC helicopter squadrons, and three US Army helicopter battalions and service units, totaling 154,662 men. This phase also included 4,000 naval personnel and 26 Air Force squadrons of various types, amounting to 17,500 men. Total Phase I requirements would be 176,162. Phase II would include 24 maneuver battalions, 17 combat support battalions, various helicopter units, and nine USAF squadrons, totaling an additional 94,810 personnel. Together Phases I and II would amount to 270,972 people, nearly four times the approximately 70,000 US forces in South Vietnam in July 1965. General Westmoreland warned his visitors that without these reinforcements, the Viet Cong would gain a more favorable strength ratio; the stability of the Saigon government would be weakened further; and there would soon exist a requirement for even greater resources on a more urgent basis and against greater odds.⁴³

On 17 July, while the Saigon meetings were still going on, Secretary McNamara received a message from Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance, who had been working on the details of meeting the 44-battalion request. Mr. Vance reported that he had met three times with the President regarding “actions associated with [the] 34 battalion plan.” The President had told Vance that it was his “current intention” to provide the entire reinforcement. However, he could not ask Congress for full funding for the expanded forces before next January, for fear of derailing his domestic legislative program. Until then, the administration would finance operations by using its existing authority and shifting already appropriated funds. President Johnson indicated willingness to seek legislative authority to call up reserves and extend tours of duty, expressing determination to “bull it through” Congress if necessary.⁴⁴

With the President's inclination becoming clear, Secretary McNamara, upon returning to Washington, on 20 July presented a report calling for expanded military action. Mr. McNamara repeated the definition of US objectives and alternatives and the description of South Vietnam's military and political situation contained in his 1 July memorandum. He recommended deployment of the full 44-battalion force General Westmoreland had requested, with more American battalions added if third country allies failed to meet their quotas. Mr. McNamara added that "the deployment of more men (an additional perhaps 100,000) may be necessary in early 1966, and that the deployment of additional forces thereafter is possible but will depend on developments." Alongside the South Vietnamese and third country allies, the deployed United States forces would seek to "exploit the offensive, with the objects of putting the VC/DRV battalion forces out of operation and destroying their morale."

Against North Vietnam, Secretary McNamara recommended a gradual increase in bombing of targets related to Hanoi's supply of war materiel to the Viet Cong. In addition, the United States should be prepared at any time to carry out a "severe reprisal" for any particularly horrendous enemy action, for example assassination of a high-ranking American official. After the 44 battalions were deployed and some "strong action" taken in ROLLING THUNDER, for example destruction of the key railroad bridges north of Hanoi, the United States "could, as part of a diplomatic initiative, consider introducing a 6–8 week pause in ... bombing the North."

To support the expanded military commitment, the Secretary of Defense recommended that the administration ask Congress for authority to mobilize about 235,000 Reserves and National Guardsmen for at least one year. It should expand the regular forces by some 375,000 by increased recruiting and draft calls and extension of duty tours, after which the reserves could be released. Secretary McNamara recommended also that the administration seek from Congress large supplemental appropriations for FY 1966 to cover the costs of mobilization and expanded war.⁴⁵

President Johnson and his senior advisers spent the following week debating Mr. McNamara's recommendations. The majority, including Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, agreed that the loss of South Vietnam would have serious strategic consequences for the United States and saw no alternative to the Secretary of Defense's proposed course of action. They expressed little regard for the new Saigon government and seemed resigned to the United States taking the major military role in the fight. Under Secretary of State Ball argued the other side, warning that the United States was heading into an unwinnable struggle that would eat up resources and end in failure. The national interest, Mr. Ball said, would be best served by negotiating a way out rather than wasting more assets and prestige in a losing cause. His colleagues generally rejected this argument.

General Wheeler participated regularly in these discussions, and on 22 July all the Joint Chiefs of Staff met with the President. Predictably, the Joint Chiefs endorsed Secretary McNamara's proposed course of action. They argued that the United States could not afford to let South Vietnam fall and that increased American military action was essential to prevent defeat. Generals McConnell and Greene urged heavier bombing

of the North to accompany the dispatch of more troops to the South. General Greene observed that it would take the United States about five years and 500,000 men to defeat the enemy. President Johnson closely questioned the generals on what improvement the additional American forces would make in the situation in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs replied that, at minimum, in Admiral McDonald's words, "we can at least turn the tide where we are not losing any more." To presidential queries about what would happen if the North Vietnamese responded to the American buildup by sending more of their regulars south, the Joint Chiefs replied that allied forces would still outmatch the enemy. Indeed, General Wheeler suggested that larger enemy units would be easier to find and destroy. President Johnson pressed Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs hard on the possibility of Chinese intervention with ground troops. The Chiefs expressed doubt that the Chinese would take such action, which did not reassure the President; but the Army Chief of Staff, General Johnson, acknowledged that if Beijing intervened, "we would have another ball game" and probably a wider war. In sum, the Joint Chiefs of Staff could offer the President only a larger, costlier war; but, like the senior civilians, they presented no alternative course of action that he found acceptable.⁴⁶

At a National Security Council meeting on 27 July, again attended by General Wheeler, President Johnson announced his decision. Essentially, he adopted Secretary McNamara's troop deployment recommendations, but without two critical elements: the reserve mobilization and the immediate large budget request to Congress. He explained:

We have chosen to do what is necessary to meet the present situation, but not to be unnecessarily provocative to either the Russians or the Communist Chinese. We will give the commanders the men they say they need and, out of existing materiel in the US, we will give them the materiel they say they need. We will get the necessary money in the new budget and will use our transfer authority until January This course of action will keep us there during the critical monsoon season and possibly result in some gains. Meanwhile, we will push on the diplomatic side

At the end of the meeting, the President asked "whether anyone in the room opposed the course of action decided upon." No one responded.⁴⁷

The President had already attempted to prepare the public for a substantial increase of American forces in South Vietnam. At a 9 July news conference, he had stated that manpower needs in South Vietnam were increasing and would continue to do so. He had added that whatever was required would be supplied. Nevertheless, on 28 July, he attempted to minimize the full dimensions of his reinforcement decision. He explained that a large increase in US forces was necessary to meet the continuing rise in the enemy's strength. The President said that, in response to General Westmoreland's request, he had ordered to South Vietnam the Air Mobile Division and certain other units, raising the US fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 "almost immediately." While not giving figures for the remainder of the increase, he did say that additional forces would be needed and would be sent at a later time. The President also stated that the reserves would not

be called into service at that time but added that, if later developments required such action, he would make the decision only after careful thought and adequate warning.⁴⁸

President Johnson's decision against mobilization rendered useless much of the planning the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Services had done toward meeting the 44-battalion request. Secretary McNamara announced the decision to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Service secretaries on 24 July and laid out a plan to provide the forces without mobilization. The Joint Chiefs were dismayed by this development, which they knew would slow down the deployment of the requested forces, cause long-term deterioration of readiness in their Services, and degrade the United States' ability to respond to other contingencies. Nevertheless, individually and collectively, the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported their Commander in Chief; they defended his policy in administration councils and meetings with Congressional leaders. At the 27 July NSC meeting, for example, General Wheeler remained silent when the President asked for objections to his plan. General Johnson, who would see the Army nearly wrecked by the attempt to wage war without mobilization, eventually considered resigning in protest. In the end, he joined the other Chiefs in acquiescence—a decision he later characterized as “the worst, the most immoral” of his career.⁴⁹

However much he tried to play down its implications, President Johnson's July program marked a major turning point in the war. The United States had decided to increase its already substantial forces in Vietnam to the extent necessary to match the buildup in enemy strength and to assume the dominant role in ground combat. This decision began a trend that was to require a steady expansion of US forces to match an equally steady increase of enemy strength. American casualties would increase at the same time in proportion to the enlargement of forces and the intensification of fighting.

Refining the 44-Battalion Program

In the months following the July decision, deployments to South Vietnam proceeded within the authorized figures. In view of the great work load the deployments generated, the Secretary of Defense had already informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that movement of individual units, as long as they were within established authorizations, would not require his specific approval. On this basis, troop movements to South Vietnam continued steadily. The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) arrived during September and the 1st Infantry Division closed in October, completing the deployment of major combat units in 1965. Even as these units, and a variety of support elements, streamed into South Vietnam, the total size of the planned reinforcement was increasing and the date of its completion was receding.⁵⁰

Throughout the remainder of 1965 and into 1966, US force deployment planning underwent continuous refinement and adjustment upwards to meet new and changing conditions of the war. Scarcely had Secretary McNamara left Saigon when COMUSMACV found it necessary to adjust his requirements. Consequently, on 30 July 1965, the Joint

Chiefs of Staff presented to the Secretary of Defense a revised deployment program adding approximately 20,000 troops to Phase I (the 1965 reinforcement) and 10,000 to Phase II (the follow-on for 1966), raising total figures to 195,887 for Phase I and the total for both phases to 300,599. Since the Joint Chiefs anticipated additional adjustments in this program, they told the Secretary of Defense that they would comment further, including specific recommendations on Phase II deployments, as refinements were made.⁵¹

In an attempt to establish a more orderly procedure for these refinements, the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened a deployment planning conference to coordinate and complete, insofar as possible, all matters relating to Phase I. This conference met at Pacific Command headquarters from 3 through 6 August and included representatives of the Joint Staff, the Services, OASD(I&L), CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and COMUSKOREA. The conferees produced a refined program for Phase I deployments to South Vietnam and other western Pacific and Southeast Asia bases, which the Joint Chiefs forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 23 August. This program still provided for 34 US maneuver battalions for South Vietnam but raised the total number of required personnel to 210,000. It also called for approximately 41,000 US troops for the Pacific and Southeast Asia outside Vietnam, including three maneuver battalions for Japan and Okinawa.⁵²

On 1 September, the Secretary of Defense asked the President to approve the additional increment for Vietnam, raising the total figure to 210,000. Mr. McNamara recommended that no announcement be made of the decision to send these forces. Instead, the administration should announce deployments only as the forces arrived in the theater. The Secretary of Defense subsequently explained to the President that the increase was needed to provide additional in-country airlift, artillery, and air defense support for combat operations, strike aircraft and associated support, and air base construction. No evidence exists in the record to indicate formal approval of the entire 210,000 program as submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 23 August; but Secretary McNamara did authorize on an individual basis the movement of specific units within that program.⁵³

Phase I required still further refinements to incorporate recommended additions and deletions. Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened another deployment planning conference. Assembling at Honolulu between 27 September and 1 October, the same participants who had met in August produced another refined Phase I deployment program. This plan merely updated the August program, reflecting 9,089 add-on spaces in South Vietnam, bringing the total Phase I figure to 219,619, and 3,445 add-on spaces for elsewhere in WESTPAC and Southeast Asia. Phase I deployments as now scheduled would not be completed until April 1966. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved this refined program on 22 October and directed the Services to prepare to satisfy the add-on requirements. Forwarding the refined program to the Secretary of Defense on 23 October, the Joint Chiefs explained that the add-ons were needed to strengthen the Phase I force structure by providing essential combat and combat service support, command and control elements, and an increase in offshore base capability to adequately sustain combat operations in South Vietnam.⁵⁴

Planning for Phase II

Overlapping Phase I in time, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC worked out the details of the Phase II deployment. The program, which went to the Joint Chiefs of Staff early in November, essentially followed General Westmoreland's original request, as modified by a PACOM planning conference. On 10 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense their recommendations for Phase II operations and deployments. To accomplish the Phase II objective, "to start winning the war," the Joint Chiefs presented a concept of operations, closely following one developed by COMUSMACV, that called for US and allied forces to continue establishing and expanding secure bases and lines of communication in the coastal area and elsewhere as necessary. From these and other bases, the Americans and their allies would launch stepped-up offensive operations to assist Saigon in expanding its control over the militarily and economically important areas of Saigon, the Mekong Delta, the coastal plain, and the central highlands. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concept also provided for intensified air operations against North Vietnam, including attacks on POL and electric power installations and continued assistance to friendly forces in Laos.

To provide additional forces to achieve the objectives in South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a Phase II deployment of approximately 113,000 men (28 maneuver battalions and supporting units). Added to their final Phase I recommendation of 219,600 men, total troop requirements for South Vietnam now amounted to approximately 333,000. Phase II included two Army infantry divisions (the 25th and the 4th), the remainder of the 1st Marine Division, and an armored cavalry regiment, plus four tactical fighter squadrons and 27,000 men for use outside South Vietnam. In order to meet the deployment dates desired by CINCPAC, the JCS recommended the call-up of selected reserve units and individuals, the activation of new units, and the extension of terms of service. Without these measures, the PACOM deployment conference had concluded, most of the Phase II Army units could not reach South Vietnam until the last half of 1966.⁵⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also reviewed the impact of both Phase I and II deployments on the US military posture world-wide. On 24 September, they had pointed out that the United States must increase its forces to: 1) meet the operational requirements of the Vietnam war as well as to maintain forward deployments in Europe and the Western Pacific; 2) supply an adequate training and rotation base to support US military operations and forces world-wide; and 3) provide a military capability to conduct other contingency operations. In November, they informed the Secretary of Defense that the completion of either or both of the two deployment phases would reduce US strength to a degree where, unless promptly reconstituted, it could not support operations in Southeast Asia and other world-wide commitments. To correct this situation, the Joint Chiefs requested authority to acquire, equip, and support seven Army aviation units, one Navy carrier group, four tactical fighter squadrons and three tactical reconnaissance squadrons, and one Marine expeditionary brigade. If Phase II was approved, they

requested similar authority for two infantry divisions, 18 additional Army aviation units, four tactical fighter squadrons, and two-thirds of a Marine expeditionary force. The Joint Chiefs also asked for authority for selective reserve call-ups to provide essential forces that could not be obtained in time through other means.⁵⁶

Well before the Joint Chiefs of Staff made their 10 November recommendations, Secretary McNamara had taken preliminary steps toward implementing Phase II. On 18 October, he directed the Services to plan in terms of completing both deployment phases, with and without a reserve mobilization. Mr. McNamara recommended to the President on 3 November the full implementation of Phase II, which he asserted the Services could do by the end of 1966 without using the reserves. At the same time, the Defense Secretary urged the President to couple Phase II with an extended pause in bombing North Vietnam and a new effort for a diplomatic settlement. The pause, Mr. McNamara said, at best might lead to productive negotiations; at minimum it would show the administration's sincerity in the search for peace, thereby helping to reconcile the American public to a larger, costlier war. President Johnson made no immediate decision on Phase II, but in mid-November he authorized the Secretary of Defense to prepare his budget for the next fiscal year on the assumption that the deployments would occur. During the ensuing weeks, the administration implemented Secretary McNamara's recommended course of action, preceding the final reinforcement decisions with an extended bombing pause and a flurry of diplomatic activity.⁵⁷

Like Phase I, Phase II grew in size. When the Secretary of Defense visited Saigon on 28–29 November, General Westmoreland informed him that the North Vietnamese were increasing their forces in South Vietnam at a rate more than double that of previous estimates. To meet this expanded threat, the general asked for 52,000 additional US troops, including another US Army infantry division, designating this increase Phase IIA forces. Upon leaving Saigon, Mr. McNamara essentially endorsed Phase IIA, stating that the accelerated North Vietnamese infiltration required allied counteraction. When he returned to Washington, he directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to convene a planning conference to develop deployment schedules for Phase II and IIA forces, including appropriate support elements.⁵⁸

At this point, Phases I, II, and IIA became merged into a single program. In connection with a supplemental appropriation request for FY 1966 to support operations in Southeast Asia, the Secretary of Defense on 11 December asked the President to approve for planning purposes a new program of deployments and augmentation. On 13 December, the Deputy Secretary of Defense authorized the Joint Chiefs of Staff to use this program for their planning. The program eliminated phases and instead provided strength in six-month increments. It still called for 34 US maneuver battalions in South Vietnam by the end of 1965, but raised the total force figure from the 186,700 of the July program to 194,900. Incorporating the elements of Phase II, the new program provided for 277,100 American troops and 46 maneuver battalions by June 1966. By December 1966, these figures would rise to 367,500 troops and 75 maneuver battalions. US combat support battalions would increase to 38 by mid-1966 and to 59 by the end of that year.

The new program projected the number of “attack capable” aircraft in South Vietnam by the end of 1966 at 929, approximately 150 more than the July program.⁵⁹

By 31 December 1965, the strength of American forces in South Vietnam totaled 184,314. During the nine months from March to December, the United States had moved approximately 150,000 troops to the theater of war. This buildup had been achieved at cost to the US military posture in other parts of the world. NATO reinforcements had been drawn down to a point where a lack of readily deployable general purpose forces impaired flexibility. Inadequacies were appearing in the US training and rotation base. Short-falls and draw-downs in supply stocks and equipment had left some forces in Vietnam and elsewhere with less than the required rates of supply support. And these were only the initial effects of escalation without mobilization.⁶⁰

Final Decisions: The Honolulu Conference

During December 1965 and January 1966, the Johnson administration played out the combined diplomatic-military scenario Secretary McNamara had proposed. Late in December, in conjunction with a Christmas holiday truce in South Vietnam, President Johnson halted the bombing of North Vietnam. He kept the suspension in effect for more than a month, while US diplomats around the world sought openings for negotiations. Under this cover, the administration continued military preparations for implementing the combined Phases I and II. At General Westmoreland’s request, some units from Phase II—two brigades of the 25th Infantry Division—moved to South Vietnam during December and January to reinforce II and III Corps against a continuing enemy main force buildup.⁶¹

On 16 December, CINCPAC submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff the final Phase IIA requirement as worked out with COMUSMACV, integrated into a deployment list of all forces for 1966 organized by quarter. CINCPAC called for a total of 42 maneuver battalions and about 221,000 US troops to be moved into South Vietnam during 1966. Major units included: three Army divisions (the 25th, 4th, and a third not designated), a separate Army infantry brigade, an armored cavalry regiment, the remainder of the 1st Marine Division, a Marine RLT, and ten tactical fighter squadrons. CINCPAC also requested numerous ground air defense units for protection of the more vulnerable US bases in South Vietnam. Since the deployment of the 25th Infantry Division and the Marine units would deplete his reserves, Admiral Sharp included in his requirements the reconstitution of the Marine amphibious brigade on Okinawa and an infantry division in Hawaii. He also requested 45,000 additional third country allied troops, the majority South Korean, which would bring total third country forces in South Vietnam to approximately 66,000 by the end of 1966.⁶²

To meet CINCPAC’s requirements, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at Secretary McNamara’s direction, convened a planning conference to work out final troop lists and deployment schedules. This conference met in Honolulu from 17 January through 6 February 1966.

It expanded at the end into a full-dress meeting of President Johnson and his senior civilian advisers with the South Vietnamese leaders Thieu and Ky, at which the officials promulgated ambitious military and pacification objectives. The military part of the conference produced three alternative programs for deploying forces to PACOM in CY 1966. The three alternatives, Cases I, II, and III, were based on CINCPAC's requirements of 16 December but modified and validated during the conference. Each case assumed a different combination of sources for the troops involved and provided varying levels and mixes of forces at differing times within CY 1966. The conference determined that under Case I the Services could most nearly meet the requirements. This Case provided for an increase of about 202,000 US personnel (including 43 maneuver battalions) and 24,000 allied personnel (13 maneuver battalions) in CY 1966. Case I also included 99,000 additional men for PACOM areas outside South Vietnam. The forces would come from those currently in the United States, and from activations, feasible drawdowns from overseas areas, call-up of selected reserve units and individuals, and extensions of terms of service.⁶³

It soon became apparent that a reserve mobilization was still off the table. On 9 February, the Secretary of Defense met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Service secretaries, and other DOD officials. He summarized the results of the Honolulu planning conference and instructed those present "to assume and act to deploy" combat units as provided in Case I, but with the understanding that there would be no reserve call-up. On 17 February, Secretary McNamara formally directed the military departments and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assume that Case I was the requirement "we will try to meet" and to study all possible ways of meeting it short of calling reserves or extending terms of service. At this time, the Joint Chiefs did not object to the Secretary's decision against a reserve call-up. They directed the Services to provide the forces for deployment on the timetable requested "or on the earliest practicable dates thereafter."⁶⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff quickly changed their position on the reserve issue. After further study of the Case I requirements and schedules, they concluded that, without a selective reserve call-up, those requirements could not be met in full. To do so without mobilization, they explained to Secretary McNamara on 1 March, would place combat elements out of balance with support capabilities and would cause an "extremely harmful effect" on the capabilities of European Command (EUCOM) and Atlantic Command (LANTCOM). The Joint Chiefs estimated that the adoption of Case I requirements would cause EUCOM to lose 48,800 Army personnel (21 battalion equivalents), four tactical reconnaissance and six tactical fighter squadrons, and a Marine BLT with associated amphibious assault shipping. LANTCOM would have to give up 6,500 personnel, resulting in 38 combat ships reduced to one-third manning level; and PACOM would lose one tactical reconnaissance and five tactical fighter squadrons. The Joint Chiefs warned that such severe drawdowns would force greater reliance on "very early employment" of nuclear weapons if war should occur in Europe. These risks to the United States military posture, the Joint Chiefs said, were not justified by the earlier deployments that would be achieved. They recommended against adopting Case I.

Instead, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed a “stretched out” deployment schedule that would provide the same forces, but over a 16-month period rather than the ten months remaining in CY 1966. Even this schedule posed some risk to the worldwide US military posture, but the JCS considered it “more acceptable” than that inherent in Case I. To permit the earliest possible restoration of the overall US military posture, the Joint Chiefs requested program changes and budgetary action for the activation of: two Army divisions; assorted Navy units, ships, and personnel; 26 Air Force squadrons of various types; and one Marine attack squadron and additional personnel for Marine combat and combat support units. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that both alternatives posed serious logistic problems, but those arising from the stretch-out would be less severe than those involved in Case I.⁶⁵

Despite the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendation, the Secretary of Defense on 10 March authorized the Case I figure as “the revised approved deployment plan for South Vietnam.” He stated that “all necessary actions are to be taken to meet these deployment dates without call-up of reserves or extensions of terms of service (except for the Marine Corps and Navy).” As finally approved by the Secretary of Defense, American strength in South Vietnam would amount to 283,500 troops by June 1966, rise to 415,000 by December 1966, and top off at 425,600 by June 1967. There would be 52 US maneuver battalions in South Vietnam in June 1966 and a total of 79 by the end of the year; combat support battalions for the same periods would total 38 and 66, respectively. US attack-capable aircraft would increase from 711 in South Vietnam in December 1965 to 866 by mid-1966 and to 1,087 by the end of 1966.⁶⁶

Still not convinced that the Case I schedules could be met within existing capabilities, the Joint Chiefs of Staff re-examined the current estimates of whether the Services could meet the force requirements. On 4 April, they forwarded to Secretary McNamara a stretched out deployment program that conformed “as closely as feasible” to Case I as prescribed by Mr. McNamara in March. The Joint Chiefs’ plan called for a projected strength by the end of CY 1966 of 376,350 (70 maneuver battalions) as compared to the Case I figure of 415,000 (79 maneuver battalions)—a difference of approximately 38,000 men. In late April, the Joint Chiefs revised this difference to more than 47,000. This was, they said in effect, the absolute best they could do.⁶⁷

On 11 April 1966, Secretary McNamara approved, with minor modifications, the 4 April JCS plan. The modifications dealt with the scheduling of the earlier months of 1966 but did not change the year-end figures. The Secretary’s decision ended a four-month effort to resolve 1966 force requirements for Vietnam and provided for a doubling of US strength in that country by the end of the year. The movement of individual units in the approved program continued to require the specific approval of the Secretary of Defense.⁶⁸

Between January and April 1966, while force requirement figures were being determined, deployments of major combat units to South Vietnam continued. By 29 April, all three brigades of the 25th Infantry Division had arrived, bringing total American strength in South Vietnam by early May to 255,574. In May and June 1966, US deployments

proceeded ahead of schedule. By late June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were planning to deploy nine additional maneuver battalions (three previously scheduled for the Dominican Republic and six from the newly activated US Army 9th Infantry Division) to South Vietnam in the latter half of 1966. This would bring the number of US maneuver battalions in-country to 79 by the end of the year, as had been envisioned in the original Case I.⁶⁹

To reflect this acceleration, the Secretary of Defense on 2 July 1966 issued a revised deployment plan, designated Southeast Asia Deployment Program #3 for reasons never explained.⁷⁰ It called for 391,000 US troops to be in South Vietnam by the close of 1966. By June 1967, three additional maneuver battalions would be added, for a total of 82, and US strength would increase to 431,000. During the next few months, the Secretary of Defense approved a number of revisions to Program #3, raising the projected US strength in South Vietnam to 392,000 by the end of 1966 and to 434,000 by June 1967, but leaving the number of maneuver battalions unchanged.⁷¹

Just five days before the Secretary of Defense issued Program #3, President Johnson had asked if any acceleration of deployments to Vietnam was possible. He wanted General Westmoreland to feel assured that he would have all the men he needed as soon as possible. The President requested Secretary McNamara to meet with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and provide him an indication of what acceleration was possible for the remainder of the year.⁷²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff doubted that any further accelerations of “supportable combat-ready forces” beyond those currently scheduled could be attained. Accepting their word, on 15 July Secretary McNamara informed the President that the Defense Department had already made “strenuous efforts” to speed up deployments. He added that this effort had succeeded. The United States would be able to provide more troops and equipment during the remainder of 1966 than had been thought possible in the spring. To illustrate what had been achieved, Mr. McNamara informed the President that he expected to have 79 maneuver battalions in South Vietnam by December 1966, as compared to the 70 battalions planned in April.⁷³

The adjustments of spring and summer 1966 were but matters of detail. At Honolulu in February and even before that, the Johnson administration had cast the die. It had committed the United States to a major American ground war in South Vietnam while avoiding a reserve mobilization, meeting requirements by bleeding US forces everywhere else. The Joint Chiefs had protested the latter decision, but in the end they could only carry it out and try to cope with the consequences.

Command Arrangements and Allies

Accompanying their recommendations and decisions on troop deployments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered other issues related to the US buildup. In consultation with CINCPAC, they sketched out command relationships for controlling the expanding American war in Southeast Asia. They played a role in securing third country contingents under President Johnson's "more flags" initiative and helped to work out command relationships between those forces, MACV, and the RVNAF. While US deployments came to overshadow the effort, the Joint Chiefs pressed forward with plans for the continued expansion of South Vietnam's armed forces—plans that were partially aborted by the military and political crises of mid-1965.

US Command Arrangements

In his recommendations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff following the deployment conference of 8–10 April 1965, Admiral Sharp had outlined what he considered the optimum national command arrangements for operations in Vietnam. He proposed to retain the organizational integrity of the Service components to the extent possible and keep military command within Service channels. Administrative and logistic support of all units would follow established procedures. CINCPAC would exercise operational control of all land, sea, and air forces through his major subordinate commanders, CINCUSARPAC, CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF, and COMUSMACV. Within South Vietnam, COMUSMACV would serve as the operational joint commander. As the senior US Army commander in the country, he also would perform Army component functions. If he wished, he could exercise this responsibility through appropriate subordinate Army commanders.

As to the other Services, the Commander, 2nd Air Division, would control USAF functions in South Vietnam, reporting in that capacity to COMUSMACV. For the air campaign against North Vietnam, CINCPACAF would exercise operational control of US Air Forces in Southeast Asia as directed by CINCPAC, working through the Commander, 13th Air Force, and the Commander, 2nd Air Division. CINCPACAF would operate in support of COMUSMACV when so directed. The Commanding General, III MEF, who controlled the largest naval force in South Vietnam, would take on the functions of naval component commander, reporting in that capacity to COMUSMACV. Other offensive naval operations would be conducted under control of CINCPACFLT, who would support COMUSMACV when directed.¹

Following the President's decision to expand the US Marines' combat role, General Westmoreland furnished to CINCPAC his concept of the Marines' command relationships with the RVNAF and of their introduction to counterinsurgency operations. General Westmoreland had secured the RVNAF High Command's agreement to the enlarged Marine mission and had worked out with the RVNAF I Corps commander an arrangement for cooperation and coordination between American and South Vietnamese forces. In his letter of instructions to the CG 9th MEB (not yet retitled the 9th MAB), COMUSMACV directed him, in coordination with the CG I Corps, to "continue to occupy defensive positions and key terrain at Da Nang to secure the airfield, communications facilities, US supporting installations, port facilities and landing beaches against attack." The Marines were to "undertake offensive action as necessary to support I Corps ... in the ... defense of the area of Da Nang and critical contiguous areas against VC or PAVN [People's Army of Vietnam] units." This was to be Phase I of a three-phase progression from defense to offensive operations. General Westmoreland set no time for the beginning of Phase II, "offensive action as a mobile reaction force" within a 50-mile radius of Da Nang. The same was true of Phase III, in which the Marines would take offensive action, if necessary, anywhere in the I CTZ.²

Admiral Sharp considered General Westmoreland's letter of instructions to be too conservative. He advised the MACV commander that he had placed too much emphasis on the defensive aspects of the Marine mission. "As I understand the JCS directive," he said, "the Marines are to engage in offensive counterinsurgency operations earliest." General Westmoreland's instructions indicated to Sharp that the 9th MEB would not start actively attacking the Viet Cong for several weeks. "If I read the messages properly, this is not what our superiors intend. Recommend you revise your concept accordingly." General Westmoreland did so. He sent the 9th MEB an amended directive calling for "an intensifying program of offensive operations to fix and destroy the VC in the general Da Nang area."³

Admiral Sharp apparently had interpreted the JCS directives correctly. Upon seeing his message to General Westmoreland, the Joint Chiefs informed CINCPAC, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff agree with you that the active employment of US Marine forces now in RVN in counterinsurgency combat operations should be accelerated in order to establish procedures and basis for similar operations."⁴

Field and Combined Commands

In the light of the decision to commit American forces to combat, as well as the growing enemy strength in South Vietnam, the United States government had to address the question of how operations of the US, Allied, and South Vietnamese forces would be controlled and coordinated. On 7 April, General Wheeler passed on to Admiral Sharp his views on command and coordination of the forces in the two northern corps areas, I and II CTZs, and on control of US and RVNAF aircraft in both South and North Vietnam.

The Chairman believed that the forces in the northern corps areas could not be effectively directed from Saigon. General Westmoreland and his staff were already overextended trying to meet responsibilities in North and South Vietnam. Even if three US and Allied divisions were in position in I and II CTZs, General Wheeler warned, no adequate system existed to direct their operations in the event of a major North Vietnamese attack in those areas. The ARVN I and II Corps headquarters were static territorial organizations, not the mobile tactical headquarters that would be needed. General Wheeler suggested that General Westmoreland might establish in the Pleiku area a combined field force headquarters, perhaps headed by General John L. Throckmorton, the Deputy COMUSMACV, which would include both US and South Vietnamese staff officers. In effect a corps headquarters although not so named, this headquarters would have a broad mission, including coordination of US/Allied/ARVN operations in the north and the preparation of plans to counter any North Vietnamese attack.⁵

At the Honolulu conference of 8–10 April, CINCPAC developed a plan that incorporated most of General Wheeler's ideas for a combined field command. The plan called for a US Army corps headquarters to be established upon deployment of the remainder of the MEF and an additional American division. The corps commander would report to COMUSMACV and assume operational control of the American divisions and, if deployed, of the South Korean division. (If establishment of the corps headquarters were delayed, COMUSMACV would retain direct operational control of these units.) COMUSMACV would plan and conduct operations on a "coordinate/cooperative" basis with the South Vietnamese high command. During field operations, General Westmoreland would exercise operational control of US and allied troops through the American corps commander. That officer, and the US and allied division commanders, would coordinate with the commanders of ARVN units in and adjacent to their operating areas. Adopting a proposal from General Westmoreland, the conference plan called for COMUSMACV and the CINCRVNAF to form a small combined staff to correlate activities and perform liaison at the highest levels of command. This staff would serve both commanders, who would supervise its activities and approve or disapprove its actions. COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF would issue directives to their respective subordinate forces only through their national operational control channels.⁶

On 11 April, General Westmoreland again raised the question of command and control over US, allied, and South Vietnamese forces. Addressing the problems that

would arise from the arrival of the three division force, he strongly recommended that a corps headquarters be furnished him. Westmoreland suggested that HQ III US Corps be considered for deployment to South Vietnam concurrently with the second of the divisions. The headquarters would not need to be at full Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) strength but could be tailored to its mission, with COMUSMACV's own headquarters furnishing the personnel needed for a provisional field headquarters for a temporary period.

“In order to forestall certain political and psychological problems within South Vietnam and the world at large associated with the deployment of US combat forces,” General Westmoreland recommended “the formation in due course, on a test basis, of an International Military Security Task Force (IMSTAF) in the Da Nang area built around the 9th MEB.” He did not propose that the direct chain of command of US military units be confused or complicated by intricate international machinery. Rather, he wanted third country contingents—Korean, Australian, New Zealand, and Filipino—along with South Vietnamese units to be attached to the US Marine brigade to constitute a combined force. If larger deployments occurred, the IMSTAF could phase into a larger international force. If the IMSTAF at Da Nang proved successful, it would be possible to form a similar combined organization at Bien Hoa as well.

General Westmoreland also took up the issue of a combined United States-South Vietnamese high-level staff. He declared that the time was ripe to form “a mechanism at the national level to control international forces.” He envisioned the cooperative exercise of authority by CINCRVNAF and COMUSMACV and the formation of a small single combined staff headed by an American general officer with a Vietnamese Deputy Chief and multinational personnel. Subject to the approval of the national commanders, this staff would develop strategic guidance, rules of engagement, command relations, and such other matters as might be directed. Informally, then-Premier Quat and other South Vietnamese officials had indicated that they would go along with such an arrangement, partly in the belief—which General Westmoreland shared—that a combined staff would help turn Saigon's fractious generals away from politics. Nevertheless, General Westmoreland concluded, this proposal “should be introduced on a low-key basis.”⁷

Confirming the wisdom of not publicizing plans for a combined staff, General Ky later in the month expressed publicly the view that a combined command was not necessary. On 3 May, commenting on General Ky's attitude, Ambassador Taylor warned Washington that Hanoi had called reports that the United States and South Vietnam were planning a combined command proof that the Saigon regime was a “lackey” of US imperialism.⁸

One of General Wheeler's principal objectives at the Honolulu conference of 19–20 April was to discuss and make firm decisions on command in Southeast Asia. He informed Admiral Sharp of this on 16 April and told CINCPAC that he saw three military situations for which advance agreement on arrangements must be reached. The first was the present situation wherein US and allied combat forces were being

sent into South Vietnam to conduct counterinsurgency operations against the Viet Cong. The second was a “near-term” contingency in which North Vietnamese troops, either covertly or overtly, entered the South to support the Viet Cong, perhaps in an effort to cut the country in two. The most drastic situation would be one in which Chinese Communist forces intervened in great numbers on a broad front in South Vietnam and perhaps in Thailand and Burma. “I desire on the first day of the conference,” the Chairman informed CINCPAC, “to finalize our thoughts and establish an agreed organizational pattern toward which we can build in the coming months.” The Chairman believed the conference should give serious consideration to deployment of a US corps headquarters with signal and supporting units to South Vietnam as a base for a combined field force command in the northern war zone.⁹

On 8 May, General Westmoreland sent to Admiral Sharp an overall concept for command and control of US/Allied ground combat forces that conformed to what had been decided at Honolulu. The plan started from the assumption that national forces would retain their command identity. The United States would not place its forces under the operational control of RVNAF or allied commanders (except temporarily in an emergency), but in special cases the United States might assume operational control or temporary “tactical direction” over Saigon’s forces. The United States would assume operational control over allied units, usually at brigade or higher level. General Westmoreland’s concept for the IMSTAF, earlier recommended, called for brigading allied troops with US forces under an American commander with a combined staff. A US brigade with some allied representation on its staff would form the nucleus of the IMSTAF. An IMSTAF would have complete tactical integrity and would be employed in a manner similar to a US brigade. Any ARVN unit associated with the IMSTAF would come under operational control of the US commander.¹⁰

On 10 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that a combined field force headquarters be organized. Under the Deputy COMUSMACV, the headquarters was to exercise operational control over US, allied, and assigned ARVN ground forces deployed in the northern combat zone (I and II CTZs). Operations in the rest of South Vietnam would continue under existing arrangements—that is direct control of US units by COMUSMACV. The JCS also declared that the small MACV-RVNAF combined coordinating staff, as recommended by General Westmoreland, would suffice for the present. However, a larger, more formal combined command authority should be established when more US troops arrived. Secretary McNamara agreed with the Joint Chiefs’ views and approved these recommendations on the same day.¹¹

On 14 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC of Secretary McNamara’s approval of their recommendations. They informed him also that the Secretary had approved an American deputy field force commander, authorized to take over from the field force commander in case the latter had to move up to the position of COMUSMACV. This could occur if Westmoreland should be killed or incapacitated or if he assumed command of US Forces, Southeast Asia, or of the Central Region SEATO

Field Forces as provided in contingency plans. The field force headquarters, under the present Deputy COMUSMACV, General Throckmorton, would go into operation at such time as the US IX Corps headquarters was deployed to South Vietnam. In assuming command of the field force, General Throckmorton was to retain his position as Deputy COMUSMACV.

Secretary McNamara had also approved upgrading the “two-hatted” position of Deputy COMUSMACV for Air Operations and Commander, 2nd Air Division, to lieutenant general. A USAF major general would be named Deputy Commander, 2nd Air Division, with additional Air Force general officers as appropriate; and an appropriate number of wings would be organized to control the 2nd Air Division’s widely distributed squadrons. A USAF brigadier general was to become MACV Deputy Chief of Staff. “In view of the heavily increased air activity in Southeast Asia,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, “and the probability of additional commitment of US air forces, additional key staff billets should be identified and subsequently filled by air officers.” In conclusion, the Joint Chiefs directed CINCPAC to plan for the air command changes and also for a combined field force headquarters in the I CTZ. In turn, Admiral Sharp asked General Westmoreland on 22 May to submit to him plans for: 1) the establishment of a small combined coordinating staff under COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF; 2) a more formal combined authority; and 3) activation of a field force headquarters in the northern combat zone, either combined or unilateral US.¹²

The combined staff and field force projects hit the obstacle of South Vietnamese national sensitivities. Earlier, General Westmoreland had discussed with top Saigon officials the establishment of a combined command authority of some type and had found them receptive. Subsequently, however, the South Vietnamese military leaders had gradually cooled toward the idea of a combined headquarters and even toward a combined staff such as COMUSMACV had proposed. On 24 May, General Westmoreland cited to Admiral Sharp the several statements by Generals Ky and Thieu on the undesirability of a combined command. “In the light of these attitudes,” he told CINCPAC, “it is clearly premature at this time to propose the establishment of a combined coordinating staff to the GVN.” As a stop-gap measure, General Westmoreland had appointed and accredited a US brigadier general as a representative on the RVNAF Joint General Staff to “coordinate the overall MACV advisory effort vis-à-vis the Joint General Staff, in critical cases affecting several functional areas.” Because General Westmoreland had indicated that a combined command authority would not be politically feasible at this time, Admiral Sharp recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that activation of a combined US/South Vietnamese coordinating staff be deferred indefinitely. The RVNAF generals’ assumption of political power in June put an end to the combined staff project.¹³

Field force planning also shifted in a unilateral direction. On 28 May, the State and Defense Departments jointly directed CINCPAC to plan for a combined field force headquarters “on a unilateral basis.” Admiral Sharp already had instructed COMUSMACV to make detailed plans for activation of such a headquarters in the northern

combat zone in either a unilateral US or a combined configuration. The field force should be built around the nucleus of a tailored US Army corps headquarters, to be activated when two or more US divisions had been deployed to South Vietnam and command US Army and Marine Corps units in the northern combat zone. To fill out the headquarters cadre, Admiral Sharp contemplated drawing as much as possible on in-country personnel resources. In view of the joint nature of the ground operations and the need for close air support, Sharp had assumed not only US Army but also Marine Corps and Air Force representation on the staff.

Confusion developed over how joint the field headquarters would be. On 16 June, Admiral Sharp learned that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed the Chief of Staff, Army, to plan for the organization, activation, and deployment of a US Army field force headquarters. The admiral immediately asked for clarification of the relationship between what he had been directed to do on 14 May and what, apparently, the Army Chief of Staff had now been directed to do. "If the proposed Field Forces command is to embrace both Army and Marine Corps ground forces," CINCPAC told the Joint Chiefs, "there is a concomitant need to tailor the headquarters in such a manner as to include adequate Marine Corps representation and to provide necessary air expertise. In this case the title of the Field Force should reflect its joint composition."¹⁴

In reply, the Joint Chiefs of Staff promised CINCPAC that they would consider his views when they addressed definitively the subject of the Field Force Headquarters. The JCS pointed out that they had recommended to the Secretary of Defense deployment of one US Army corps headquarters to South Vietnam. Subsequently, "higher authority" had directed that the corps be referred to as a US Army Field Force so as to avoid the appearance of superseding the ARVN corps headquarters. While the JCS had asked the Department of the Army to plan the organization of the Field Force headquarters, they now believed, because of the issues raised by CINCPAC that a joint headquarters would provide for better control of US forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thereupon rescinded their instructions to the Chief of Staff, Army. Instead, they instructed Admiral Sharp to plan for a joint US Field Force Headquarters. They directed him also to continue his planning for activation of a combined field force headquarters.¹⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff soon reversed this decision, in response to arguments by General Westmoreland. COMUSMACV argued against formal creation of a joint Field Force headquarters. He favored instead keeping the headquarters an Army organization with liaison officers from other Services attached as necessary. Under this arrangement, details of headquarters organization and staffing would be kept out of Washington inter-Service politics; and COMUSMACV would have flexibility in restructuring the command as the situation developed. The Joint Chiefs accepted Westmoreland's argument, the more so as COMUSMACV now intended, in line with established contingency plans, to retain the III Marine Amphibious Force as a separate corps-level command in I Corps.¹⁶

The Field Forces in South Vietnam thus grew up as augmented US Army corps-level headquarters. On 1 August, General Westmoreland activated the first field headquarters, called Task Force Alpha, at Nha Trang to control the US troops in II and III Corps. After the 1st Cavalry Division arrived, the task force, on 25 September, was renamed Field Force Vietnam, with its jurisdiction reduced to the American units in II Corps. On 15 March 1966, COMUSMACV activated II Field Force Vietnam at Bien Hoa to command all US forces in III Corps. At the same time, he redesignated Field Force Vietnam as I Field Force Vietnam. In I CTZ, III MAF performed the field force function. In IV Corps, where no major US ground combat units were located, the corps Senior Adviser, and subsequently a Delta Military Assistance Command, directed US military operations and advisory support. Besides their US command responsibilities, the III MAF and Field Force commanders acted as senior American advisers to the ARVN corps commanders, oversaw the US advisory effort in their areas of operation, and eventually took on important pacification duties.¹⁷

Command Arrangements—Southeast Asia

As top US commander in South Vietnam, General Westmoreland also had wider responsibilities. In contingency plans for a major emergency, he was designated Commander, US Forces Southeast Asia (COMUSSEASIA), and Commander, Central Region SEATO Field Forces (COMCRSFF). Of more immediate practical importance, he served as Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Thailand (COMUSMAC-THAI). This arrangement dated back to 1962, when the United States had temporarily deployed troops to Thailand in response to a crisis in Laos. With the withdrawal of American ground forces, the United States left USMACTHAI in place; and the Thai government, which had not been consulted on the command's establishment, initially did not force the issue.¹⁸ However, as US military activity in Thailand began to expand along with the war in Vietnam, Thai officials expressed resentment at USMACTHAI's subordination to MACV. They complained that it tended to make Thailand an appendage of the US command in Vietnam, bringing communist propaganda charges that Thailand was a puppet of the United States.

At the Manila conference in late 1964, the Thai Foreign Minister had asked Secretary of State Rusk to have US command arrangements in Southeast Asia modified. When a South Vietnamese delegation visited Thailand in late 1964, the Chinese Communists had charged that the Vietnamese were conveying to the Thais the demands of their joint US overlords. This increased Thai irritation at a US command arrangement that, in their eyes, associated Thailand directly with US military actions in South Vietnam. The Prime Minister of Thailand informed US Ambassador Graham Martin that he realized that in event of a major escalation, General Westmoreland would have to assume overall command in Southeast Asia. But he pointed out that the conflict had not yet reached that stage. He could not understand why the United States persisted

in keeping General Westmoreland as COMUSMACHTHAI since his duties obviously required his presence in Saigon. If the United States wished to continue maintaining USMACHTHAI, Bangkok was amenable but definitely wanted the command separated from MACV.¹⁹

In mid-1964, anticipating these objections, CINCPAC had suggested that a separate COMUSMACHTHAI, resident in Bangkok, be established with a lieutenant general holding the post. At that time, General Westmoreland had concurred in this recommendation. But with the upsurge in enemy activity in South Vietnam and the consequent intensification of US actions throughout Southeast Asia, General Westmoreland changed his view. Believing that any major US command reorganization would be disruptive at this time, COMUSMACV recommended on 31 March 1965 that there be no change in command arrangements that would divide responsibility for operations in Southeast Asia. He opposed establishment of a separate COMUSMACHTHAI. General Westmoreland recommended also that the post of Chief, Joint Military Advisory Group (CHJUSMAG), Thailand, be retained as it was, filled by a USAF or US Army major general with a brigadier general of the "opposite service" as his deputy.²⁰

In anticipation of Secretary Rusk's attendance at the May 1965 meeting of SEATO, Secretary McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to furnish him their views on the existing command relationships in Southeast Asia. On 28 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary that they believed it was now time to separate MACV and MACTHAI into two separate commands. The change, they said, would respond to long-standing Thai sensitivity about the "double-hat COMUSMACV/COMUSMACHTHAI arrangement" and promote efficiency by letting COMUSMACV concentrate on his immediate task of defeating the Viet Cong. As for COMUSMACV's planning responsibilities as US and SEATO commander designate for Southeast Asia, the Joint Chiefs believed that he should exercise direct policy control over COMUSMACHTHAI's region-wide planning activities. Therefore, the US should keep open a direct channel between General Westmoreland and COMUSMACHTHAI. This should be done by augmenting the small COMUSMACHTHAI planning staff in Bangkok and developing a communications/operations facility at the Royal Thai Air Force Base at Korat that could expand if necessary into a headquarters for COMUSSEASIA and COMCRSFF.²¹

Secretary McNamara accepted the Joint Chiefs' advice. In late May 1965, he directed that USMACHTHAI be constituted as a separate command from MACV under a major general who would report directly to CINCPAC. Formal activation of the reorganized headquarters took place on 10 July. General Westmoreland conducted planning for his Southeast Asia command role through his MACV staff and through a small staff in Bangkok, and the two commands developed the contingency headquarters facility at Korat. The MACV commander worked closely with Ambassador Martin and COMUSMACHTHAI to coordinate the expanding Thailand-based US air operations against North Vietnam and Laos as well as overt and covert Thai participation in the wars in South Vietnam and Laos.²²

Third Country Forces—1965

At the 1 April 1965 NSC meeting, where President Johnson approved the first US ground combat troop deployments, he also directed the “urgent exploration” with the governments of the Republic of Korea, Australia, and New Zealand of possible contributions of their soldiers to the war in South Vietnam. Implementing the President’s directive, the United States invited Australia and New Zealand to participate in military staff talks with CINCPAC. During the talks, in early April 1965, the Australians indicated that they were prepared to send a combat battalion to Vietnam. New Zealand, on the other hand, was less forthcoming. Its representative thought that his government might furnish a 105 mm howitzer battery and possibly a tank troop. He added, however, that such a deployment would require considerable political ground work with the New Zealand public.²³

True to its word, Australia acted promptly. After a formal request to Australia from the South Vietnamese government, the two nations issued a joint communiqué on 29 April announcing that Australia would deploy an infantry battalion to South Vietnam. Although small numbers of noncombatant personnel had been in South Vietnam for some time, this marked the first commitment of a combat unit to the war by a third country.²⁴

On 5 May, in anticipation of the arrival of the Australian troops in South Vietnam, the United States and Australia signed a Military Working Arrangement. Under this arrangement, command of the Australian forces was vested in the Commander, Australian Army Force, Republic of Vietnam (COMAAFV), who would in turn be under the operational control of COMUSMACV. The Australian battalion would be “brigaded” with “an appropriate US brigade echelon,” and COMUSMACV would provide all administrative and logistical support for the unit. Subsequently, in a financial working arrangement, Australia agreed to reimburse the United States for this support.²⁵

The advance party of the Australian battalion arrived in South Vietnam on 26 May 1965. The rest of the unit, together with a logistic support company, closed between 29 May and 11 June. In accord with a concept of command and control that the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, had given the Australian military attaché in Washington as well as the US-Australian Military Working Arrangement, the battalion was attached to the US 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa. In late September, Australia augmented its force with a 105 mm howitzer battery, a field engineer troop, an armored personnel carrier troop, a signal unit, and filler personnel. At the end of the year, Australia had 1,557 soldiers in South Vietnam.²⁶

In early May, the United States sent then Ambassador at Large Henry Cabot Lodge to New Zealand to solicit a definite troop commitment. Late in that month, Prime Minister Keith Holyoake announced that his country would send a 105 mm battery to South Vietnam, concurrent with the withdrawal of the New Zealand engineer team sent to Vietnam in 1964. Despite some unfavorable New Zealand public reaction to the deployment, the battery arrived in Vietnam on 21 July 1965. It came under the

operational control of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, with a primary mission of support for the Australian battalion. New Zealand's contribution was governed by a Military Working Arrangement with the United States identical in terms to that under which the Australians operated. Although it was never set forth in a formal agreement, New Zealand, like Australia, reimbursed the United States for the administrative and logistic support for its unit.²⁷

Outside of the United States, the Free World nation that furnished the most troops to South Vietnam in 1965 was the Republic of Korea. In March 1965, South Korea sent a task force composed of an army engineer battalion with associated support and self-defense troops. This task force, called the "Dove Unit," totaled 1,927 men. Throughout the early summer of 1965, the United States negotiated with the Seoul government concerning the provision of Korean combat elements to South Vietnam. These discussions concluded on 12 August in a South Korean agreement to contribute a combat division composed of a headquarters, one marine regiment, two infantry regiments, and a field support command. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, optimistic that South Korea would approve the deployment of this division, already had included it in their deployment recommendations of 2 July 1965 to the Secretary of Defense.²⁸

As had been the case with Australia and New Zealand, the United States negotiated a Military Working Arrangement with the Republic of Korea. This arrangement, signed on 6 September 1965, provided for US logistic and administrative support of the South Korean troops and vested command of them in the Commander, Republic of Korea Forces, Vietnam (COMROKRV). The South Koreans, however, refused to sign any formal agreement placing their troops under COMUSMACV's operational control. They insisted that their force be treated as independent of, and coequal with, the US and South Vietnamese armies. General Westmoreland attempted, without success, to reach a formal agreement with COMROKRV on command and control. He reported to CINCPAC in early December that a formal arrangement could be politically embarrassing to the Koreans; it might connote that they were subordinate to, and acting as mercenaries for, the United States. General Westmoreland stated that COMROKRV had promised verbally to act as though he were under US operational control as long as American orders were couched as requests. Westmoreland considered this gentlemen's agreement as "probably more durable and certainly more politically palatable than a formal arrangement that would create unnecessary controversy . . . , be politically awkward to the Koreans, and in the final analysis not be binding."²⁹

The advance party of the South Korean division arrived in Saigon on 15 September 1965. The division's main body landed in II CTZ between 8 October and 8 November. The South Korean Marine regiment was stationed at Cam Ranh Bay and the rest of the division at Qui Nhon, with the mission of protecting logistic bases and keeping vital Route 19 open to traffic. From then on, the Koreans became the dominant force guarding coastal II CTZ.³⁰

Two other Free World nations, the Philippines and the Republic of China on Taiwan, increased their military assistance to South Vietnam; but this aid continued to be

in the form of noncombatant personnel. The United States attempted to persuade the Philippines to supplement its representation in South Vietnam with a civic action group of about 2,000 men. Both President Diosdado Macapagal and President-elect Fernando Marcos favored this proposal; but the Philippine Congress refused to approve it during 1965. Only in mid-1966 did the legislature finally authorize deployment of the civic action group. The United States also considered approaching Manila with a request for combat troops. However, the chief of the US military assistance group in the Philippines advised against such a move. He stated that the Filipino armed forces were in no condition to furnish any combat soldiers, and the United States dropped the matter. The Filipinos did augment the medical and civic action teams that they had sent to Vietnam in 1964, increasing their contingent in country from 32 men to 72 by the end of 1965. As to the Republic of China, due to diplomatic sensitivities, it contributed only a very small number of noncombatant personnel.³¹

Thailand, the only other Free World nation that had military forces in South Vietnam at the beginning of 1965, made no additions to its small contingent during the year. Late in 1965, the Thai government indicated that it might provide cargo aircraft and shallow draft shipping to South Vietnam; but nothing had come of this by the year's end.³²

The year 1965 saw the first introduction of third country combat forces into South Vietnam. Third country strength increased from 388 at the beginning of the year to 22,404 by the end of December. The following year would bring a further expansion of the war and a doubling of US forces in Vietnam. Accompanying this vast increase, the Johnson administration would seek still larger numbers of third-country fighting men to assist and support the US forces and maintain the appearance of an international struggle against aggression. In late 1965, US military plans were already calling for the deployment of 23,500 additional third country personnel, in 1966—most of them in a second South Korean division.³³

Expanding the RVNAF

From the beginning, the United States had built its Vietnam policy around supporting and strengthening Saigon's military forces, so that they could take over successfully the defense of their own country. In 1963, Secretary McNamara had directed an accelerated buildup of the RVNAF in the hope that, within a reasonable time, Saigon would be able to defeat the Viet Cong without the advice and assistance of substantial numbers of US personnel. CINCPAC and MACV had made plans for a gradual withdrawal of American advisers and units, aimed at bringing the US presence down to a modest MAAG by mid-1965, by which time the insurgency should be well on the way to defeat. In late 1963 and during 1964, as the political and military situations in South Vietnam deteriorated, the United States had abandoned withdrawal plans and chosen instead to increase rather than decrease its own military involvement. During 1964 and

1965, the United States continued trying to strengthen South Vietnam's regular and territorial forces. This effort, however, had only limited success in the face of Saigon government instability, heavy RVNAF combat losses, abnormally high desertion rates, and inadequate enlistment and recruitment.³⁴

In late autumn of 1964, General Westmoreland, working with the RVNAF High Command, conducted a survey of the structure of South Vietnam's armed forces. The survey was intended to determine what additional strength those forces needed so that they could simultaneously conduct search and destroy operations, protect key installations and cities, and support national and provincial pacification plans. On the basis of this survey, General Westmoreland sent recommendations for additional forces to CINCPAC on 24 November 1964.³⁵

General Westmoreland set forth two alternatives for these force increases. Under Alternative One, the regular forces would be enlarged by 30,000 men, mostly for the ARVN. The territorial components would receive 110,000 additional men, raising the number of Regional Force (RF) companies by 105 immediately and by 234 at the end of 1965. The Popular Forces (PF) would grow by 64,000 men as soon as possible, with a total increase of 79,000 by the end of 1965. These increases, Westmoreland hoped, would provide for progress in the Hop Tac pacification area, arrest Viet Cong gains in certain other critical areas, and provide enough impetus to keep pacification machinery operating in the rest of South Vietnam. Under Alternative Two, the territorial forces would not increase beyond Alternative One strength, but the regulars would expand by 17,000 above Alternative One. Under Alternative Two, COMUSMACV claimed, more progress would be achieved in pacification.

To support the Alternative One increases, General Westmoreland pointed out, the RVNAF would have to induct an average of 7,000 recruits per month. Alternative Two would require 8,000 per month. Westmoreland intended to tell Saigon military officials that, as a condition to US support of any strength increases, the government must agree to enforce its draft laws, actively carry out its population and resources control programs, and adopt certain improved personnel policies for the RVNAF. South Vietnam also would have to disband some of its elite, but expensive, military units. Even if the South Vietnamese made these reforms, General Westmoreland told Admiral Sharp, "It is not certain at this time whether either of these figures can be supported. However, the lower figure is [a] more reasonable estimate of manpower availability."

Alternative One had other advantages. In view of training and lead time requirements, it could be completed by the end of 1965; while Alternative Two would take until about mid-1966. Alternative One also would have a less damaging inflationary impact on South Vietnam's economy. General Westmoreland believed that sufficient men could be acquired to support Alternative One and that all of the new units, except for armored units, could be trained by the end of 1965, as would all the needed personnel, except for non-commissioned officers. The United States could meet requirements for critical supply and equipment items by priority procurement and shipment

from America or by diversion from US Army stocks. Both alternatives would require additional US advisers—446 under Alternative One and 606 under Alternative Two.

Taking all these factors into account, COMUSMACV recommended adoption of Alternative One. Ambassador Taylor concurred. CINCPAC forwarded General Westmoreland’s recommendation to the Joint Chiefs of Staff with his approval; and it received consideration during the important Johnson administration policy meetings of late November and early December 1964.³⁶

**RVNAF Forces
11 December 1964**

<i>Regular</i>	<i>Authorized</i>	<i>New Totals</i>	
		<i>Alt 1</i>	<i>Alt 2</i>
Army	217,300	240,953	258,200
Navy	8,162	14,476	14,476
Marines	6,555	6,555	6,555
Air Force	11,582	11,924	11,924
Total	243,599	273,908	291,155

<i>Territorial</i>	<i>Authorized</i>	<i>New Total End 1965</i>
Regional Force	97,615	133,002
Popular Force	109,991	189,185
Coastal Force	4,640	No change
Total	212,246	322,189

Information derived from App to Encl A to JCS 2343/500-1, 11 Dec 64.

The proposed RVNAF augmentation met no resistance in Washington. On 17 December 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve Alternative One as a basis for discussion with the Saigon government. They also asked him to approve the detailed MAP programming actions required. They requested also that he authorize the American advisers for the new units and take action to obtain the additional funds in the FY 1965 and FY 1966 Military Assistance Program to support Alternative One. On 13 January 1965, Secretary McNamara approved “in principle” the Alternative One increase and the associated US advisory augmentation. He directed that \$35.9 million of the additional cost be funded from the FY 1965 MAP and the remainder from the FY 1966 MAP. Secretary McNamara added, “I shall coordinate with the Department of State on the matter of final approval” of the expansion program. On 15 February, the Joint Chiefs informed CINCPAC that the additional US advisers had been approved.

In the meantime, the Services had already taken preliminary actions to deploy these advisers to South Vietnam.³⁷

As one of his first responses to the worsening military situation in South Vietnam, General Westmoreland requested further enlargement of the RVNAF. On 20 March 1965, he asked for authorization to accelerate the activation of 16 ARVN infantry battalions authorized under Alternative One. He asked also that, upon completion of Alternative One, he be given authority to put Alternative Two into effect. With the 17,000 additional spaces called for in this latter alternative, the RVNAF could form 15 additional infantry battalions, four engineer battalions, one 155 mm artillery battalion, and three M-113 troops along with more administrative and logistic forces. General Westmoreland declared that he would be able to complete the training of all 31 battalions provided in both alternatives by March 1966 as opposed to July of that year, but only if certain conditions were met. These included: 1) the South Vietnamese government must make a serious effort to increase conscription and recruiting to a sustained 8,000 men per month input; 2) construction funds must be provided speedily; 3) Saigon must agree to an increase in training facilities and to a temporary redistribution of equipment; 4) Washington authorities must take extraordinary MAP programming and supply actions; and 5) General Westmoreland must receive approval of Alternative Two by 1 April 1965. COMUSMACV recognized that South Vietnam might not be able to meet the manpower requirement and that there might be some slippage in the quality of training and equipment. Although concerned that the Alternative One increases might not be achieved as readily as General Westmoreland was predicting, Admiral Sharp considered the need for a stronger RVNAF overriding. He recommended approval of General Westmoreland's recommendations.³⁸

The Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed the theater commanders' proposal. On 8 April, they stated to the Secretary of Defense that it was "essential at this critical period to take maximum advantage of GVN capabilities to recruit and field the necessary military forces to support pacification operations." The JCS believed that higher strength goals would give Saigon an incentive to set up an adequate recruiting program. Consequently, they recommended that the Secretary authorize the Alternative Two program and the necessary advisor spaces. They also urged him to approve acceleration of the total force increase, subject to CINCPAC review of FY 1965 funding requirements, and to fund the force increase from sources outside the world-wide MAP. On 12 April, Secretary McNamara approved the additional RVNAF force increase.³⁹

On 5 May, General Westmoreland proposed that a tenth ARVN division be formed from three existing separate regiments in III CTZ. In order to do this, he would need 2,369 additional spaces to form two artillery battalions and some support units. He believed that this new division could help to shore up the weak east flank of the Hop Tac zone. CINCPAC recommended approval of this request. On 27 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary of Defense to authorize the actions needed to form the new division. Secretary McNamara approved the request on 4 June, thus raising the authorized strength of the ARVN to 261,155.⁴⁰

These expansion plans fell afoul of the worsening combat situation. During the spring of 1965, RVNAF battle losses ran higher than had been anticipated. Equally serious, RVNAF desertion rates soared to inordinate heights. As a result, ARVN battlefield strength declined. In June, after another review of South Vietnamese force requirements, General Westmoreland decided that he should concentrate for the time being on keeping existing units filled rather than on creating the new units authorized. He proposed a temporary moratorium on activation of new battalions and the diversion of the manpower to bring units already in being up to authorized strength. Admiral Sharp agreed. On 15 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed COMUSMACV temporarily to defer activation of 11 battalions scheduled for the next several months.⁴¹

Later in the year, with US forces assuming a greater role in combat, prospects for the South Vietnamese forces appeared to improve. On 27 October, General Westmoreland reported that the RVNAF buildup was making better progress than had been anticipated. The desertion rate, for example, was declining; and as a result the strength of ARVN battalions had risen to combat-effective levels. RVNAF expansion had resumed, with fifteen new battalions in training. General Westmoreland had been able to form the tenth ARVN division, which was now operational. COMUSMACV estimated that South Vietnam had the manpower available to support an input of 10,000 men per month into the RVNAF for the remainder of FY 1966. In response to this more favorable picture, as well as to pressure from RVNAF generals for more units of various types, Westmoreland asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to approve a new strength level for Saigon's forces, raising it to 311,500. Such an increase, he said, would avoid a forced reduction in current levels of conscription and recruiting and prevent a loss of momentum in the buildup that would take months to regain.⁴²

One element of General Westmoreland's recommendations brought a protest from the US Marine Corps. COMUSMACV had proposed to organize a South Vietnamese Coastal Military Command to improve the effectiveness of the existing Vietnamese Navy Coastal Force. During the Joint Chiefs consideration of the overall RVNAF expansion proposal, the Marine Corps Commandant objected that the Coastal Command would duplicate the function of the Vietnamese Marine Corps and refused to concur in its establishment. On 13 April 1966, the Joint Chiefs asked the Secretary of Defense to approve continuance of RVNAF recruiting and conscription during FY 1966, aimed at raising the RVNAF force level to 311,458 men by the end of that fiscal year. The Marine Commandant concurred in all the provisions of this memorandum except that calling for creation of the Coastal Command. Disregarding the Marine objection, Secretary McNamara, on 25 April 1966, approved all the JCS recommendations.⁴³

On 27 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to continue supporting RVNAF manpower procurement for the remainder of FY 1966 to attain the following strengths: ARVN–274,769; VNN–15,491; VNAF–14,658; VNMC–6,540; RF–133,002; and PF–189,195. Regarding the territorial components, the Joint Chiefs noted that the buildup of the regular forces would hinder recruitment of the RF and PF. "In view of the critical role of Regional Forces and Popular Forces in the Rural Construction Program," they

said, "request you give an appropriate priority to the recruiting, training and equipping of such forces."⁴⁴

Even as US troops flowed into South Vietnam, Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued planning and trying to carry out an effort to expand Saigon's armed forces and improve their effectiveness. Yet, as of the end of 1965, results were hard to find. In particular, there was little improvement in RVNAF leadership, which remained tainted with corruption, lacking in professionalism, and entangled in politics. A US Army historian summed up the situation at this time:

Although the South Vietnamese armed forces looked better on paper ..., they still had to overcome their major weaknesses in leadership and combat effectiveness. The general reserve units were tired, and most of the other ground combat units were in static defensive positions. Exhausted by encounters with large Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units, neither the regulars nor the territorials had the energy to seriously challenge the local Viet Cong cadre and militia. Westmoreland expected little improvement in the foreseeable future Salvation appeared to lie in greater American participation in the war effort by continuing the U.S. troop buildup and escalating the air war over Laos and North Vietnam. If the South Vietnamese could not win the war, the Americans would have to do it for them.⁴⁵

Military Operations, July–December 1965

The United States government deployed combat troops to South Vietnam before it had reached final decisions on exactly how the soldiers and Marines would be employed against the enemy. During the ensuing months, as more and more US troops arrived in South Vietnam, the Johnson administration gave close scrutiny to what they should be doing. Especially at issue was whether or not the United States would assume the lion's share of the large unit fighting and leave the pacification and security missions to the RVNAF.

As the ground war developed, the United States also expanded and refined its use of air and naval power. In particular, the administration made decisions on command and control of B-52 bombers in South Vietnam, the employment of US naval craft to halt sea infiltration from North Vietnam, and the use of US planes to strike the Ho Chi Minh Trail supply route through Laos. To accommodate these and other programs, the administration had to reconsider the restraints it had placed, primarily for political reasons, upon operation of its forces in Southeast Asia. This reconsideration led to some modification of the rules of engagement for South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

First Engagements

The war would not wait for the administration to arrive at a definitive concept of ground operations. Rather than always adhering hard and fast to predetermined concepts, commanders in the field reacted, insofar as their resources would allow, to enemy initiatives and ARVN weaknesses with whatever tactics seemed most effective at the time.

As early as 22 April 1965, a small patrol of Marines and South Vietnamese troops engaged in a fire fight with the Viet Cong near Da Nang, the first combat encounter with the enemy by an American unit. During May and June, as additional American forces arrived and deployed, the Marines patrolled aggressively around their bases at Da Nang, Chu Lai, and Hue/Phu Bai. By 7 June, with more than 50,000 US military personnel in country, US Army airborne troops were engaging in search and destroy missions around Bien Hoa. On 27 June, two battalions from the 173rd Airborne Brigade and two ARVN battalions, with the Australian battalion and a US battalion in reserve, conducted a combined search and destroy operation in the enemy's War Zone D base area. The enemy was not passive. On 1 July, the Viet Cong attacked the Da Nang air base under cover of darkness, destroying three USAF planes and severely damaging three others. By this time, contacts between American and enemy units had increased, and the trend continued into July and August.¹

The first regimental size battle between US and Viet Cong forces took place in mid-August near Chu Lai. Intelligence reports indicated that 2,000 enemy troops, a main force regiment, were in position to attack the Marine base. In response, elements of the 4th Marines deployed by helicopter to designated landing zones while other units made amphibious landings in a maneuver designed to link up with blocking forces and cut off enemy escape routes. In two days of hard fighting, the Marines claimed to have killed approximately 700 Viet Cong, at a cost to themselves of 45 dead and 203 wounded, and to have rendered the *1st Viet Cong Regiment* combat ineffective.²

Concepts of Employment—US, FWMAF, and RVNAF

During visits to Hawaii and Saigon in July, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, heard briefings on General Westmoreland's Phase I US deployment program and his ideas on how these forces were to be employed. The South Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) also briefed the American officials on Saigon's version, prepared independently, of future operations. The South Vietnamese wanted to turn the highlands area over to US forces and shift their own units to the seacoast region, since they believed the RVNAF was best qualified to establish contact with the populace and handle the main security and pacification duties. In the JGS view, the US Marines should be committed to search and destroy operations in I CTZ; and the Army airmobile division should go to the Kontum, Pleiku, and Phu Bon area as soon as possible. The JGS also asked that another US infantry division be moved to South Vietnam to operate around Tay Ninh and Phuoc Long in III CTZ, pointing out that the Viet Cong were defeating the ARVN there. As a whole, the JGS briefing implied strongly that American forces would have a more active role than the ARVN in fighting the enemy's large units.³

At the July meetings and later, US officials accepted in principle the Joint General Staff's proposed allocation of responsibilities but opposed making a rigid division of labor between the United States/Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) and

the South Vietnamese forces. They preferred instead that all participating nations share responsibility for both combat and security operations, in varying proportions according to their diverse capabilities. As General Westmoreland formulated it, the Americans and the RVNAF general reserve marine and airborne brigades would primarily, but not exclusively, battle the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese main force outside the pacification zones; the bulk of the ARVN and all of the Regional and Popular Forces, with US and FWMAF help as needed and available, would root out the Viet Cong guerrillas and establish security in the villages and hamlets. Working on this basis, General Westmoreland developed his concept for employing Phase I forces and the strategy, concept, and forces required for Phase II. He took steps to associate the Joint General Staff with these planning efforts through development of an annual combined campaign plan that spelled out overall objectives and the responsibilities of all the allied forces.⁴

On 27 August, in connection with their planning for deployments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared and forwarded to the Secretary of Defense their own comprehensive recommendations for US strategy in Southeast Asia, together with a statement of military actions necessary to carry out this strategy. With reference to the war in South Vietnam, they addressed the situation facing COMUSMACV and the RVNAF and the broad outlines of the strategies that would have to be employed. MACV and its allies confronted a number of specific problems: the continued existence of a widespread Viet Cong infrastructure, both political and military; a Viet Cong armed force that was growing in strength at a faster rate than the ARVN; and the continued loss to the enemy of lines of communication, food-producing areas, and population.

To remedy this situation, the allies must cause North Vietnam to cease directing and supporting the Viet Cong, defeat the Viet Cong, and extend Saigon's control over all of South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs recommended that the "US basic strategy for winning the war should include, within RVN ... to improve the combat effectiveness of the RVNAF; build and protect bases; reduce enemy reinforcements; [and] defeat the Viet Cong, in concert with the RVN and third country forces."

Analyzing the enemy's current strategy in South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs stated that the Viet Cong, directed and controlled from the North, used propaganda, intimidation, and terror to gain the support of the rural population. Whenever possible, the enemy used armed assault and coercion to destroy Saigon's capability to govern an area, thereby cutting the government off from the people and their resources. Once they had control of an area, the Viet Cong set up their own governing apparatus. Making use of local people and logistic support, the Viet Cong organized and trained military units to attack the government and its troops. Usually, they sought to avoid large-scale sustained battles with the RVNAF and the newly arrived American units, preferring to strike at weak spots with superior force, then "fading away" when the odds shifted against them. The enemy's current major objective appeared to be the destruction of the RVNAF.

To counter the enemy's method of warfare, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, the United States and South Vietnam must recapture control of the country's population and resources. In particular, the allies must secure the areas of greatest military significance:

Saigon and its environs, the Mekong Delta, the coastal plain, and the central highlands. The United States should direct its military action at eliminating the Viet Cong from these regions in order to protect the people there. The United States must build up and secure a series of bases and supporting lines of communication at key localities along the coast, from which to launch and sustain offensive operations. In line with the general official consensus on roles and missions, the Joint Chiefs declared that American and third country forces should devote their principal effort to assisting the RVNAF in search and destroy operations while also helping the South Vietnamese to clear and secure areas for pacification. The United States and the FWMAF should conduct sustained air and ground operations, attacking and destroying Viet Cong base areas, so as to keep continuous pressure on the enemy.⁵

On 30 August 1965, General Westmoreland issued his own concept for the operational employment of US forces in South Vietnam. He visualized three phases of operations by American forces in coordination with third country contingents and the RVNAF: Phase I—commitment of US and FWMA forces necessary to halt the losing trend by the end of 1965; Phase II—resumption of the offensive by US/FWMAF during the first half of 1966 in high priority areas to destroy enemy forces and reestablish rural construction (pacification) activities; Phase III—should the enemy continue fighting, destruction of remaining hostile forces and base areas during a period of a year to a year and a half following Phase II.

During Phase I, allied forces would secure major military bases, airfields, and communications centers; defend major political and population centers; attack major Viet Cong base areas to divert and destroy enemy main forces; provide reserve reaction forces to prevent the loss of secure and defended areas; strengthen and preserve the RVNAF; provide adequate combat and logistic air support; maintain an anti-infiltration screen along the coast and support forces on shore with naval gunfire and amphibious lift; furnish air and sealifts as necessary to transport the minimum supplies and services to the civil population; open lines of communication necessary for essential military and civil purposes; and defend, as possible, areas under effective government control.

During Phase II, the allies would resume pacification operations, which effectively had come to a standstill. The HOP TAC area around Saigon would receive priority in effort and resources. Other priority areas would be the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tri, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, and Phu Yen. Supporting these actions, COMUSMACV's forces would carry out offensive and clear and secure operations and provide reaction reserves. For each phase, the plan set forth detailed concepts of operation and tasks to be performed in each corps tactical zone.⁶

In mid-September, General Westmoreland reported that his planning had culminated in a schedule of operations, approved jointly by himself and the Chief of the RVNAF Joint General Staff, some of which were even then taking place. In view of the deployment planning conference scheduled for Hawaii at the end of September, General Westmoreland proposed to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and CINCPAC that he have presented there the strategy and employment concept for the Phase I and Phase

II forces along with salient features of the campaign plan. Depending on how many additional forces the planning conference approved, he would then, in concert with the Chief, JGS, project the campaign plan forward.⁷

Also in mid-September, General Westmoreland outlined for his commanders his approach to working with the RVNAF. He urged his subordinates to cooperate as closely as possible with their allies, to encourage them, and by example and other means to attempt to instill in them a professional approach and competence. He admitted the difficulty in conducting combined operations requiring surprise, due to the widespread subversion in the ARVN. Nevertheless, “with a minimum of coordination at the lower level but a full and frank exchange of information with senior ARVN commanders,” US troops could make the initial assault with surprise and speed, holding the ARVN in reserve for commitment as the battle began to develop. General Westmoreland instructed his commanders to establish, whenever possible, a combined command post with the cooperating ARVN unit, so as to exercise influence on the tactical direction of operations and effectively coordinate the US air and artillery support on which the South Vietnamese were increasingly dependent. The MACV commander urged extensive exchange of liaison officers with the ARVN and the placing of US forward observers and forward air controllers with the South Vietnamese. He also suggested that US units cooperate tactically with the RF and PF, a practice that would gain the Americans useful intelligence and perhaps encourage the territorials to confront the Viet Cong more resolutely.⁸

On 7 October, CINCPAC, replying to a Joint Chiefs of Staff request of 25 August, issued his definition of the role of US forces in Phase II operations. In his view, the mission of these forces was to defeat the Viet Cong and extend Saigon’s control over all of South Vietnam. If the Viet Cong operated in large formations, US forces, in conjunction with the RVNAF, would find, fix, and destroy them. If the enemy reverted to small operations, the Americans and South Vietnamese would clear, secure, and pacify areas as fast as practicable. US and third country forces would conduct periodic offensives in Viet Cong controlled areas to destroy enemy main forces and bases. The allies would coordinate all their activities closely with the RVNAF to stimulate an improved performance by Saigon’s forces. American forces would help the South Vietnamese to defend major population centers, assist the RVNAF to regain the initiative, strengthen it, and aid Saigon in rural construction. The South Vietnamese would conduct pacification operations with and without US military participation.⁹

On 21 October, Brigadier General William E. DePuy, USA, the MACV J-3, briefed the Secretary of State, his principal assistants, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Taylor (now returned to private life but still advising the administration) on COMUSMACV’s Phase II program. The ensuing discussion focused upon the concept for employing American forces as compared with the role of the RVNAF. As General DePuy explained it, the ARVN with the exception of certain elite units—airborne, Marines, and some Rangers—would be mainly employed in pacification activities behind a “fighting screen” of US troops. The Americans would carry the

battle to the enemy in the war zones and other areas where Viet Cong main force units were to be found.¹⁰

Among the salient points of his briefing, General DePuy stated that US troops would be deployed to defend bases and would conduct search and destroy operations generally in “penny packets.” American commanders would visit Regional and Popular Force units and would have troops accompany and support RF companies in areas that the territorials normally avoided. COMUSMACV campaign plans specified areas where US forces would operate each month, opening roads, conducting clearing operations, and protecting the rice harvest. General DePuy noted that this technique had already served to put the ARVN back in the war. The arrival of 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) units in the central highlands had already freed four or five South Vietnamese battalions to work in the populated areas of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen provinces. These ARVN troops, operating behind a screen of US units, would set the stage for pacification. The South Vietnamese government favored the concept of using their forces among the people while US troops screened against main Viet Cong units and maneuvered on the edges of the populated zones and against the enemy’s base areas.¹¹

General DePuy’s briefing raised concern among some attendees that Saigon might be prepared to stand back and let the United States do most of the fighting. Notably, General Taylor, after hearing General DePuy’s description of the employment of Phase II forces, observed that while the original concept seemed to have been for the US troops to assist the South Vietnamese, that concept seemed to have dropped out, with the US ground forces taking on the role of “primary doer.” He questioned whether the United States was prepared to assume this preponderant ground combat role, while the ARVN fell back behind US units on pacification duty. In response to the concerns of General Taylor and others, General Wheeler asked Admiral Sharp on 22 October to clarify this point, saying “there is a need for us to have a clearer understanding of just what we can expect in the future from the ARVN ...”¹²

This need for a “clearer understanding” was becoming apparent in other quarters as well. The American press and other news media were devoting considerably more attention to the operations of US forces in Vietnam than to those of the RVNAF. In early November, Ambassador Lodge expressed concern over this. He recommended that the State and Defense Departments give firm guidance to all appropriate subordinates emphasizing that the United States was not taking over the war, that the South Vietnamese had the basic and essential role, and that the American role remained that of combat support to the RVNAF. Agreeing with the Ambassador, Secretary McNamara informed the Services and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that “critical as our own operations may be it is an inescapable fact that final attainment of our goals in South Vietnam will depend to an even greater extent on effective operations by the RVNAF, which must continue to conduct the bulk of all actions against the VC, and on the stability and morale of the GVN as a whole.” He instructed all agencies to consider this statement as guidance within their respective areas of responsibility.¹³

On 2 November, Admiral Sharp replied to the Chairman's query of 22 October regarding the role of the ARVN. CINCPAC pointed out that ARVN and Regional Force units normally would engage in four main types of operations. These were search and destroy, clear and secure, reserve reaction, and defense of government centers. Search and destroy denoted "offensive operations undertaken against known or suspected VC base areas or force concentrations," thereby keeping the enemy on the move and driving him away from populated areas. Clearing operations were "Search and Destroy operations conducted in a well defined zone directed at destroying or permanently eliminating VC forces from that zone." Securing operations provided long-term protection for "hamlets, villages, and districts, which have already been cleared of larger VC units and in which the Government is reestablishing effective control." Reserve reaction operations were designed to relieve province and district towns and units under attack. Defense of government centers included protection of province capitals, district towns, and key governmental facilities and installations.

Whenever possible, Admiral Sharp continued, South Vietnamese forces would defend government installations and bases and conduct securing operations. US forces would not engage in such activities except in areas around their own bases. While some ARVN battalions would be earmarked for reserve reaction and search and destroy operations, US and Free World units and the ARVN general reserve (six airborne and six marine battalions) would conduct the majority of attacks against Viet Cong forces and bases.¹⁴

Although General Wheeler considered CINCPAC's concept to be "at considerable variance" from that briefed by General DePuy on 22 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concept of operations differed little in substance from those of the field commands. On 10 November, the Joint Chiefs presented to the Secretary of Defense an extension and defense of the concept they had given him on 27 August. As the Joint Chiefs of Staff envisioned it, US and allied forces would continue to establish and expand secure bases and lines of communication along the seacoast and elsewhere as necessary. From these positions, they would step up offensive operations against Viet Cong main force units and bases so as to assist Saigon to expand its control over the people and resources of the militarily and economically significant areas of Saigon, the Mekong Delta, the coastal plain, and the central highlands. When the enemy operated in large formations, US/third country and RVNAF forces would find, fix, and destroy them. If the Viet Cong dispersed and reverted to small-scale actions or guerrilla warfare, the allies would place additional emphasis on clearing, security, and civic action operations. Besides securing their own bases and lines of communication, United States and third country troops, in conjunction with air and naval forces, would provide heavy assault strength against the Viet Cong. They would launch offensive operations to assist the RVNAF in defending major population centers, advise and support the ARVN, conduct psychological operations, and assist in the pacification program. US/third country and ARVN general reserve forces would handle the bulk of search and destroy operations outside the secure areas.

Most of the ARVN would be committed to defending government installations and to securing operations.¹⁵

These clarifications and reformulations failed to assuage General Taylor's concerns. On 19 November, he informed Secretary McNamara and the Chairman that the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their "paper" seemed to be accepting the concept of the RVNAF JGS that US forces should have the "primary combat role" in South Vietnam. General Taylor asserted that this was a mistake from the viewpoints of "GVN psychology and US domestic opinion"¹⁶

Ground Combat Operations, Late 1965

The issue of the proper US share of combat operations in South Vietnam was never resolved but was largely overtaken by events as fighting intensified. During the last half of 1965, the Viet Cong continued to expand all components of their forces, particularly their local force battalions and main force regiments. From North Vietnam, additional infantry regiments, along with artillery, sapper, engineer, and signal units and other specialist troops entered the battlefield. During the fall and winter, the enemy organized five infantry and one artillery divisions from his forces in South Vietnam. Carrying out earlier strategy decisions, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong expanded their large-unit operations while also keeping up guerrilla warfare and political subversion. According to official historians in Hanoi, "Combining the rapid expansion of our local force units and mass political forces with the formation of mobile main force divisions on the battlefield, our army was able to intensify its massed combat operations in combination with guerrilla warfare to gradually defeat the plots and strategic measures being employed by the American, puppet, and satellite troops." As a campaign slogan, the enemy adopted: "Seek out the Americans to fight them, pursue the puppets to kill them."¹⁷

Seeking battle as they were, the Communists collided ever more frequently with the arriving American forces as well as with the South Vietnamese. In I CTZ, where enemy main force units were slow to appear, the US Marines concentrated on the defense of their bases at Da Nang, Chu Lai, and Phu Bai and sought to root out the guerrillas from the villages and hamlets. The Viet Cong had been extremely active in the region, especially around Da Nang, and controlled much of the countryside. Because the fighting took place in populated areas, the danger to the civilian populace was great. Concerned about the number of noncombatants being killed and injured in US combat operations, the CG III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF), General Lewis W. Walt, ordered great care in the use of artillery, aviation, and other weapons capable of inflicting mass casualties. He restricted their use in populated areas to close support missions against clearly identifiable enemy targets. At the same time, the Marines experimented with combining their rifle squads with the Regional and Popular Forces to clear and hold the hamlets.¹⁸

With the arrival in early autumn of major US Army units, including the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and the 1st Infantry Division, General Westmoreland expanded his

attacks in the II and III CTZs. In the II CTZ, US and ARVN forces secured coastal areas and pushed forward along formerly Viet Cong controlled lines of communication into the highlands plateau. In one of the earliest large-scale US Army search and destroy campaigns, a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division conducted Operation GIBALTAR in Binh Dinh province from 17 to 21 September. In a fierce engagement with an enemy main force unit, the brigade reported killing 226 Viet Cong at the cost of 13 Americans killed and 28 wounded.¹⁹

American incursions into the central highlands brought strong reaction from the enemy, who pursued his own offensive plans, reinforced by units fresh from the North. The major North Vietnamese counterattack began on 19 October when an enemy regiment besieged a Special Forces camp at Plei Me, 25 miles southwest of Pleiku. This action touched off a month-long campaign during which US, ARVN, and Viet Cong/North Vietnamese troops engaged in the heaviest fighting up to that time in South Vietnam.

Following the relief of Plei Me by US airstrikes and an ARVN ground force, the 1st Cavalry Division launched a search and destroy mission, Operation SILVER BAYONET, between Pleiku and the Cambodian border. A North Vietnamese division was waiting for the heliborne troopers in the Ia Drang valley. On 14 November, the enemy attacked a battalion of the cavalry division's 3rd Brigade at Landing Zone (LZ) X-Ray. Repeatedly, the enemy attempted to overrun the American position with human wave assaults; but the cavalymen held their ground, at times in hand-to-hand combat, aided by lavish air, artillery, and armed helicopter support. Used in a tactical role, B-52s caused heavy enemy casualties. Badly defeated at X-RAY, the North Vietnamese secured a measure of revenge on 17 November, when they ambushed and came near destroying a battalion of the 3rd Brigade at LZ ALBANY, although again at the price of heavy Communist losses. When the fighting died away as the North Vietnamese withdrew to sanctuary in Cambodia, the 1st Cavalry claimed to have killed more than 1,200 of the enemy while losing 217 of its own killed and 232 wounded. While an American tactical victory, the battle had occurred at the enemy's initiative, as a carefully planned effort to test US forces and destroy American troops; and the North Vietnamese considered the operation to have been a success.²⁰

While these battles took place in the north, in III CTZ the 1st Infantry Division and other American and South Vietnamese units pushed out from Saigon into the enemy's hitherto largely unmolested war zones. During October, November, and December, the 173rd Airborne Brigade conducted 14 company size or larger operations, east and north-east of Saigon. Mostly north of the capital, the 1st Division carried out 59 battalion size or larger operations. In addition, both units reported more than 3,000 smaller operations, over 800 of which produced some contact.²¹

In this region, too, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong sought battle. A number of sharp actions resulted. From 5-9 November, in Operation HUMP, the 173rd Airborne Brigade fought engagements in which it killed an estimated 400 enemy while losing 49 dead and 83 wounded. In Operation BUSHMASTER II, between 28 November and 9 December, the 1st Division destroyed units, facilities, and a weapons factory and ammunition in an

enemy base area and killed almost 300 Viet Cong. In these and other operations, a US Army historian concluded, American forces had damaged the enemy and showed that they “were now here to stay in these contested parts of III Corps.”²²

B-52 Operations: The Quest for Flexibility

After the first few weeks of ARC LIGHT operations, the program had assumed a fairly routine aspect in the eyes of Washington policymakers. Although the President personally had approved the first B-52 strikes, the Secretary of Defense authorized subsequent missions. General Westmoreland developed targets on the basis of intelligence from various sources that indicated the presence of enemy forces or installations in a particular area. COMUSMACV forwarded his proposed targets to CINCPAC, who in turn reviewed them and sent them along, with his comments, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the next step, the Joint Chiefs, if they approved, recommended the targets to the Secretary of Defense. Secretary McNamara then consulted with the White House staff and the State Department and, based upon their views and his own judgment, either approved or disapproved the strikes in question.²³

This procedure had several flaws. First, it was time-consuming and cumbersome. If a target was of a transitory nature, such as a troop concentration, the strike might not arrive until after the enemy had moved away. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were concerned about the lack of adequate intelligence information on some of COMUSMACV's proposed targets. Air Force officials were not convinced that the ARC LIGHT strikes were in all cases justified. They were particularly disturbed by the fact that only occasionally did ground forces go in to determine results or to take advantage of damage done the enemy. Unfortunately, General Westmoreland did not have sufficient ground troops available to exploit more than a fraction of the strikes during 1965, nor could the ARVN generate adequate forces for this purpose. Nevertheless, having established the principle of approving targets largely on the field commander's recommendation, the Joint Chiefs either had to break this precedent or go along with the recommendation. Occasionally, they did ask for further intelligence support of particular targets. The Joint Chiefs were also concerned that in passing on these targets, they were performing a function that normally would have been handled within the theater.²⁴

A diplomatic problem with ARC LIGHT surfaced in late July. Because of bad weather, B-52s were temporarily moved to Okinawa and a strike was launched from there. As Ambassador Taylor had foreseen earlier, the Japanese Prime Minister expressed concern that the use of Okinawa for B-52 operations in South Vietnam might cause an outcry from political opponents of his government and exacerbate US/Japanese relations. In response, State Department officials urged that the United States discuss its position with the Government of Japan. Under Secretary of State Ball advised Secretary McNamara that an aroused Japanese public might pressure its government to demand changes in US rights in Okinawa, a matter under continuing review.²⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had held consistently that unrestricted use of US bases in the Ryukyus was essential to the US security position in Asia. They also believed that the United States should not make any concessions on base rights for political reasons at this time. On 3 August, they declared to the Secretary of Defense that the unlimited right to all necessary use of the bases on Okinawa must be upheld as a matter of national policy and that the United States should not agree to consult with or notify the Japanese Government regarding their use. The Joint Chiefs of Staff received no formal reply to this statement, although higher authorities took the matter under consideration.²⁶

Although the United States continued to fly tanker support from Okinawa, it did not normally fly the B-52s from there. On only one other occasion in 1965, owing to weather conditions, were the B-52s temporarily based on the island. The Joint Chiefs continued to believe that the United States should have unrestricted use of Okinawa, but they realized that the State Department would probably oppose any regular large-scale B-52 operations from that base. They did not press the issue during the remainder of the year.²⁷

On 16 August, seeking to increase the flexibility he felt was needed in ARC LIGHT, General Westmoreland proposed that five areas in South Vietnam be designated as Free Bomb Zones (FBZs). The areas were known to be Viet Cong strongholds, free of friendly forces, and not close to South Vietnam's borders. The JGS of the RVNAF and the Saigon government had identified and approved them for attack. Ambassador Lodge, too, agreed, with COMUSMACV's plan. General Westmoreland proposed that planned strike programs against targets in the FBZs be approved in advance for execution when appropriate. COMUSMACV and CINCSAC would handle these strikes directly between them while keeping interested authorities informed. To get the program under way, General Westmoreland asked to strike seven target areas within the proposed Free Bomb Zones, which were designated phonetically ALFA through ECHO.²⁸

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw merit in General Westmoreland's proposal, they did not want decisions on ARC LIGHT to be taken out of their hands entirely. Consequently, on 21 August, they asked the Secretary of Defense to vest in them the execution authority for the seven targets COMUSMACV had nominated for strike during the last week of August. Further, they proposed that he delegate to them execution authority for future strikes in the Free Bomb Zones delineated. Requests for strikes outside the Free Bomb Zones would continue to be processed as in the past.²⁹

Secretary McNamara approved the seven strikes, which were executed late in August. However, he took until 29 September to approve the proposed procedure for Free Bomb Zones, and then he imposed conditions. He directed the Joint Chiefs to keep the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) informed of recommended strikes in the Free Bomb Zones. With respect to targets outside the Free Bomb Zones, McNamara added, "the ASD/ISA will continue to transmit my decisions after considering White House Staff and Department of State views on the proposed strikes."³⁰

The Free Bomb Zone program continued to evolve through the end of the year. Until mid-August, all ARC LIGHT strikes had been maximum effort, each involving 30 B-52s. With the approval of the Free Bomb Zones, the Air Force began conducting

smaller, more frequent bombings. On 23 October, the Joint Chiefs recommended to the Secretary of Defense a sixth FBZ approved by South Vietnamese officials and the US Ambassador. This zone lay in Tay Ninh province in III CTZ and was long known to contain well-established Viet Cong bases. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary for authority to execute ARC LIGHT strikes within additional FBZs as the Saigon government and the Ambassador approved them in the future. They received no immediate reply.³¹

Late in the year, in one of the most successful applications of ARC LIGHT fire power to date, B-52s from Guam flew close support missions for US troops fighting in the highlands along the Cambodian border. In these battles, part of Operation SILVER BAYONET, the urgency of the situation underscored the need for quicker reaction to calls for B-52 support. Seeking faster response, General Westmoreland on 16 November asked to be allowed to deal directly with the SAC commander on Guam, the CG, 3rd Air Division, as well as for “blanket approval ... for the conduct of the bombing effort” during SILVER BAYONET. Admiral Sharp concurred in this request. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thereupon authorized CINCPAC and CINCSAC to delegate to COMUSMACV and CG, 3rd Air Division, respectively the authority to establish direct liaison channels during the current operations in the highlands. CINCSAC, however, declined to delegate this authority. As a result, on 17 November, CINCPAC instructed COMUSMACV to continue to submit proposed SILVER BAYONET targets to him for approval.³²

In December, General Westmoreland again sought special approval authority to decrease B-52 reaction time. The enemy attacked US and ARVN troops engaged in Operation BUSHMASTER II in the Michelin Plantation area, and COMUSMACV called for B-52 strikes. He asked that ARC LIGHT “coordination and approval channels be decentralized” as had been done for SILVER BAYONET. He received approval for this on 3 December.³³

These operations proved the value of ARC LIGHT in close support but pointed up the need for decentralized control of the B-52s. Of 149 targets that had been hit by mid-January 1966, 139 had been processed for individual approval at the Washington level. The amount of time that had elapsed before approval was received varied from 24 to 72 hours. In the several cases where a desired time on target (TOT) was 24–30 hours after the initial request, only extraordinary efforts had brought the bombers in on schedule. In the view of the field commanders, the establishment of the Free Bomb Zones and the ad hoc measures to relax control in emergencies were steps in the right direction but did not go far enough. General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp pressed for a more comprehensive solution to the problem.³⁴

Both commanders believed the existing system inadequate. On 6 November, CINCPAC recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff issue instructions to him and to CINCSAC setting out basic guidelines and direct the SAC commander to provide a fixed number of B-52 sorties per month in support of CINCPAC. Admiral Sharp then would instruct General Westmoreland to request strikes at least 48 hours in advance of desired TOT, at the same time sending the action to the CG, 3rd Air Division, or CINCSAC

with information copies to the JCS. Approval would be automatic if the Joint Chiefs, CINCPAC, or CINCSAC did not object. Twenty-four hours prior to the strike, the CG, 3rd Air Division, would issue an order of intent to conduct the mission. COMUSMACV would be authorized direct liaison with the 3rd Air Division commander for minor deviations from the plan. Any special requests—waiver of restrictions, increase in monthly sorties, etc.—would be submitted to the Joint Chiefs for approval. Although he insisted on retaining demurral authority on strike requests, CINCSAC generally agreed with CINCPAC's proposal.³⁵

Apparently, the Secretary of Defense had been thinking along the same lines. On 18 December, he approved, with a minor adjustment, the sixth Free Bomb Zone that the Joint Chiefs had proposed on 23 October; but he did not give the JCS carte blanche to create additional Free Bomb Zones based on Saigon government and US Ambassador approval. Mr. McNamara wanted less emphasis on creation of Free Bomb Zones and greater emphasis on analyzing current procedures. He instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to conduct a full review of ARC LIGHT procedures “with the objective of establishing a firm basis for providing the highest level of effectiveness, flexibility and responsiveness in the employment of ARC LIGHT forces generally.” The Secretary noted that this was particularly important because it was very likely that the situation then developing in South Vietnam would require a “substantial increase” in ARC LIGHT operations in the months ahead. He warned that any changes in procedure must permit quick cancellation or recall if political reasons required, must ensure avoidance of noncombatant casualties, must not violate neutral borders, and must not allow the program to lapse into routine operations. The Joint Chiefs directed the Joint Staff to begin the survey of ARC LIGHT immediately.³⁶

Operation MARKET TIME Expands

During the last half of 1965, MARKET TIME, the naval campaign to choke off seaborne infiltration from North Vietnam, evolved into an effective blockade. During their July visit to Saigon, Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler talked with General Westmoreland about the operation. Mr. McNamara was not convinced that the enemy was bringing in any significant amounts of supply by sea. He had seen no real proof other than the capture of a single enemy vessel in February. Nevertheless, on his return to Washington, he indicated a desire to build up MARKET TIME forces and “saturate” South Vietnam's coastal areas to cut off any infiltration that might be going on. The Secretary of Defense brought back with him from Saigon a “shopping list” that General Westmoreland had given him which included, among other things, a sizeable package for expansion of MARKET TIME.

The MACV commander's list included 60 modern, motorized junks for South Vietnam's Junk Force, expedited delivery of 20 Swift patrol craft with US crews, a speed-up in procurement of 34 additional Swifts, and certain communications equipment. The 60

motorized junks would replace a like number of sail-only junks which were old and in poor condition. General Westmoreland wanted delivery of these started on 30 November and completed by 31 March 1966. The Swift Boats, which had been used in OPLAN 34A operations, were excellent for patrolling and investigating inshore areas. The 20 boats already on order would be used to seal off coastal lanes around the 17th parallel and in the Gulf of Thailand; the 34 additional craft would be needed on the central coast. American personnel would man the Swift Boats until the Vietnamese Navy was capable of taking them over, probably in late 1966. The Swift Boats could do some surveillance and intercept jobs as well as destroyers and at considerably less cost.³⁷

As had been decided earlier, COMUSMACV assumed control of MARKET TIME forces on 30 July 1965. He exercised his authority through the Chief of the Naval Advisory Group, Rear Admiral Norvell G. Ward, who commanded TF-115, integrating sea, air, and shore-based units for MARKET TIME operations. Initially, TF-115 included seven radar picket escort ships, two ocean mine sweepers, 17 82-foot cutters, and SP-2H aircraft, as well as two Combat Tactical Groups from the US Coast Guard. With these units, supplemented by patrol aircraft from Tan Son Nhut and Sangley Point in the Philippines, TF-115 kept watch in the nine patrol zones into which COMUSMACV divided the coast of South Vietnam. Its area of responsibility extended from the 17th parallel to the South Vietnam/Cambodia border.³⁸

The Naval Advisory Group improved its own operations. Notably, the group established an intelligence disseminating organization based on the Surface Operations Center (SOC) in Saigon. SOC examined all information dealing with MARKET TIME and directed operations to intercept, capture, or destroy hostile vessels. The SOC received its information from five Combined Coastal Surveillance Centers (CSCs). In turn, the CSCs gathered reports from all US and South Vietnamese surface and air units, sending their findings to the SOC for a more complete and detailed examination.³⁹

By late 1965, MARKET TIME was sufficiently established to deny enemy shipping freedom of movement along the coast. The Viet Cong appeared to be still transporting personnel and equipment by sea, but the extent of the traffic was unknown. While Vietnamese Navy units had improved, their performance was still not up to par. They carried out their missions with greater aggressiveness and had added three vessels to the ships already involved in MARKET TIME; but these limited improvements had not met the standards established by Admiral Ward. The Coastal Force was still having many of the same difficulties it had experienced at the beginning of 1965—a general lack of routine maintenance, untrained personnel, and inadequate leadership. In spite of these deficiencies, Admiral Ward rated the force as “satisfactory” in his year-end evaluation.⁴⁰

During Secretary McNamara’s visit to Saigon in November, General Westmoreland submitted his own evaluation of MARKET TIME. He considered the operational concepts and efforts to be satisfactory considering available resources. He felt that the 54 Swift Boats to be delivered in the spring of 1966 would satisfy requirements for the present. Like Admiral Ward, he was not satisfied with the South Vietnamese Navy’s performance. Its aggressiveness and accuracy of reporting left much to be desired, but

he thought only increased advisory efforts could remedy the situation. COMUSMACV concluded that no major changes in the overall program were necessary and none was anticipated. He believed progress in MARKET TIME operations could continue so long as programmed forces materialized.⁴¹

Cross-Border Operations into Laos

Infiltration by sea was but one means that North Vietnam used to aid the Viet Cong. North Vietnam's major route for sending men and supplies to the South had long been overland down the Ho Chi Minh Trail through the Laos panhandle. Throughout 1965, the North Vietnamese expanded and improved this network of roads and way stations, making it usable by motor transport over much of its length. Thousands of infantry and air defense troops protected this vital supply line. To interdict this infiltration, the United States initiated a number of air and ground programs.⁴²

The United States had initiated reconnaissance and bombing operations in Laos beginning in May 1964. In December of that year, at a Washington conference, American officials had agreed to conduct regular air strikes against Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese infiltration routes and operating forces in Laos. These strikes code-named BARREL ROLL and designed primarily to support the Royal Laotian Government, had begun on 14 December. In mid-March 1965, after his trip to Vietnam, General Johnson recommended, among other actions, that the air campaign in Laos be redesigned and reoriented to focus more on interdiction of the infiltration routes. President Johnson approved this recommendation.

Accordingly, the United States divided Laos into two sectors for its air operations. In the northern sector, which retained the name BARREL ROLL, American planes flew missions primarily in support of Laotian government forces fighting the Pathet Lao. In the southern sector, named STEEL TIGER and designated a separate air program on 3 April 1965, the air strikes and reconnaissance concentrated on the enemy infiltration routes. By 29 April, Air Force and Navy planes had flown 791 sorties of all types in STEEL TIGER, and the campaign expanded steadily thereafter.⁴³

Since the spring of 1964, the United States had also considered cross-border ground operations into Laos to identify and destroy infiltration targets. Done frequently and on a large enough scale, such attacks might block the Ho Chi Minh Trail more effectively than air strikes. However, Washington had declined to approve any cross-border ground incursions due to concern over the fragile condition of the Royal Laotian Government and the desire to maintain the façade of Laotian neutrality.⁴⁴

In March 1965, COMUSMACV submitted to CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff a concept for cross-border operations developed by his Studies and Observation Group (MACSOG) and designed to gain better intelligence on the Laos infiltration routes and interdict them more effectively. The concept provided for three expanding phases of operations, beginning with "short-stay" tactical intelligence missions, progressing to

“longer-stay” intelligence and sabotage missions, and culminating in long-duration missions to develop local Laotian resistance cadres, utilizing secure bases in Laos and South Vietnam. RVNAF teams would carry out these operations, advised and supported by American personnel as feasible. In April, a Southeast Asia Coordinating Committee (SEACoord)⁴⁵ meeting in Saigon agreed that Phase I (the “short-stay” missions) could be initiated subject to certain limitations recommended by the US Ambassador in Vientiane. Concerned with protecting the appearance of Laotian neutrality, Ambassador William H. Sullivan wanted the missions accompanied by American advisers restricted to the two southernmost operational areas, with penetrations limited to 20 km and periods of no longer than 10 days. Finally, Ambassador Sullivan would agree to American advisers accompanying the teams only if they went in overland rather than by air.⁴⁶

On 18 June 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded COMUSMACV's concept to the Secretary of Defense. They recommended its approval in principle, for further planning, training, and discussion with the RVNAF. The Joint Chiefs also recommended approval of Phase I for implementation, subject to the time and geographical restrictions on the use of US advisers as proposed by Ambassador Sullivan. They found Ambassador Sullivan's limitation on the air introduction of American advisers unacceptable, however; and they recommended that unless this limitation was removed, there be no further consideration of the program. If the concept was adopted, the Joint Chiefs requested that it be paid for from DOD contingency funds. The Joint Chiefs of Staff discounted the political risks of these cross-border operations, stating that the increased overt American involvement in South Vietnam and Laos had largely eliminated the need to maintain “the façade of compliance” with the Geneva Accords.⁴⁷

Ambassador Sullivan visited Washington after submission of the concept to the Secretary of Defense. At a meeting with representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) on 23 July, he clarified his position on cross-border operations. He still insisted that the introduction of US-advised teams be by ground infiltration, but he agreed that subsequent resupply, reinforcement, and evacuation could be by air. He also accepted elimination of the ten-day restriction on length of stay and agreed that air missions in Laos be flown as approved and conducted through the BANGO alert system (US aircraft on strip alert in Thailand) but without including strike aircraft from South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs found these modified restrictions acceptable, and on 7 August they requested that Secretary McNamara approve and fund Laotian cross-border operations subject to Ambassador Sullivan's revised restrictions.⁴⁸

Action was not immediately forthcoming, and the Chairman informed the Secretary of Defense on 8 September that he was “increasingly concerned” over the long delay. General Wheeler stated that the military needed better intelligence on the infiltration routes in Laos and more effective interdiction of them. He believed that COMUSMACV's concept as supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff could make “an important contribution” to the effort in Vietnam. He urged the Secretary of Defense to push for “a clear-cut decision” on the entire issue, adding that, in the event of a negative from State, he was inclined “to go further up the chain.”⁴⁹

On 18 September, six weeks after the Joint Chiefs of Staff request, Secretary McNamara approved in principle the overall concept for cross-border operations into Laos. He authorized implementation of Phase I, subject to the limitations of Ambassador Sullivan and with operations restricted to the two southernmost areas of the panhandle with penetrations of no more than 20 km. The Secretary of Defense requested that he be informed 48 hours in advance of the intention to launch operations and be furnished appropriate progress and final reports. He also made provision for the necessary funding. The Joint Chiefs passed this authorization on to CINCPAC, assigning the operations the name SHINING BRASS. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC that, based on favorable experience with Phase I and his future recommendations, they would seek authority for expansion of SHINING BRASS consistent with General Westmoreland's original concept.⁵⁰

The Cambodian Border

Increasingly in the early months of 1965, the Viet Cong had made use of Cambodia as a base of operations for forays into South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that this sanctuary should be denied the enemy to the extent possible. Hence, in April they had recommended that the prohibition on RVNAF hot pursuit of Viet Cong into Cambodia be modified to allow "appropriate response" under certain conditions. The Secretary of Defense agreed "in principle" to a relaxation of the rules, but the State Department opposed modification because of the political situation at the time. As a result, in the second week of May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendation was disapproved.⁵¹

As 1965 wore on and fighting intensified, US military authorities, both in Washington and in the field, chafed under the restrictions that blocked action against Viet Cong using Cambodian territory. On 12 November, the Joint Chiefs informed the Secretary of Defense that "strong evidence" indicated that the enemy was using Cambodia as a logistics and communications base, a sanctuary, and a staging and transit area for operations in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that, despite the risk of antagonizing neutralist Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the allies must take forceful measures to stop this abuse; and they proposed a series of military actions to this end. They recommended expanded and intensified overall intelligence collection in Cambodia, low-altitude aerial reconnaissance over that state, increased surveillance of the sea routes between South Vietnam and Cambodia, and increased patrols on the Mekong and Bassac waterways. The Chiefs also called for paramilitary operations into Cambodia to reduce enemy infiltration into South Vietnam and authorization for US and South Vietnamese forces to enter Cambodia in immediate pursuit of the Viet Cong. In the political sphere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested a diplomatic effort to persuade the Cambodian government to cease support of the Viet Cong and the enlistment of third countries to pressure Sihanouk on this issue. For future consideration, the Joint Chiefs recommended military operations to prevent maritime shipping of contraband goods into Cambodia and overt

air and/or ground cross-border operations against confirmed lines of communication and facilities supporting the Viet Cong.⁵²

On 18 November, as Operation SILVER BAYONET was drawing to a close in the Ia Drang valley, Admiral Sharp pointed out to the JCS that US troops were heavily engaged with North Vietnamese regulars near the Cambodian border. It was likely that when the enemy broke contact they would withdraw into sanctuary in Cambodia. CINCPAC requested authority to conduct “immediate pursuit” of the North Vietnamese on the ground across the border, which was ill-marked and disputed in that area. In CINCPAC’s view, Cambodia had forfeited its neutral status by providing a haven for the enemy and the United States was entitled to pursue and destroy its adversaries there. If higher authority turned down actual pursuit, CINCPAC asked that, “as a lesser pressure,” US artillery be allowed to shoot into Cambodia at maximum range, pursuing the enemy by fire.⁵³

On 21 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized United States forces engaged in SILVER BAYONET to take the necessary actions to defend themselves against enemy attacks from Cambodia. These would include returning fire and maneuvering across the border as necessary while actually engaged and in contact with the enemy. This authorization included the use of artillery and close air support. The Joint Chiefs prohibited air and artillery strikes against populated areas in Cambodia. They also forbade attacks on North Vietnamese/Viet Cong base areas “other than in circumstances justified by self-defense in terms of continuing engagement and direct threat to US/RVNAF forces.”⁵⁴

On 9 December, General Westmoreland informed Admiral Sharp that it was perfectly clear that the enemy was building in Cambodia a base of operations in the same manner as he had done earlier in Laos. To meet this threat, COMUSMACV called for firm rules of engagement to include authority for: US air and artillery strikes to a maximum distance of 10 km into Cambodia against enemy weapons firing from the Cambodian border against US troops; ground troops, when engaging an enemy on or near the border, to maneuver into Cambodia for at least 2 km; US planes to fly observation and fire direction missions within a 10-mile strip of the border; and ground reconnaissance elements to operate to a depth of 5 km on the Cambodia side. Ambassador Lodge concurred with General Westmoreland’s recommendations.⁵⁵

Higher authority concurred with COMUSMACV’s evaluation of the situation and promised that, in cases similar to SILVER BAYONET, “similar authorization will be extended promptly from Washington.” State and Defense Department officials, however, did not judge it wise to grant advance approval for the type of action that General Westmoreland wished to take in Cambodia. Consequently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US forces, in emergency situations only, to take necessary counteractions in self-defense against enemy attacks from Cambodian territory; but they retained approval authority in Washington for nonemergency maneuver and return of fire across the border. The Joint Chiefs of Staff defined an emergency situation as one in which, in the judgment of the commander, the need for timely actions in self-defense precluded obtaining prior approval.⁵⁶

On 29 December, after discussing with the State Department the JCS recommendations of 12 November for military actions in Cambodia, the Secretary of Defense informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that there had been “substantial agreement” that the United States should seek to deny Cambodian territory for support of the Viet Cong but also continue to recognize Cambodian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore, Secretary McNamara did not intend to seek a policy decision on paramilitary or low-level aerial reconnaissance operations in or over Cambodia or authority for immediate pursuit beyond that already granted. He had proposed that the Secretary of State join with him in requesting the Director of Central Intelligence to develop a plan for expanding and intensifying the intelligence effort in Cambodia. The Secretary of Defense did authorize the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in coordination with the State Department, to take the necessary action to improve surveillance of the sea routes between South Vietnam and Cambodia and to strengthen controls on the Mekong and Bassac waterways, but without violating Cambodia’s border, territorial waters, or legitimate rights of navigation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff subsequently drew up and the Secretary of Defense approved an appropriate plan for these actions.⁵⁷

OPLAN 34A

begun in 1964, operations against North Vietnam under OPLAN 34A continued during 1965. In February 1965, the administration had approved the last four increments, Package One; and other actions followed aimed at expanding these operations. On 2 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve a request by CINCPAC to use US submarines and US-manned C-130s in OPLAN 34A operations. However, the Secretary of State disapproved of these actions.⁵⁸

As follow-on to the first eight increments of Package One, COMUSMACV proposed in April additional increments 9 through 12, all involving maritime actions against North Vietnam. These ranged from bombardment by Fast Patrol Boats to psychological operations, including an amphibious raid on the offshore Isle du Tigre. CINCPAC, however, recommended that Fast Patrol Boats not carry out bombardment missions. He wanted those craft to concentrate on interdicting sea infiltration and to continue to execute limited missions, less bombardments, north of the 17th parallel. As a result, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense increments 9 through 11 only, calling for reconnaissance and infiltration actions, an amphibious raid, and coastal harassment missions. These were approved on 21 June. Later in the year, CINCPAC recommended, and the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved, an extension of these maritime operations up to the 20th parallel.⁵⁹

Earlier, on 16 May, CINCPAC had recommended that the OPLAN 34A Fast Patrol Boats be used to stop, search, and harass North Vietnamese shipping north of the 17th parallel. This was in effect an extension of the junk capture program on which the Fast Patrol Boats already were engaged. Admiral Sharp proposed that US Navy advisers be

on board the Fast Patrol Boats and that American planes provide close support if the boats came under hostile attack beyond their ability to repel. The American advisers would wear civilian clothing but carry US identification. Because the original guidance for OPLAN 34A required that actions be covert and plausibly deniable by the United States government, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ruled against placing the advisers on board the Fast Patrol Boats. In other respects, they agreed with CINCPAC and on 3 July recommended that the Secretary of Defense approve employment of the Fast Patrol Boats as Admiral Sharp had proposed between the 17th and 19th parallels but without US Navy advisers. Deputy Secretary Vance granted approval on 28 July.⁶⁰

Under OPLAN 34A, the allies had long conducted psychological operations against North Vietnam, including dissemination of propaganda materials, such as leaflets, radios, and gift kits, by air. The C-123 aircraft that dropped these items were vulnerable to enemy anti-aircraft fire and hence were restricted to sparsely populated, lightly defended areas. By relying on wind-drift, these missions could spread leaflets over a wide region; but the technique did not allow “tactical leaflets” to be dropped on specifically selected targets. Nor could radios or gift kits be widely distributed. Consequently, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC proposed using the faster and less vulnerable A1G aircraft for these operations, thus securing more accurate drops on specific population centers. On 12 October, the Joint Chiefs recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve this employment. On 25 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff received word that Deputy Secretary Vance had authorized additional OPLAN 34A missions employing the A1G.⁶¹

Under existing directives, CINCPAC had to submit proposed air missions in periodic packages for Washington’s approval. Once carried out, each individual mission could be repeated only with reapproval from Washington. Admiral Sharp believed that his operations would be more effective if he were delegated authority to authorize in the theater repeat OPLAN 34A operations “in support of mission concepts and objectives that have been approved at the Washington level.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed. On 20 December, they recommended to the Secretary of Defense that CINCPAC be granted the authority he sought, although the approval of new concepts and/or mission objectives should continue to rest with the Joint Chiefs of Staff or higher authority. Deputy Secretary Vance approved this recommendation on 15 February 1966.⁶²

Revising the Rules of Engagement for Southeast Asia

At the beginning of 1965, the general rules of engagement (ROE) in effect for US forces operating in Southeast Asia dated from August and September 1964. These rules authorized US forces to attack and destroy any hostile vessel or aircraft which attacked, or gave positive indication of intent to attack, US forces in South Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos, their territorial seas and internal waters, as well as adjacent international waters. The ROE authorized hot pursuit into North Vietnam, Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Thailand, but not into Communist China. The local US military commander

was armed with an omnibus emergency authority to take immediate aggressive action against unprovoked armed attack, using any means at his command. Additional rules applied to Laos and most special operations and projects, such as YANKEE TEAM and destroyer operations in the Tonkin Gulf.⁶³

As it became apparent that US military involvement in Southeast Asia would grow, possibly leading to situations where US forces might need more leeway to operate, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took up the question of revising the ROE. The first initiative came from CINCPAC. On 6 January 1965, he declared that a recent incident in the South China Sea, in which unidentified craft had been detected approaching the Hue/Da Nang area, pointed up the need to make the ROE clearer and more precise. The Joint Chiefs agreed that the existing rules needed substantive changes to protect friendly forces in international waters and to permit stronger action by US forces if attacked by Communist Chinese planes.⁶⁴

On 16 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed to the Secretary of Defense revised ROE for Southeast Asia. These were actually a clarification and consolidation of existing rules, with certain provisions added to protect friendly forces in international waters and to allow “immediate pursuit” into Communist China. The Joint Chiefs had replaced the term “hot pursuit,” used earlier, with “immediate pursuit” to standardize terms among approved plans for various theaters and because “immediate pursuit” differed in certain key aspects from “hot pursuit” as defined in international law. Immediate pursuit must be continuous and uninterrupted and could be extended as far as necessary and feasible into the areas prescribed. The operative wording on this point stated that no pursuit was authorized “into territorial seas or air space of Communist China except in response to attack upon US forces by forces which can reasonably be established as CHICOM.” The Joint Chiefs told the Secretary that this new feature was essential to prevent creation of a sanctuary for attacking enemies; it was also essential to an effective American military presence in Southeast Asia as well as to US national dignity.

In its other aspects, the proposed new ROE attempted to define more exactly geographic areas and such terms as “hostile” and “friendly.” This was to remove some of the confusion that, because of omissions and imprecision, marked the current rules. With regard to operations such as BARREL ROLL, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested no modification of the procedure for setting up special rules on a case-by-case basis or any changes to existing special rules.⁶⁵

By the time the Secretary of Defense acted on this proposal on 12 April, ROLLING THUNDER had been under way for a month; the first surface-to-air missile site had been discovered in North Vietnam; and the President had committed US forces to ground combat in South Vietnam. Secretary McNamara refused to endorse “immediate pursuit” (which he equated with “hot pursuit”) into Communist China. He notified the Joint Chiefs that he believed hot pursuit should be allowed if significant, clearly intentional Chinese intervention took place. “However,” he said “since the implications of hot pursuit are likely to be so major, I believe that there should be no revision of present rules in this

connection at this time.” If circumstances dictated later, McNamara told the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he was ready to take up the issue with the President.

Whereas the earlier rules had established a three-mile limit for territorial waters, the Secretary changed this limit to 12 miles. He appreciated the Joint Chiefs’ “concern over the apparent recognition of a twelve-mile territorial limit but, solely for the purpose of these rules,” he believed it was “not desirable” to “bring these claims to issue with State now.” He considered that the 12-mile rule would restrict only the area in which US ships might be operationally deployed, not immediate pursuit. Although the Joint Chiefs had designated Cambodian aircraft as “hostile” if found over South Vietnam or Laos, Secretary McNamara pointed out that the United States had traditionally treated Cambodian forces less severely than communist bloc forces. Consequently, the Secretary deleted Cambodian aircraft from the “hostile” category. With these exceptions, he approved the rules of engagement proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁶⁶

Upon receipt of Mr. McNamara’s memorandum, the J-3 was quick to point out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the claim that the 12-mile limit would not restrict hot pursuit was not entirely correct. Territorial air space was defined with respect to territorial waters, and immediate pursuit was not authorized into either Chinese air space or territorial waters. Hence, McNamara’s amendment could well impose significant restrictions on US operations under current circumstances, particularly around Hainan Island. The Secretary was actually reflecting a *de facto* recognition of a claimed 12-mile territorial sea which the United States had not legally recognized. To preclude delay, the Joint Chiefs did not reclamation the Secretary’s amendments but sent the revised rules of engagement to CINCPAC on 17 April. They informed Admiral Sharp that they were seeking “further consideration” of the decision on immediate pursuit into Communist China.⁶⁷

The new rules defined “hostile aircraft” in the air space of South Vietnam and Thailand and over international waters but did not specify North Vietnam. To include the DRV as an area in which the definition of “hostile aircraft” would apply, the JCS on 26 May amended the geographical definition to cover all of Southeast Asia except Cambodia and Laos. Laos was covered by separate provisions.⁶⁸

The Enemy Threat Increases

Tactical successes by American forces encouraged and heartened the RVNAF. At the same time, however, the early battles did not discourage the enemy, who also considered them tactical successes for himself. The Communists kept on with their own force expansion, to offset the growing US capability. During a visit by General Wheeler to South Vietnam in late November 1965, General Westmoreland emphasized his serious view of the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese buildup that had taken place and which was continuing, apparently at an accelerated rate. In response, as described previously, he nearly doubled his reinforcement request for 1966.⁶⁹

By late November, US intelligence accepted the presence in South Vietnam of the North Vietnamese *325th Division*, plus four other separate non-divisional regiments, the latest of which had arrived in mid-September. During the Plei Me battle in November, the allies captured evidence indicating that the enemy had formed another *325th Division* with cadres left behind by the parent division. COMUSMACV's intelligence officer believed that one regiment of this newly constituted division was now in the South. The other two regiments of this division were either already in or were shortly to arrive in South Vietnam.⁷⁰

At Plei Me, the allies had encountered a regiment of the North Vietnamese *304th Division*. Reportedly, this unit had brought 120 mm mortars into South Vietnam, the first occasion on which the enemy had introduced these effective weapons. All this evidence, if true, meant that the North had nine of its regiments in South Vietnam. Most disturbing to the US command was the increasing rate of North Vietnamese infiltration. Besides organized formations, the enemy continued to send in political, economic, and military cadre personnel, supporting the formation of new Viet Cong units. US intelligence now accepted 83 Viet Cong battalions plus 27 North Vietnamese ones, for a total of 110 enemy battalions in South Vietnam. (At this time, according to historians in Hanoi, the Communist main force army in the South totaled almost 92,000 soldiers, organized into 18 infantry regiments and a number of specialty branch units.)⁷¹ By American calculations, the Viet Cong controlled a manpower pool of 526,000 physically fit males between the ages of 16 and 45. They could form at least two new battalions each month and train at least 2,500 replacements, equating to five battalions. Taking into consideration training and infiltration capabilities and losses, the MACV J-2 believed that the enemy could have a force equivalent to 155 battalions in South Vietnam by the end of 1966.

At this time, the MACV J-2 also examined the enemy's ability to supply and maintain his forces in South Vietnam. He estimated that the North could move 300 tons per day through Laos into South Vietnam during dry weather and about 50 tons per day in the normal five-month rainy season—an average daily year-round figure of 195 tons per day. Substantial support also came into South Vietnam by way of Cambodia, believed to amount to a minimum of 25 tons per day. The enemy's total line of communication capacity through Laos and Cambodia and by sea amounted to a minimum of 234 tons per day. Communist forces then in South Vietnam would require, under light combat conditions, only 84 tons per day.⁷²

Analyzing the enemy's strategy, US intelligence officials believed that the other side counted on a long war during which they would exact the maximum attrition on allied and especially US forces. They would avoid combat unless they could expect victory. They would try to keep a force ratio in their favor by conducting holding attacks against American bases as well as diversionary attacks to disperse allied forces, and they would strike simultaneously at widespread locations. By raids on American bases, they would tie down security forces and destroy aircraft, equipment, and supplies. They would mount attacks to force the United States to commit its general reserves and seek to inflict heavy losses on isolated units. They would continue trying to dominate the highlands to protect

their own base areas at the end of the Laos infiltration routes. They would maintain pressure on lines of communication to isolate government-controlled areas and weaken the will of their population. The enemy would defend his own major bases because to fight a protracted war he would need the supply stockpiles he had built up over the years.

The MACV J-2 nevertheless saw enemy weaknesses. “Although the enemy has great capabilities he also has significant vulnerabilities. He must defend his logistic base areas, and his long logistical LOC is susceptible to interdiction. He is especially vulnerable to air and artillery attack, sustained combat operations, and aggressive pursuit. Additionally, he is dependent upon the support of the local population.”

The Defense Intelligence Agency agreed for the most part with the MACV J-2’s evaluation of the enemy. DIA analysts considered the tactics the enemy had used in such recent engagements as Plei Me and the Ia Drang Valley to be a “logical acceleration” of guerrilla warfare. The DIA concurred with MACV that the enemy was following a strategy of “Strategic Mobility”—massing sufficient numbers of maneuver battalions to pose a threat in widely separated areas. By this means he would tie down large numbers of friendly forces in static defensive missions while concentrating against selected targets at times and places of his choosing. DIA pointed out that the Viet Minh had followed these tactics successfully against the French. The only questions on which DIA did not completely agree with the MACV estimate were the enemy’s logistic requirements, which DIA set at 125 tons daily as opposed to the MACV figure of 84 tons, and the enemy’s capability to move supplies into South Vietnam, which the DIA estimated at 214 tons per day as opposed to MACV’s estimate of 234 tons.⁷³

In US intelligence reporting, enemy numbers kept increasing. Intelligence officials estimated in December that Viet Cong strength had risen to 215,000—75,000 regular and regional troops, 100,000 guerrillas, and 40,000 support personnel and political workers. This represented an apparent net gain, despite heavy casualties, of approximately 50,000 since March 1965; although, as always, some of the increase could have reflected the discovery through improved intelligence of forces that had been present all along. Intelligence estimates placed the number of North Vietnamese regulars in the South in December at 26,000.⁷⁴

By the end of 1965, it was clear that the United States deployment of major combat forces to South Vietnam had not caused the leaders in Hanoi to back away from their war in the South. Indeed, on 27 December, the 12th Plenum of the Communist Party Central Committee declared in its review of the year: “Even though the American imperialists have poured tens of thousands of expeditionary troops into South Vietnam, the basic balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy is unchanged. Our people have a firm foundation for maintaining the offensive initiative on the battlefield.” The Central Committee resolved to continue expanding its forces in both North and South and to press on in the fight for victory and national unification. Developments in South Vietnam thus had not discouraged the enemy; neither had ROLLING THUNDER, the American air offensive against North Vietnam.⁷⁵

ROLLING THUNDER

Continues

Begun on 2 March, ROLLING THUNDER, the closely controlled program of air strikes against North Vietnam, continued throughout 1965, the missions flown by US carrier- and land-based aircraft with some VNAF participation. The intensity of ROLLING THUNDER rose much more slowly than the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders wished or believed necessary. In terms of targets struck, areas brought under armed reconnaissance, methods of attack, and weight of effort, reality lagged far behind the Joint Chiefs' recommendations, under the damping influence of other presidential advisers who urged a more cautious, and in the Joint Chiefs of Staff view, less productive approach. During the year, the enemy acquired from the Soviet Union sophisticated air defense systems. Consequently, the threat to US forces operating over North Vietnam soon became an integral part of the ROLLING THUNDER planning and a matter of continuing concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Developing ROLLING THUNDER Packages

Each numbered ROLLING THUNDER package, eventually sent to CINCPAC as an execute order, set forth in detail the targets to be struck and the limits on the timing and weight of effort. The package delineated the areas in which specific operations could take place and precisely prescribed how the raids should be conducted. Generally, the development of these packages began with guidance to the Joint Staff J-3 by the Chairman, stating what the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed should be included. The Defense Intelligence Agency furnished target information and evaluations to assist the J-3.

The J-3 worked with proposals from CINCPAC, who was responsible for recommending to the Joint Chiefs optimum targets for all ROLLING THUNDER packages. For

this purpose, he maintained in his headquarters a Target Planning Group composed of intelligence and operations personnel from his staff and from the staffs of his component commanders. The group produced a target list and armed reconnaissance proposals which then were considered by CINCPAC's ROLLING THUNDER Planning Group, chaired by his Chief of Staff. CINCPAC then submitted his final recommendations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff eleven days prior to the effective execution date of each ROLLING THUNDER package. Fixed target recommendations included estimates of the civilian casualties likely to result from particular strikes.

Any individual member of the Joint Chiefs who wished could have an observer present with the Joint Staff group which developed the weekly package. On 10 May, the Chairman instructed the Joint Staff to flag for his attention any proposed target or usage of forces that the Joint Chiefs had not previously considered. This was to "provide opportunity for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to exercise judgment in the targeting and the manner of employing our forces for the strikes against North Vietnam."¹

After the Joint Staff J-3 developed the initial draft planning message, the action officers briefed the Joint Chiefs of Staff and received the Chiefs' guidance on revisions. At this juncture, the revisions usually reflected JCS judgment on what higher authority would or would not accept. The Chairman then discussed the revised draft planning message with the Secretary of Defense, usually on Saturday. The Secretary's own staff, meanwhile, had been informed of the features of the draft message. At this stage, in coordination between the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) and counterparts in the State Department, the views and influence of DOD and State were brought to bear. Both State and DOD officials, and on occasion the President's personal staff, regularly demanded substantive changes in targets, areas, timing, and procedures. Invariably, such changes were in the direction of softening the impact of the bombing on North Vietnam.

The final step for each numbered package was Secretary McNamara's presentation of it to President Johnson, usually at a luncheon on Tuesday, in the presence of Secretary of State Rusk and such White House advisers as Mr. Bundy and Mr. Rostow but not the JCS Chairman. After the President approved the package, sometimes with additional amendments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent the execute message to CINCPAC.²

In spite of the continuing inhibitions placed upon ROLLING THUNDER, the administration gradually expanded the campaign northward and westward. It increased the number of sorties in a given period and by year's end also the value of the targets struck. The scope and effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER showed perceptible growth as compared to the first efforts in the spring of 1965.

ROLLING THUNDERs 9–12: Interdiction

When he approved NSAM 328 on 1–2 April, President Johnson decreed that the United States should continue roughly the present slowly ascending tempo of ROLLING THUNDER operations. The United States would be prepared to add strikes

in response to a higher rate of Viet Cong operations, or conceivably to slow the pace in the unlikely event enemy activity slacked off sharply for more than a brief period. The United States, in other words, would react to any enemy initiative as appropriate. The President also forecast at least part of the shape *ROLLING THUNDER* would take, saying, "We should continue to vary the types of targets, stepping up attack 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."³

Starting with *ROLLING THUNDER* 9 on 2 April and continuing through RT 12, which ended on 29 April, the United States directed its operations against North Vietnam specifically at interdicting lines of communication into Laos and South Vietnam. The campaign's general objective was to increase the cost and difficulty to the enemy of sustaining his infiltration to the South and to degrade his capability for overt aggression. This was to be achieved by preplanned strikes against bridges and ferries and by armed reconnaissance against railroad rolling stock, trucks, and shipping. During this campaign, CINCPAC was authorized to attack both by day and night, in contrast to an earlier restriction to only daylight raids. He could fly a maximum of 24 strike sorties per calendar day and attack the (Ile) du Tigre during this period.⁴

In RT 12, the Joint Chiefs authorized CINCPAC to fly six sorties beyond the 24 sortie limit when necessary to destroy trucks or railroad rolling stock. The State Department had been reluctant to grant this relatively small expansion of authority. Accordingly, the Chairman asked Admiral Sharp, after each use of "this permissive commitment of additional air resources," to send him an evaluation for the Secretary of Defense of the actual worth of the target as demonstrated by results achieved. By the end of RT 12, US aircraft had struck 26 bridges and seven ferries.⁵

During the Honolulu conference on 19–20 April, Secretary McNamara, General Wheeler, Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland, Mr. William Bundy, and Mr. McNaughton discussed the *ROLLING THUNDER* program. On 20 April, Secretary McNamara reported to the President that all had agreed that the present tempo of bombing was about right and that by "repetition and continuation" the campaign was providing sufficient increasing pressure. All present, he stated, envisioned a strike program continuing at least six months and perhaps a year or more, avoiding the Hanoi-Haiphong-Phuc Yen areas during that period. "There might be fewer fixed strikes, or more restrikes, or more armed reconnaissance missions," Secretary McNamara informed the President. Ambassador Taylor had observed that it was important not to "kill the hostage" by bombing inside the "Hanoi do-nut." All the conferees, Mr. McNamara advised the President, considered *ROLLING THUNDER* essential to the US campaign, both psychologically and physically, but did not believe that it could "do the job alone."⁶

By the end of April, 60 of the JCS-designated targets in North Vietnam had been struck, 43 by US planes and 17 by planes of the VNAF. The allies had flown 86 armed reconnaissance missions against lines of communication, targets of opportunity, and coastal shipping. Addressing himself to the interdiction campaign, the Chairman informed the Secretary of Defense that the effort had magnified North Vietnam's

problems in providing logistic support to its own southern region and had “degraded” the enemy’s ability to conduct any major offensive beyond his own borders in Laos or South Vietnam.⁷

RT 13-RT 14: Gradual Expansion and a Pause

In the ensuing several months, the air campaign shifted emphasis to attacks on fixed targets having military value. In addition to bridges, barracks, and ammunition depots, the President authorized strikes on power plants, supply depots, ammunition factories, locks, and POL installations and facilities; but he continued to insist on avoiding strikes on population centers. At the same time, the administration permitted expansion of armed reconnaissance areas, as well as stepped up attacks against radar sites, land and water vehicular traffic, bivouac areas, and maintenance facilities. Allied bombers cratered lines of communication and seeded chokepoints with mines. In the same period, the administration made gradual slight modifications of its restrictions on operational methods and procedures and raised the limits on sorties.

Before RT 13, which began on 30 April, armed reconnaissance had been limited to particular segments of designated routes. But for RT 13 and subsequent programs, the administration authorized armed reconnaissance over a more broadly defined geographical area, in this instance all of North Vietnam south of 20 degrees N latitude. In addition, CINCPAC could now fly 40 sorties per calendar day with a maximum of 200 for the seven day period.⁸

During a conference with General Wheeler on RT 13, Secretary McNamara expressed the belief that CINCPAC had consistently exceeded the number of sorties authorized since the beginning of ROLLING THUNDER. General Wheeler responded that newspaper accounts of the bombings made no distinction between actual strike sorties and other sorties carried out in support of the strikes, for example, Combat Air Patrol (CAP), Search and Rescue, and flak suppression. Mr. McNamara acknowledged the point but insisted he was talking about strike sorties. Actually, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the number of sorties specified in RT orders to be “advisory” only. CINCPAC and his component commanders established the actual strike magnitude, which the Joint Chiefs monitored to insure an adequate weight of effort. Nevertheless, to answer the Secretary’s question, the Chairman asked the Director, Joint Staff, to assemble a comparison of the authorized figures with those reported from the field for the last two ROLLING THUNDER programs. When compiled, these data showed that of 474 sorties authorized on fixed targets, CINCPAC’s forces had flown 316, and of 264 authorized on armed reconnaissance they had flown 249.⁹

On 10 May 1965, President Johnson informed Ambassador Taylor that he had decided to suspend ROLLING THUNDER operations for about a week as a means of appeasing domestic critics of his policy and of swinging world opinion in favor of the United States. He intended “to begin to clear a path either toward restoration of peace

or toward increased military action, depending upon the reaction of the Communists.” Following the President’s orders, CINCPAC halted ROLLING THUNDER operations effective 12 May at 2400 hours Saigon time.¹⁰

Through the Soviet ambassador in Washington and the North Vietnamese embassy in Moscow, the administration tried to apprise Hanoi that the United States would watch very closely to see if the bombing pause were accompanied by any significant reductions in the North’s support of the Viet Cong. These overtures brought no positive Soviet or North Vietnamese response. Intensive aerial reconnaissance during the pause showed no reduction in activity on the infiltration routes. Consequently, President Johnson authorized resumption of ROLLING THUNDER at 0600 on 18 May, ending a five day suspension. Secretary Rusk announced, “In view of the complete absence of any constructive response, we have decided the bombing must be resumed.”¹¹

CINCPAC and Ambassador Taylor Propose Changes

In mid-May, Admiral Sharp proposed an intensification of the bombing campaign. He warned against underestimating the cumulative effects of ROLLING THUNDER, and at the same time challenged the view that few worthwhile targets remained south of the 20th parallel. He pointed out that of the four major barrack complexes attacked, about two-thirds of the buildings remained undamaged. In the three major ammunition depots that had been struck, only 40 percent of the ammunition storage and 56 percent of the support buildings had been destroyed or damaged. In two major support depot complexes, 46 percent of the known buildings had not been hit. The allies had barely scratched the surface in strikes against North Vietnamese shipping and port facilities, and a significant part of the enemy’s bridge and ferry system was still intact. New staging and refueling areas were untouched.

CINCPAC proposed an around-the-clock program to be conducted in increments by small numbers of planes making repeated strikes. These missions would include armed reconnaissance of land and waterway routes, route interdiction, restrikes on still lucrative military targets, destruction of dispersed supplies, equipment, and military personnel, and attacks on ports and recognized North Vietnamese shipping. Admiral Sharp recommended also that the United States continue the regularly programmed large-scale attacks so as to damage targets on an incremental basis rather than attempting to inflict maximum destruction in one day. Initially, strikes would be limited to the area south of 20 degrees North, but subsequently the bombing of major military supply and ammunition depots would move northwestward from the 20th parallel.¹²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff generally agreed with CINCPAC’s concept. They believed, however, that in order to put his ideas into effect, changes would have to be made in the current concept of operations. Specifically, the administration would have to give CINCPAC greater authority to plan strikes and restrikes as the situation dictated. On 22 May, the Joint Chiefs recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the Pacific

commander be given such authority. In a proposed draft message to CINCPAC, they embodied instructions that would have had him prepare a weekly plan of operations for submission to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The draft set the weekly sortie rate at 400 and in general permitted CINCPAC a freer hand.¹³

The Secretary of Defense took a whole month to disapprove CINCPAC's views and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations. On 22 June, he told the Chairman:

I am aware of no serious defects in the present method of planning ROLLING THUNDER operations. The proposed programs are worked out with close coordination between COMUSMACV, CINCPAC and the JCS. The operations are militarily effective and are managed in such a way as to permit political considerations to be taken into account on a timely basis. Accordingly, I doubt that, at this time, a change in our method of planning ROLLING THUNDER operations would be desirable.¹⁴

At about the same time that CINCPAC was giving the Joint Chiefs of Staff his concept for future ROLLING THUNDER operations, Ambassador Taylor also proposed a change in strike tactics over North Vietnam. On 13 May, he suggested to Secretary Rusk that the administration consider varying the apparent standard pattern of "virtually daily strikes." The Ambassador believed that a more random pattern would have a greater psychological effect on Hanoi. He had in mind a period of a few days of no attacks, followed by a day of concentrated strikes over a wide area, and then smaller raids. This tactic, General Taylor and the Embassy staff thought, would accentuate for Hanoi the "tensions, stresses and strains" of the bombing program.

Admiral Sharp quickly went on record as opposed to Ambassador Taylor's suggestion. He explained to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that there already were sufficient variations in operating methods. Moreover, the Admiral believed that the concept he had just submitted, if approved, would have maximum psychological impact on North Vietnam. In the end, higher authority adopted neither Admiral Sharp's nor Ambassador Taylor's proposal.¹⁵

ROLLING THUNDER Moves North: RT 15–RT 28/29

Between mid-May and mid-June, the bombing campaign underwent only gradual, incremental changes and expansion. With minor variations in the size and tactics of the raids, allied planes continued a pattern of armed reconnaissance of lines of communication and planned strikes against fixed targets. ROLLING THUNDER moved north of the 20th parallel for the first time on 19 May, when US bombers in RT 15 hit a military barracks above that line. On 15 June, in RT 19, they bombed a military complex and ammunition depot north of the 21st parallel. At the urging of CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs, Secretary McNamara increased the weekly sortie rate, eventually to 250 per week. He also gradually extended the area open to armed reconnaissance northwestward to the Laotian border.¹⁶

For ROLLING THUNDER to be a combined effort, participation by the Vietnamese Air Force was essential; but the VNAF was hard pressed to mount the few strikes assigned to it in southern North Vietnam. As Viet Cong activity grew, an increasing need for the VNAF's services in the South reduced the force's resources available for ROLLING THUNDER. By June, CINCPAC had concluded that some measure was necessary to assure continued VNAF participation in the air campaign against the North. Hence, he made an arrangement with COMUSMACV and the RVNAF high command, under which the VNAF would provide a modest three strike/reconnaissance missions (24 sorties) for each ROLLING THUNDER period.¹⁷

On 11 June, during discussions of the major ground force commitment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned the Secretary of Defense that there were significant indications that the Communists might be moving the war in Southeast Asia to a new level of intensity. The arrival in North Vietnam of more jet fighters, some light bombers, and SA-2 surface-to-air missiles showed a Communist decision to "add a new dimension to the situation in Southeast Asia." The Chiefs proposed therefore, among other actions, that the United States intensify the air war against North Vietnam by increased armed reconnaissance sorties against lines of communication and strikes against militarily important targets. This was necessary, the Joint Chiefs said, to reduce the North's capabilities to support the insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam, to punish North Vietnam still further, and to demonstrate more clearly the United States intent to prevent a Communist seizure of South Vietnam.¹⁸

In practice, JCS target proposals continued to be scaled down. Typical of this evolution was RT 20. In their original draft planning message, the Joint Staff included 11 fixed targets to be struck by US planes and three to be hit by the VNAF. When the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense reviewed the draft message, they removed five US and one VNAF fixed targets, most probably at Mr. McNamara's insistence. This left six targets for US planes and two for the VNAF. When the State Department reviewed the message, it objected to hitting a thermal power plant and a POL installation, complaining that they were "too close" to Haiphong, a SAM site, and Phuc Yen airfield. (The targets were actually 27 miles from the SAM site and 51 miles from the airfield.) State also believed that the installations were too close to civilian population centers, raising the possibility of "high" noncombatant casualties. (DOD estimated civilian casualties, assuming a daylight raid, at 30.) These facts notwithstanding, Secretary McNamara removed the power plant and POL installation from the target list, replacing them with an ammunition depot. The final execute message for ROLLING THUNDER 20, sent on 24 June, contained five fixed US targets and two for the VNAF. Subsequently, the administration added two airfields to RT 20, as reconnaissance revealed that the enemy had restored these fields, previously bombed, to operational status.¹⁹

On 28 June, General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were "considering urgently expanded military actions" in both South and North Vietnam, with the objective of proving to the enemy that they could not win in South Vietnam. "In North Vietnam," he said, "our objective is further to curtail by air strikes their capability and will to continue support to the VC."²⁰

Following a conversation with the Secretary of Defense on 2 July, the Chairman appointed an ad hoc study group to review the results of ROLLING THUNDER to that point. The group reported on 14 July that the results through June showed that the program had not achieved its intended purpose. Although 10,000 sorties had been flown and 122 targets in North Vietnam (the original JCS 94 targets had increased to 240) had been damaged or destroyed, the economic effects on the North had been minor. "From a military standpoint," the report maintained, "the flow of material and manpower from NVN in support of VC/DRV operations in the south is still considerable. Direct attacks against military installations, while doubtless creating a disruptive effect on troops and upon their training, have not discernibly weakened the fiber of the DRV military structure. In short, the DRV still seems ready and able to endure air strikes at the current level."²¹

Putting a positive face on ROLLING THUNDER's limited effects, Secretary Rusk asserted on 11 July that the United States had never "suspected" that air strikes against North Vietnam would be a "decisive element." Nevertheless, he said, Hanoi's leaders had discovered that they were not going to be permitted to send tens of thousands of people to attack South Vietnam and still live in safety and comfort "there in the North." There was to be no sanctuary for those committing aggression against South Vietnam, and Secretary Rusk warned that this was a fact that "others who may be supporting Hanoi must take fully into account."²²

In spite of the urgings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the findings of the ad hoc group, the nature of the strike program against fixed targets did not change materially during the summer of 1965. ROLLING THUNDER programs between July and September authorized attacks on 59 fixed targets (27 of them restrikes) including 26 barracks, 11 ammunition depots, two port facilities, seven bridges, two explosive plants, two thermal power plants, six supply depots, one hydroelectric power plant, one lock, and one POL installation. Beginning with RT 22/23 on 9 July, the administration combined two packages, designed to cover a two week period with the weight of effort approximately equal for each week. Officials believed that this procedure, which CINCPAC had suggested, would give Admiral Sharp more flexibility in his planning and conduct of the operations.²³

In RT 22/23, the Joint Staff proposed strikes against bridges on the main rail line leading from China into North Vietnam, one of the bridges only 17 miles from the China border. They also proposed moving the armed reconnaissance boundary north and northwestward to within 11.5 miles of the Chinese border in order to include the area of this rail line. Even though the President early in April had seemed to support bombing the rail lines from China, higher authority disallowed the bridge attacks and did not move the armed reconnaissance boundary as far to the north as the Joint Staff had recommended, setting the limit at 22 degrees north. The administration also authorized armed reconnaissance planes to restrike previously bombed airfields and JCS numbered line of communication targets if necessary to keep them out of commission.²⁴

During the twelve week period of RT 22/23 through 32/33, the tempo of the armed reconnaissance program, in contrast to the fixed target strikes, increased substantially.

In RT 26/27, the administration raised the armed reconnaissance sortie limit from 500 to 600 for the two-week period; in subsequent programs it pushed the number up to 1,000 and then 1,200. CINCPAC frequently asked for and received additional sortie authorizations to maintain the momentum of his attacks. In their instruction to CINCPAC for RT 24/25, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed him to plan his strike and reconnaissance missions so that his planes would not “approach closer than fifteen (15) nautical miles of the China border.”²⁵

In ROLLING THUNDER 26/27, the administration for the first time authorized attack of a fixed target north of the 22nd parallel, extending the bombing zone well above the latitude of Hanoi. CINCPAC finally received permission to attack a bridge on the highway to China. Higher authority, however, rejected other bridge targets in that same area. RT 26/27 did add naval craft berthing areas and airfields to the permissible targets for armed reconnaissance strikes.²⁶

In the planning for RT 28/29, some new issues received attention. On 17 August, CINCPAC was authorized for the first time to attack SAM systems “in mobile mode” throughout the ROLLING THUNDER armed reconnaissance area, except for restricted circles around Hanoi and Phuc Yen. CINCPAC had recommended 800 sorties for this two week period; the Joint Staff raised this to 1,000, believing the greater number was warranted by the increased tempo of operations against the lines of communication. Of the 15 fixed targets CINCPAC proposed, the Joint Staff turned down eight, some because they were not on the JCS target list, others because they lay in heavily populated areas, and still others because they were located close to Phuc Yen and would “be difficult to sell.” In place of the eight targets dropped, the staff substituted a group of facilities in the Haiphong/Hon Gay port areas. “If there is a substantial fall out of targets in the clearance process,” the Joint Staff informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “the Chairman has eleven targets considered suitable as alternates; seven are restrikes.”

CINCPAC had also recommended that he be allowed to restrike all JCS targets previously struck. The Joint Staff proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he be allowed to restrike only 37 of the 100 targets thus far attacked, but designated eight more as ordnance jettison areas. Of the remaining targets, only 20 had more than 50 percent residual capacity. Because of this and other factors, the Joint Staff advised that “CINCPAC has rather wide latitude in this area and . . . now is not the time to push for this broad change as requested.”²⁷

On 13 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the Joint Staff’s recommendations. They also agreed “to give their full support to the Chairman’s efforts to obtain permission to attack more profitable targets.” On the latter point, they were once again unsuccessful. In its final form, RT 28/29 authorized CINCPAC to strike nine fixed targets, none of them particularly valuable. The program did not include the Haiphong/Hon Gay targets.²⁸

In late August, the Joint Staff evaluated and assigned priorities to the targets on the basic list in the “Target Study-North Vietnam.” The staff separated the targets into four groups: Group I—those constituting a direct and immediate threat to US and South Vietnamese forces, bases, or installations; Group II—those (other than Group I) which

were most critical to North Vietnam's military capability; Group III—those (other than Groups I and II) which directly contributed to the North's military capabilities; and Group IV—remaining targets that sustained North Vietnam's military forces and economy. The staff analysis showed that only two Group I and two Group II targets had been struck, whereas 40 targets in Group III and 54 in Group IV had been attacked.²⁹

Blockade and Mining

As another means for bringing pressure on Hanoi, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered A blockade and mining of North Vietnamese ports. Such action, combined with ROLLING THUNDER operations, would substantially reduce the importation and movement of war materials into and through North Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs had considered aerial mining and naval blockade as early as March 1964 and had proposed them in November 1964 as part of the series of increased military pressures that could be launched. On 6 April 1965, when President Johnson approved a program of expanded military operations in Vietnam, including gradual acceleration of ROLLING THUNDER, he had stated that blockade and aerial mining of North Vietnam's ports should be considered "for future operations." Because of the "major political complications" involved, however, he directed only further study of these matters.³⁰

In response to the President's direction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared a "Blockade and Aerial Mining Study," which they submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 8 August 1965. After reviewing the economic, political, and military aspects of the issue, the Joint Chiefs recommended the addition of aerial mining of the approaches to Haiphong, Hon Gay, and Cam Pha to the ROLLING THUNDER program. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended that the mining operation, once begun, be extended to minor North Vietnamese ports. As a complementary measure to the mining "for maximum impact," the Joint Chiefs requested the addition to ROLLING THUNDER of an expanded interdiction campaign against "high density alternate LOCs" north of the 20th parallel.³¹

Secretary McNamara forwarded the Joint Chiefs of Staff study to the Department of State for an assessment of the political risks involved in the mining and expanded interdiction. Deputy Secretary Vance assured General Wheeler that, upon completion of the assessment, OSD would give further consideration to the recommended actions. No further action, however, resulted from the Joint Chiefs of Staff blockade and mining study.³²

Enemy Air Defenses: Missiles, Jets, and Guns

From the beginning of ROLLING THUNDER, US officials had acknowledged that the Soviet Union might react to the US bombings by providing North Vietnam with more modern and effective air defense weapons. The Chairman advised the Secretary

of Defense on 27 March, however, that US intelligence authorities did not believe that any surface-to-air missiles had yet been deployed to North Vietnam. Should the Soviets deploy these weapons, which they could do readily, they would probably provide Hanoi with the SA-2 missile. The SA-2 could be made operational within two or three weeks. It had an effective range of 17 nautical miles and could attack targets as high as 90,000 feet and as low as 1,500 feet.³³

In fact, the enemy was well along in covertly importing these weapons and their associated equipment and constructing a missile troop training center. North Vietnam activated its first SA-2 regiment on 1 May, manned by soldiers transferred from other arms, and launched an accelerated training program assisted by Soviet advisers. On 5 April, the United States detected the first SAM site under construction 15 nautical miles south of Hanoi. By the end of July, a total of seven sites had appeared, in various stages of readiness, clustered around the North Vietnamese capital. The sites were intended to support SA-2 missiles and were associated with radar to detect and track air targets.³⁴

The appearance of SAMs in North Vietnam caused the Joint Chiefs of Staff serious concern. On 14 April, they alerted Secretary McNamara that it might be necessary to strike at the new enemy capability on short notice. At the same time, they instructed CINCPAC to watch for new sites and to plan to attack the one site then identified. In response, Mr. McNamara informed the Joint Chiefs on 19 April that a decision to hit this site required careful analysis of political as well as military considerations. He asked to be kept informed of the status of the SAM sites and directed that forces be alerted to attack them on short notice should it become necessary.³⁵

During May, as new sites were detected, planning continued for attacks on the sites. The Joint Chiefs instructed CINCPAC to keep his ROLLING THUNDER aircraft away from the sites and not to attack them. On 27 May, they warned Secretary McNamara that the growing SAM presence could threaten US air operations within a considerable area around Hanoi. Because the first site discovered could become operational at any time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that, despite political factors, the site be destroyed as a matter of "military urgency" and that this attack be coordinated with a B-52 strike on Phuc Yen airfield, the base of North Vietnam's growing jet fighter force.³⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that current intelligence estimates sustained their position. Although they informed the Secretary of Defense of this, he disapproved their recommendations on 15 June, mainly because the SAMs had not yet interfered with ROLLING THUNDER. He informed the Joint Chiefs that if such interference occurred he would reconsider their recommendations. He offered also to arrange for them to discuss the matter with the President if they desired.³⁷

The Joint Chiefs did not ask to see the President, but on 26 June they recommended to Secretary McNamara that the SAM sites be destroyed "as they near operational status." In support of their recommendation, they reviewed for him how the presence of the SAMs restricted ROLLING THUNDER by inhibiting reconnaissance and creating geographic sanctuaries. They asked to discuss this matter with him. The Secretary met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 28 June but did not grant permission to strike the sites.

Subsequently, on 3 July, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary, in response to a query from him, that bombing the SAM sites after they became operational and after their defenses improved would be more costly than striking them while they were uncompleted. They also reiterated their earlier recommendation for destruction of the SAMs.³⁸

The SAM sites remained untouched, however; and on 24 July, the United States learned that at least some of them had become operational. On that date, a missile from a newly activated SAM regiment brought down a US jet fighter 40 nautical miles (nm) west of Hanoi. President Ho Chi Minh personally congratulated the successful unit, and the enemy made 24 July the official birthday of his missile troops.³⁹

On 25 July, CINCPAC recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff attacks on all new SAM sites and submitted plans for striking three of them. Ambassador Taylor told the Secretary of State the same day that new sites should be destroyed as they were discovered. However, he opposed “simultaneous” attacks on all known sites. Such attacks, he believed, would be wrong because: 1) there was no proof that all sites were occupied; 2) friendly aircraft losses would be increased by using large numbers; 3) such an attack would appear to the world as an escalation; and 4) a substantial number of Soviet advisers or technicians might be brought under attack.⁴⁰

On 26 July, President Johnson held two meetings on the SAM issue with his principal advisers, including Secretaries Rusk and McNamara and General Wheeler. After lengthy discussion of the diplomatic and military problems involved in attacking the SAMs, the President ordered strikes on two sites that had been occupied on 24 July. Following the President's decision, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 27 July, ordered CINCPAC to launch on that day one-time attacks on the two sites and their immediate support facilities. Attacking planes were to remain outside the cone of fire of other SAM sites. Subsequent to the bombings, Admiral Sharp was to carry out armed reconnaissance missions to destroy any mobile SAM installations in the immediate vicinity of the fixed sites.⁴¹

CINCPAC carried out the strikes as ordered. Six US aircraft were lost in the operations, and initial post-strike bomb damage assessment (BDA) showed that neither site had been damaged. Pilots asserted, however, that they had struck a SAM site or sites. Exactly what targets were struck and what actual damage, if any, was inflicted on the enemy's air defense system remained undetermined. At the time, some American officials suspected, and North Vietnamese historians later claimed, that the target sites were fakes, decoys set up to draw US planes into massed antiaircraft gun fire.⁴²

During August, US forces made intensified efforts to detect new SAM sites. On 3 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to carry out photo reconnaissance missions to detect missile sites and special strikes to destroy them. CINCPAC, however, could not hit sites if they lay within 30 nm of the Chinese border, were in the area around Hanoi bounded by established sites, or were within 10 nm of Haiphong and Phuc Yen airfield. On 11 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to conduct low-altitude armed reconnaissance within the ROLLING THUNDER area, but outside the forbidden zones, to destroy SAM sites. These missions received the nickname IRON HAND.⁴³

The first IRON HAND missions did not go well. After a SAM shot down another US jet about 50 miles southwest of Hanoi on 12 August, CINCPAC, using Navy carrier planes, made a costly and futile attempt to locate and destroy the site from which the missile had been launched. Flying 124 sorties during a 30-hour period on 12–13 August, US aircraft failed to locate any SAM sites. Intense ground fire downed five Navy aircraft and damaged seven. The enemy dispersed his missile equipment, camouflaged his sites, and massed antiaircraft guns in their vicinity. Admiral Sharp blamed American inability to locate and destroy SAM sites on the lack of accurate intelligence. “I consider our tactics as now refined are adequate to destroy the SA–2, provided intelligence can fix the site,” he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 August.⁴⁴

The enemy increased the tempo of SA–2 activity in September, with the pattern of missile firing extending from the Thanh Hoa area in the south to the Cao Nung area, northeast of Hanoi, near the Chinese border. During the month, missiles brought down a drone and an F–105. The heaviest concentration of firings came from the Cao Nung area, where the enemy on 20 September made 13 unsuccessful firings in reaction to an air strike on the Hanoi-Dong Dang rail line. During these weeks, the US Air Force and Navy gradually improved their anti-SAM reconnaissance and tactics, for example by flying IRON HAND missions as part of other raids rather than separately for quicker response to firings. But not until mid-October was an SA–2 site attacked successfully. Hitting a site near Kep Ha within 48 hours of its detection, US planes caught the enemy by surprise, destroying missiles, radar vans, and missile transporters.⁴⁵

Fortunately, enemy missiles were relatively ineffective against US pilots. Although the United States suspected Soviet technicians of assisting North Vietnam (and they were), enemy missile crews, who were completing their training on the job, remained inept during 1965. A combination of their inexperience and the skill of American fliers at evasive maneuvers kept the “kill” ratio between the number of SAMs fired and the number of US planes downed at a very low level. Although 180 SAMs were fired at US planes during 1965, only 11 aircraft fell to the missiles. Nevertheless, the SAMs complicated and sometimes disrupted ROLLING THUNDER missions and, coupled with the expansion of Hanoi’s other air defense elements, increased the hazards and costs of the campaign.⁴⁶

Complementing the missiles, the additional MIG jet fighters that the Soviet Union had furnished to Hanoi posed another threat to ROLLING THUNDER operations. At the beginning of March, North Vietnam possessed 36 MIGs. In less than three months, this inventory increased to about 60 MIG–15s and MIG–17s based at Phuc Yen airfield. According to Communist historians, the air combat force, which grew during 1965 from one regiment to three, also was equipped with MIG–21s.⁴⁷

In March 1965, President Johnson had directed that US planes avoid air combat with MIGs. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, therefore, stipulated in ROLLING THUNDER and reconnaissance orders that US combat air patrol pilots would engage MIGs only to protect themselves or other US planes. In his decisions of 1–2 April, the President directed that ROLLING THUNDER targets be selected outside the effective ground controlled intercept (GCI) range of the MIGs. In spite of this policy, MIGs shot down two US jets

and damaged another south of the 20th parallel on 4 and 5 April. CINCPAC advised the JCS on 4 April that the best way to destroy enemy MIGs was to attack their base, Phuc Yen airfield. The Joint Chiefs fully agreed but realized that such an attack was not “politically feasible” at that time.⁴⁸

On 9 May, Admiral Sharp again informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the best way to eliminate the MIG threat was to attack their base at Phuc Yen. Strengthening the argument for attacking the base, five Soviet light jet bombers arrived at the field during May. On 27 May, the Joint Chiefs advised Secretary McNamara that these bombers represented a threat to the American base at Da Nang. They recommended that Phuc Yen be attacked in order to destroy both the bombers and the MIGs. The Secretary of Defense disapproved this recommendation on 15 June. His decision was prompted by opposition to the bombing from Ambassador Taylor and COMUSMACV and by a recent intelligence estimate that North Vietnam probably did not intend to use the bombers in offensive actions.⁴⁹

Less than two weeks later, on 26 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff tried again to secure authorization to bomb Phuc Yen, pointing out to the Secretary the military necessity of so doing. They insisted that current intelligence estimates theorizing that the enemy did not intend to use his bombers against South Vietnam were not significant. The Joint Chiefs said, “... we cannot deal in the estimated intentions of the enemy but must base our actions on enemy capabilities which, from a military point of view, we cannot afford to ignore, particularly when the elimination of the threat can be accomplished at this time by a relatively low cost.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized that bombing Phuc Yen would eliminate both the bomber threat and the increasing MIG threat. In spite of these arguments, the Secretary did not authorize an attack on Phuc Yen. More than two years passed before he would do so.⁵⁰

In the end, the Soviet-supplied bombers never flew against South Vietnam. As for the MIGs, while they had an inhibiting effect on ROLLING THUNDER, they shot down no more US planes during 1965. On the other hand, in air-to-air combat American pilots destroyed five MIGs and possibly accounted for two others.⁵¹

The enemy’s most effective defenses against US/VNAF planes operating over North Vietnam were neither the SAMs nor the MIGs, but rather automatic small arms in the hands of local militiamen and a large and growing number of antiaircraft artillery pieces, both manual and radar controlled. By February 1965, US intelligence had detected 941 antiaircraft artillery positions in North Vietnam. By late September, the number of positions had grown to 1,600, ranging from 37 mm manually-controlled guns to highly effective radar-directed 85 mm pieces. During 1965, by their own account, the North Vietnamese expanded their air defense artillery arm from 12 regiments and 14 battalions to 21 regiments and 41 battalions, including 8 mobile regiments. By 30 September, a total of 118 USAF, USN, and VNAF planes had been lost in flying almost 25,000 sorties over North Vietnam. In September alone, enemy ground fire brought down 23 American planes.⁵²

North Vietnamese actions suggested a basic understanding of American operational concepts. The enemy placed his heaviest antiaircraft defenses around targets of obvious

and continuing interest to the United States. He also apparently moved antiaircraft weapons into an area after an initial strike, in anticipation of a restrike. Combining missiles, antiaircraft artillery, and militia automatic weapons, the North Vietnamese formed “air defense combat clusters” around their most vital locations. They used 60 percent of these forces to defend their lines of communication and transportation.⁵³

Reconnaissance Rules Change

On 24 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to fly BLUE TREE reconnaissance missions in support of ROLLING THUNDER at his discretion throughout the armed reconnaissance area. They moved the southernmost boundary of armed reconnaissance north to 20 degrees 30 minutes north for this purpose. CINCPAC was restricted to 20 two-sortie missions a week, but missions could be flown at low level. The Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized MIG CAP for the missions, but the planes would withdraw if MIGs were sighted. MIG CAP could engage the enemy only to protect the reconnaissance planes. For flak suppression escort, and any BLUE TREE flights outside the authorized area, CINCPAC would have to seek Washington’s approval on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁴

In RTs 28/29 and 30/31, the administration progressively expanded the armed reconnaissance zone to cover all of North Vietnam except a 30 nm-wide buffer along the Chinese border and the quadrant north and northeast of Hanoi and Haiphong. A 30 nm circle around Hanoi and a 10 nm circle around Haiphong remained off limits to attack. RT 30/31 included another new feature: authority for CINCPAC to assign strike aircraft returning from BARREL ROLL and STEEL TIGER in Laos alternate missions in the ROLLING THUNDER area.⁵⁵

The Joint Chiefs Call for Heavier Bombing

On 27 August, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense major recommendations on the basic US strategy for Vietnam, they called for stronger air and naval pressures on North Vietnam. Specifically, these included destruction of significant military targets and the enemy supply base, as well as interdiction of the lines of communication supporting the insurgency in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs asserted that “the physical capability of the DRV to move men and supplies through the Lao Corridor, down the coastline, across the DMZ and through Cambodia must be reduced to the maximum practical extent by land, naval and air actions in these areas and against infiltration-connected targets.”⁵⁶

Six days later, on 2 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave the Secretary a list of air actions which they believed to be “in concert” with this strategy. They recommended

that the United States begin air strikes immediately and “as a matter of urgency” against: 1) Phuc Yen airfield, including the aircraft thereon; 2) rail, highway, and waterway routes and traffic between Hanoi and Haiphong and between Hanoi/Haiphong and south China; 3) POL storage facilities at Haiphong; and 4) SAM sites and other anti-aircraft defenses which threatened US air operations. Their rationale for striking Phuc Yen and the SA-2 sites was the same as that presented in June. Interdiction of the routes between the major North Vietnamese industrial and shipping centers and south China was needed, the Joint Chiefs said,

to reduce substantially the present freedom of movement into the DRV of major war-making supplies, including heavy and complex equipment such as SA-2 missiles and modern anti-aircraft artillery with radar fire control and ammunition. Further, interdiction of principal LOCs around Hanoi would assist in immobilizing and fixing in place the SA-2 defenses, thus impairing present mobile ambush tactics.

The enemy, declared the Joint Chiefs, now had 66 MIG fighters and 8 IL-28 bombers based at Phuc Yen. American intelligence had located a total of 18 SAM sites, all but two fairly close to Hanoi. Missiles or missile-associated equipment had been noted on only four of these sites, and it was possible that many were only temporary field installations. North Vietnam could move these missiles about in an 85 nm radius of Hanoi without serious difficulty and apparently was doing so. Just how missiles and equipment were entering North Vietnam was not known. Destruction of the POL storage at Haiphong would deprive North Vietnam of nearly half of its remaining national capacity for oil storage. This facility was the only one in North Vietnam that could receive POL imports from tankers.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the strikes should be made as “a concentrated offensive effort, unrestricted by previously prescribed sanctuaries within the DRV, to search out and destroy SAM installations, as required, and to conduct low-level reconnaissance to encourage the maldeployment of AAA resources.” B-52s would bomb Phuc Yen at night, and US aircraft would attack North Vietnam’s other airfields at first light the next day. Concurrently, planes would hit Haiphong POL, and intensive interdiction of specified routes would follow. The United States would make every effort to minimize destruction of nonmilitary installations and would not target civilian population centers.

Failure to initiate air operations against North Vietnam as now recommended ... to support the over-all strategy for Southeast Asia would result in increased US commitments, costs, and casualties and increasing risks to the security of major elements of US and SVN military forces and facilities. Each day’s delay produces increased enemy capability which will have to be destroyed eventually at an increasingly higher cost to the United States.

In conclusion, the Joint Chiefs asked that their views be brought to the attention of the President “without delay.”⁵⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff incorporated their recommendations in the draft planning message for RT 32/33, scheduled for 17–30 September. In addition to the targets and systems cited in their 2 September memorandum, the Chiefs included in the target list four thermal power plants generating nearly 50 percent of North Vietnam's electricity. Secretary McNamara rejected the proposed ROLLING THUNDER package. He declared that he had not been persuaded that the military advantages would outweigh the military and political risks. Citing intelligence estimates, Secretary McNamara maintained that the proposed strikes, rather than reducing the flow of material from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, could very well cause Hanoi to make "more vigorous efforts" to support the Viet Cong. According to the estimates McNamara had seen, strikes as proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff would not injure the Viet Cong or persuade North Vietnam that the price of continued support to them was too high. "More important is the risk of a US-Chinese confrontation, which could well be increased by a program of the kind proposed." Pointing to a JCS warning that North Vietnam might use its IL-28s and MIGs against the American air base at Da Nang, the Secretary cited an intelligence analysis that such an attack was unlikely. On the other hand, the analysis had also shown that if the United States struck the Hanoi/Haiphong area, North Vietnam might retaliate by attacking Da Nang, and that substantial risk existed that a strike program of the weight and kind that the Joint Chiefs recommended would cause the Chinese Communists to intervene with air from Chinese bases.⁵⁸

The Secretary of Defense finally approved a reduced RT 32/33 package that permitted attacks on a railroad bridge and on a highway bridge northwest of Hanoi on routes leading to China, the first strikes on a line of communication in this area. These bridges, however, could be struck only one time. Apart from these, the package contained relatively unimportant targets, most of them restrikes. CINCPAC was directed not to bomb fixed SAM sites located within a 30 nm radius from the center of Hanoi. US aircraft struck the bridges with "limited success." But the net effect of the package, Admiral Sharp noted, was to leave the entire northeast quadrant of North Vietnam free from harassment.⁵⁹

In the directive for RT 30/31, CINCPAC had received authorization to restrike as necessary any Joint Chiefs of Staff numbered target within the currently established armed reconnaissance area that had previously been designated for attack. The rules for RT 32/33 narrowed this authority, allowing re-attack only of line of communication targets observed under repair. On 22 September, CINCPAC asked for restoration of the original proviso. In RT package 34/35, carried out between 1–14 October, the administration granted Admiral Sharp's request and restored the authority he sought. This package contained only four fixed targets for US forces, three of them bridges northwest of Hanoi.⁶⁰

More Limits on Bombing

On 16 September, in a memorandum to Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy called attention to reports that ROLLING THUNDER strikes, probably armed reconnaissance, had damaged

several dams and a canal lock in North Vietnam. Mr. Bundy cited Hanoi charges that the United States was attacking dams in its territory. The State Department, Mr. Bundy said, understood that dams were not considered targets of opportunity and, at least for the present, were not authorized targets for armed reconnaissance. “We do not believe that it is now appropriate to classify dams, canal locks, or flood control levees as valid targets for the ROLLING THUNDER program,” he declared. Mr. Bundy asked Defense to amend the ROLLING THUNDER instructions specifically to exclude dams, canal locks, hydroelectric power plants, and flood control levees from attack unless approved by Washington on a case-by-case basis as regular preplanned strikes. Mr. McNaughton passed this memorandum to the Chairman and asked for General Wheeler’s views.⁶¹

In his reply, General Wheeler disagreed with Mr. Bundy’s assertion that dams and locks were not valid military targets. He stated that he had no information about the dams reportedly damaged but made clear his distrust of any claims emanating from Hanoi. General Wheeler noted that North Vietnam increasingly relied on its inland waterway system, of which dams and locks were a part, to replace damaged or destroyed land lines of communication. The Joint Chiefs of Staff target list included only dams and levees associated with the waterway system, and the Joint Chiefs had no intention of including other such targets at this time. Since one hydroelectric plant and four thermal power plants had already been bombed in ROLLING THUNDER, the Chairman was puzzled by Mr. Bundy’s questioning of those targets. General Wheeler told Mr. McNaughton, “I can assure you that the Joint Chiefs of Staff will strongly oppose the imposition of further restraints upon our air campaign against the DRV.”

Then, turning to a matter that apparently concerned him, the Chairman called attention to a recent State Department comment that the United States had made “many prior official indications, public and private, that we intended to respect the special sensitivity of the Hanoi-Haiphong complex.” He asked Mr. McNaughton to obtain for the Joint Chiefs of Staff a listing of all such indications other than those possibly contained in statements by the President or the Secretaries of State and Defense. Mr. McNaughton agreed with General Wheeler in this matter and so informed Mr. Bundy. Further, he asked Mr. Bundy to provide the list of indications the Chairman had requested.⁶²

Mr. Bundy replied to McNaughton that he was not in a position to comment further on the question of locks and dams. He defended his assertion that US officials had consistently given the impression to the enemy and to other nations as well that the United States would continue to abstain from attacks on the Hanoi/Haiphong area, but he emphasized that the administration had said nothing officially to this effect and did not intend to do so. “I do want to conclude by assuring you and General Wheeler that we have no intention of changing the line we have taken so consistently, basically that we are not excluding this or any other action. Obviously, we must not say anything that could impair our freedom of action or the President’s freedom of choice on future actions.”⁶³

Starting with RT 32/33, CINCPAC had been allowed to attack primary line of communication targets in the northeast quadrant. On 2 October, Admiral Sharp recommended that RT 36/37 follow this trend. He listed five rail and highway bridges as fixed targets. In

the draft planning message, the Joint Staff included all these and added four additional bridges on the routes to the Chinese border. The Staff also proposed raising the sortie limit from 1,200 to 1,500 and increasing the armed reconnaissance area to coincide with that for IRON HAND anti-SAM missions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were briefed on the proposed package on 8 October and apparently accepted the Staff recommendations.

On 13 October, the Secretary of Defense made substantial changes in the draft planning message. He struck out all the proposed targets but four bridges in the northeast for US forces and one target for the VNAF in southern North Vietnam. Mr. McNamara also rejected raising the sortie limit to 1,500 and directed that planes keep their flight paths 20 miles, rather than the earlier 15 miles, from the Chinese border. In apparent concession to Mr. Bundy's earlier objections, he specifically excluded locks and dams from JCS numbered targets available for restrike by armed reconnaissance. These decisions set a pattern that continued for the remainder of 1965: fixed target authorization for ROLLING THUNDER packages was restricted to four bridges in the northeast quadrant and one VNAF target in southern North Vietnam. The administration made exceptions on only three occasions when it granted special authorization for attacks on SAM support facilities.⁶⁴

With the variety and number of fixed targets for US forces reduced to four bridges, and with the armed reconnaissance limits frozen, the military pressure against North Vietnam notably decreased. This effect lasted until the stand-down of military operations for the Christmas truce, which began on 24 December 1965. RT packages 38/39, 40/41, 42/43, and 44/45 were cautiously crafted, contained little worthwhile military innovation, and had little real effect on enemy capabilities or determination. A few minor changes in operating rules did relieve some of the constraints. In late November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff attempted to have armed reconnaissance limits lifted slightly to 20 degrees 32 minutes to be approximately contiguous with the 30 nm circle around Hanoi. Higher authority moved the limit by only one minute, to 20 degrees 31 minutes latitude. In RT 42/43, the administration extended authority for suppression strikes against SAM units firing on US planes to sites located within, as well as outside, the 30 nm circle around Hanoi. RT 46/47 expanded authority for coastal armed reconnaissance.⁶⁵

Review of ROLLING THUNDER

By late October 1965, the JCS Target List for North Vietnam comprised 240 targets, 126 of which had been struck. Of the remaining 114 targets, 75 lay in the sanctuaries. Only 39 targets that had not been bombed were outside the sanctuary areas, and of these 29 were in the key northeast quadrant. Allied aircraft had attacked over 740 bridges in North Vietnam. They had destroyed at least 145 of these or rendered them impassable for motor traffic. At about half of these sites, the enemy had built readily accessible vehicular by-passes. The allies had struck 31 rail or combination rail and highway bridges, but only 13 of these remained impassable. The enemy had repaired

some of these bridges and at others had built fords, ferries, and alternate bridging using floats, pontoons, and earthen causeways.⁶⁶

By late October, ROLLING THUNDER strike forces had flown 6,752 sorties against fixed targets and 11,149 on armed reconnaissance. Of the sorties against fixed targets, over one third had been against military barracks and about one sixth against ammunition depots. Supply depots, power plants, sea ports, railway yards, and explosive plants had come in for minor shares of the overall effort. Allied planes had bombed four airfields, two naval bases, thirteen radar sites, four SAM sites, and two communications installations. In addition to other damage, armed reconnaissance sorties had destroyed 328 vessels, 423 vehicles, and 181 railway cars and engines.

On 22 October, assessing the effects of ROLLING THUNDER, the Defense Intelligence Agency told the Secretary of Defense that the bombing had not visibly diminished the enemy's will and determination. Hanoi continued to assert its intent to press on with the war in South Vietnam despite US actions in the North and South. The attacks on economic targets had not greatly affected the capabilities of North Vietnam's armed forces, but damage to transportation facilities was hampering military movement. The Director, DIA, noted that it would be difficult to further reduce North Vietnam's capabilities in some categories because 51 percent of all sea ports and about 60 percent of POL, power plant, and railroad capacities lay within the sanctuary areas.⁶⁷

ROLLING THUNDER continued at a reduced and relatively ineffective level in spite of the efforts of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. With determination and persistence, the Joint Chiefs tried to persuade their superiors to reduce the area of sacrosanct territory in North Vietnam and to unleash US air power on fixed targets of greater value, such as the POL storage system. Their endeavors were uniformly unsuccessful.

Since midsummer, Admiral Sharp had been calling for destruction of the POL supply and facilities in the Hanoi/Haiphong complex. In his ROLLING THUNDER recommendations and in separate communications, he argued for the wisdom of such strikes. On 15 October, the Chairman asked the Joint Staff to advise him on whether it would be desirable to destroy the Haiphong POL facility at the risk of Viet Cong reprisal attacks on US POL installations in South Vietnam. On 5 November, he asked the Joint Staff to examine the desirability of destroying North Vietnam's entire bulk POL system as well as the Haiphong facility. The Staff concluded that the United States should attack the entire bulk POL system at once, beginning with Haiphong, regardless of the risk of Viet Cong reprisals in South Vietnam.⁶⁸

On 10 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense approve immediate attacks on North Vietnam's POL system, starting with Haiphong and continuing with subsequent strikes on eight other POL targets. They declared these raids would do more damage than attacks on any other group of targets; they would cripple the enemy's transportation system to a considerable degree and greatly hamper the flow of supplies to Communist military forces in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs pointed out that Haiphong, with 40 percent of North Vietnam's total POL storage capacity, was the most important target involved.⁶⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, they told Secretary McNamara,

that the air operations in DRV/Laos cannot attain more than the limited success now being achieved if they continue to be conducted under the existing constraints. The establishment and observance of de facto sanctuaries within the DRV, coupled with a denial of operations against the most important military and war supporting targets, preclude complete attainment of the objectives of the air campaign. Decisions should be reached to permit an immediate acceleration and increase in the scale, scope, and intensity of air operations against the DRV, to include attack of military and war supporting targets within the Hanoi-Haiphong area, and to permit aerial mining of North Vietnam[ese] ports.⁷⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff included elements of this recommendation in the draft planning message for RT 42/43, which they approved on 19 November; but higher authority disapproved the proposal on 22 November. On 1 December, they again proposed attacks on POL storage, including Hanoi and Haiphong in the draft for RT 44/45. They also directed the Joint Staff to develop a proposal for reducing the size of the Hanoi/Phuc Yen/Haiphong sanctuary to present to the Secretary of Defense. Apparently anticipating another rejection of the POL targets, the Chairman also directed the Staff to prepare an alternate proposal for continued interdiction of key lines of communication to the north and east of Hanoi.

The Joint Staff proposed reducing the sanctuaries to 10 miles around Hanoi, 10 miles around Phuc Yen airfield, and 4 miles around Haiphong, which if approved would uncover 30 JCS numbered targets. On 3 December, the Joint Chiefs approved these proposals for presentation to higher authority. Higher authority deleted all POL targets, authorizing only four bridge strikes for US planes, and retained the current size of the sanctuary areas.⁷¹

The story was much the same for RT 46/47, which was to take place between 24 December 1965 and 6 January 1966. Again, the Joint Staff proposed striking the POL system and reducing the sanctuaries to within 20 nm of Hanoi and 4 nm of Haiphong. Again, higher authority cut the package to four bridge strikes plus a restrike of one thermal power plant, if BDA showed a requirement. There was no reduction of the sanctuaries.⁷²

ROLLING THUNDER underwent only one minor expansion. In December, intelligence indicated that North Vietnam might be planning to send its patrol boats out to attack US destroyers on search and rescue station in the Gulf of Tonkin. These destroyers were essential to the recovery of downed US flyers in the Gulf. Because of this threat, higher authority authorized CINCPAC to conduct air operations along a portion of the northeast coast of North Vietnam previously excluded from armed reconnaissance. His planes now could strike "positively identified DRV attack-type naval craft" all along the coast of North Vietnam within 3 nm of shore and not within 10 nm of Haiphong and 25 nm of China. However, such craft found outside the 3 nm limit would not be attacked unless they fired first.⁷³

In accordance with President Johnson's decision to halt military action against the enemy in Vietnam during Christmas, the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC

to stand down all air operations over North Vietnam and Laos at 1800 (Saigon time), 24 December 1965. On 23 December, in a slight modification, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized BLUE SPRINGS reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam and Laos during the truce, so long as those missions did not involve “manned support aircraft.” Although some reconnaissance activities resumed in late December, the bar on air attacks against North Vietnam remained in place for more than a month while the administration searched for a diplomatic opening for a settlement of the war.⁷⁴

The Search for Peace Begins

As a major objective of national policy toward Vietnam, the United States sought to compel North Vietnam, through carefully controlled military pressures, to halt its support of the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos. Implicit in this policy was the understanding that the United States, once satisfied with the enemy's response to its demands, would cease its military actions against North Vietnam. US officials had not agreed upon exactly what would constitute a proper and adequate response or just what steps they would take if the other side made one. The enemy, for example, might do no more than gradually cut back assistance to the Viet Cong. Such action could occur through tacit understanding not enforced by real controls or checks, or it might come in the form of diplomatic overtures, open or secret negotiations, and written agreements.

Throughout 1965, the Johnson administration remained constantly on the alert for signs of a change in enemy attitudes or actions. Beyond that, US spokesmen publicly importuned the Communists for an indication that they were disposed to pursue a peaceful solution and, as in the mid-May bombing pause, attempted to elicit such an indication. As the year went on, the administration came under increasing pressure from public opinion at home and abroad to seek a diplomatic solution to the war; and international initiatives were launched to bring about negotiations toward that end. In the light of these pressures, US military leaders were concerned that their political superiors might be moved to enter negotiations without regard to the comparative friendly and enemy military positions, and before they received guarantees that the other side would give up its attempt to conquer South Vietnam.

Secretary of State Rusk set the overall US terms for a settlement at the beginning of 1965. On 3 January, he declared that if the communists in Southeast Asia would "leave their neighbors alone," US forces would come home, and all sorts of political possibilities would open up to bring "that situation to a peaceful conclusion." He underscored, however, that if the communists remained determined to press into Southeast Asia, it would be difficult to see how a political settlement could be reached.¹

The United States took a similar line in response to an overture by UN Secretary General U Thant. On 8 March, the Secretary General issued an appeal to the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, North Vietnam, Communist China, and South Vietnam to convene a seven power conference as a step toward ending the war in Vietnam. The United States turned down the suggestion, saying in essence that North Vietnam must halt its aggression before any conference would be considered.²

For their part, the leaders in Hanoi did not regard South Vietnam as a separate sovereign nation; they viewed their campaign in the South as a struggle to complete the liberation of a temporarily divided country, not a war of conquest. Hence, they alternately ignored, denounced, or simply rebuffed American overtures. They set their own peace terms, but their terms were so far out of line with the announced United States objectives that ground for negotiations proved difficult if not impossible to find.

Ambassador Taylor's Views

Shortly after the beginning of 1965, when the United States was moving toward the Sair strike phase of its program to compel Hanoi to stop its support of the Viet Cong, Ambassador Taylor raised the question of negotiations. His discussion centered on the nature of American and South Vietnamese objectives for the settlement of the war and the means of achieving them. Largely in a philosophical vein, the Ambassador examined whether a settlement would involve a return to the Geneva accords or the making of a new international agreement and what terms the United States should demand of North Vietnam in return for the cessation of action against it.³

Following the initial US reprisal raids on North Vietnam, and concurrently with his recommendations for further graduated reprisals, the Ambassador on 11 February again raised the question of negotiation. This time, he declared explicitly that a return to the Geneva accords of 1954 and 1962 would sidestep the pitfalls of new conferences and has the advantage of avoiding negotiations. Conceivably, if American pressure were strong enough, North Vietnam might tacitly agree to stop supporting the Viet Cong, confirming this later with "GVN/DRV negotiations at the military level." If Hanoi adopted this approach, it would have the added advantage of allowing the United States to avoid direct talks with the North Vietnamese. At this stage, the Ambassador was thinking in terms of "cessation of reprisal attacks" as the reward for Hanoi's accession to United States and South Vietnamese demands. Taylor proposed that the allies' demands, made when appropriate, involve generally a return to the Geneva accords. He suggested that North and South Vietnamese military representatives might meet in the Demilitarized Zone under the auspices of the International Control Commission (ICC), with US observers present.⁴

On 26 February, Ambassador Taylor reported that the US Ambassadors to Southeast Asia, at a coordination meeting, had reached the consensus that:

while, for other audiences, it may be felt necessary frequently to reiterate our willingness to talk and, of course, negotiations may be in fact necessary at some stage, too much reference, especially publicly, to our “willingness to negotiate” causes confusion in SVN, Thailand, and Laos, as well as distortion in the signal we are seeking to convey to Hanoi, Peking and Moscow.

General Taylor said that the Ambassadors had learned that in the local context, “to negotiate” had come to mean setting up a neutralist or coalition government as opposed to seeing the war through to a satisfactory conclusion. The United States must convince friends and enemies alike of its firm resolve to achieve its objectives. If the United States brought the matter before the UN Security Council, the Soviet Union would have to speak in defense of North Vietnam, a role it probably would wish to avoid, especially in view of the great Chinese Communist influence on Hanoi. China stood to gain from continued North Vietnamese involvement in the South and would seek to prevent any settlement. Should the Soviets replace China as the main support of North Vietnam, a political settlement would become more likely. Ambassador Taylor also stated that, while countries seeking a neutralist settlement undoubtedly would press hard for a negotiated solution short of US objectives, the United States should resist and try to divert the pressure to Hanoi, Beijing, and Moscow as the real villains in the piece.⁵

The JCS Position

On 15 March 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff established their own position on negotiations. They advised the Secretary of Defense that at the very minimum the United States and South Vietnam should not attempt to enter negotiations until their forces had gained a strong military advantage. Further, the minimum acceptable terms for any settlement must require North Vietnam to cease its support of the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos. Should talks take place, the United States and its Vietnamese and Laotian allies must not lose the contest at the conference table. If the other side stalled or displayed intransigence, thus dragging out the negotiations (as had been the case in Korea), the allies should increase military pressure on them in North and South Vietnam and in Laos. Although the Royal Laotian Government would have to be associated at some point with any negotiations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered bilateral talks between the two Vietnams preferable to a large Geneva-type conference where participants could resort to propaganda or raise matters not related to the main issue. The communists could be expected to resist bilateral talks. The United States, the Joint Chiefs advised, must not count on the USSR either as a mediator or as a communications channel to Hanoi, since the Soviets would advance their own interests at American expense whenever possible.

One of the main problems in any settlement would be to develop effective safeguards to make sure that any agreements were carried out. The other side would

probably insist strongly on the inclusion of the National Liberation Front (NLF), the Viet Cong's political arm, in any future Saigon government. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff definitely opposed the participation of the NLF in negotiations. The communists, they expected, would not give up easily on this point unless US and South Vietnamese military pressures were overwhelming. The 1954 Geneva accord provisions for "free general elections" must be set aside, since current conditions precluded the reunification of Vietnam. The International Control Commission must be organized so that it could function effectively in Vietnam; and any negotiated settlement must include appropriate deadlines for a ceasefire, withdrawal of forces and materiel, and safeguards (in addition to the ICC) to ensure positively that the terms were carried out. Particularly difficult would be the withdrawal of US forces as a "quid pro quo" for North Vietnamese withdrawal. As North Vietnam had demonstrated in 1954, it could pull out troops but leave behind strong Viet Cong forces.

In conclusion, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to Secretary McNamara that the United States and its allies "not enter into negotiations with the communists until a strong military position has been achieved, to include a reasonable indication that DRV intervention in the RVN and Laos has ceased." They asked that their views be considered in the development of a US position on settlement of the Southeast Asia conflict.⁶

President Johnson Sets His Terms

On 15 March, representatives of 17 "Non-aligned Nations," meeting in Belgrade, adopted a resolution appealing to the United States and other nations concerned in Vietnam for a peaceful settlement. Ten days later, President Johnson announced in a White House press release that he was ready to go anywhere at any time and meet with anyone whenever there was a promise of progress toward an honorable peace. "We have said many times," he continued, "to all who are interested in our principles for honorable negotiation—that we seek no more than a return to the essentials of the agreement of 1954—a reliable arrangement to guarantee the independence and security of all in Southeast Asia."⁷

On behalf of the President, Secretary Rusk formally received the appeal of the 17 "Non-aligned Nations" on 1 April. The United States turned down the appeal. The President, however, on 8 April took the opportunity to spell out for these nations that "Peace in Southeast Asia demands an independent South Vietnam—securely guaranteed and able to shape its own relationships to all others—free from outside interference—tied to no alliance—a military base for no other country."⁸

The President's words to the "Non-aligned Nations" repeated what he had said on 7 April in a major foreign policy address at Johns Hopkins University, delivered a week after his decision to commit American ground forces to counterinsurgency combat

operations. President Johnson emphasized United States determination to stand firm in Southeast Asia. He then stated:

it should also be clear that the only path for reasonable men is the path of peaceful settlement. Such peace demands an independent South Vietnam—securely guaranteed and able to shape its own relationships to all others—free from outside interference—tied to no alliance—a military base for no other country. These are the essentials of any final settlement. We will never be second in the search for such a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. There may be many ways to this kind of peace: in discussion or negotiations with the governments concerned; in large groups or in small ones; in the reaffirmation of old agreements or their strengthening with new ones. We have stated this position over and over again 50 times and more to friend and foe alike. And we remain ready with this purpose for unconditional discussions.

But he warned the communists: “We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired. We will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement.”

Offering a carrot as well as a stick, in the same address the President proposed a huge US economic assistance program to the nations of Southeast Asia, including North Vietnam. On 11 April, Hanoi’s official news agency rejected the President’s offer of unconditional discussions and called his proposed economic program the “bait” of “stupid pirates.”⁹

Hanoi Issues Its Four Points

Two days after the President’s Johns Hopkins speech, Premier Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam laid out his country’s terms for a settlement. He announced that his government adhered unswervingly to a policy of strict respect for the 1954 Geneva agreements on Vietnam and would implement their basic provisions as interpreted in what soon became known as Hanoi’s Four Points. Point One called for recognition of “the basic national rights of the Vietnamese people—peace, independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity.” It demanded that the United States withdraw from South Vietnam all of its troops and weapons, dismantle its military bases, cancel its “military alliance” with Saigon, and end its “policy of intervention and aggression” in South Vietnam. This point also declared that the United States “must stop its acts of war against North Vietnam” and “completely cease all encroachments on the territory and sovereignty of the DRV.”

Point Two stated that “pending the peaceful reunification of Vietnam, while Vietnam is still temporarily divided into two zones,” the zones must adhere to the military provisions of the Geneva agreements. Specifically, they must refrain from military alliances with foreign countries and refuse to allow foreign bases or military personnel in their respective territory. Point Three, provided that the internal affairs of South Vietnam, “must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves in

accordance with the program of the NFLSN [National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam] without any foreign interference.” Point Four declared that “The peaceful reunification of Vietnam is to be settled by the Vietnamese people in both zones, without any foreign interference.”¹⁰

The JCS Again Express Views

On 7 May, Ambassador Taylor, in preparation for discussions with the South Vietnamese government, submitted a list of questions, with suggested answers, dealing with allied objectives in the war and with specific ways of reaching a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. After studying these questions and answers, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that intervening developments had not changed their basic views; indeed, events had strengthened the views submitted on 15 March. The Joint Chiefs again urged that the United States make no effort to negotiate until friendly forces had achieved a strong military advantage. Should negotiations or discussions take place, they emphasized that continued military pressure on the enemy should accompany the diplomacy. While the Ambassador, in his list, had postulated minimum and maximum conditions under which the United States would be willing to cut back air attacks and reduce its forces in South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs held out little hope that these conditions would be attained. The United States, they declared, “must view any negotiations on the Vietnam problem in the context of the future US posture throughout SEAsia and the Western Pacific. We must maintain a position of strength to thwart communist aggression and expansion in these areas.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred with the Ambassador that the conflict in South Vietnam might end in a “tacit agreement,” pointing out that the insurgencies in Greece, Malaya, and the Philippines had ended with such arrangements. While desirable from the standpoint of Washington and Saigon, having the insurgents surface and lay down their arms might not be practicable. It also might not be feasible to insist that North Vietnam dissolve the National Liberation Front.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff observed that the immediate US objectives, which in turn would foster the attainment of other objectives, would be reached when North Vietnam ceased its interference in South Vietnam and Laos and when the Viet Cong stopped their insurgency. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the United States make no further offers to the enemy of economic development, at least until Hanoi responded favorably to the President’s standing offer of 7 April. Additional offers might be construed as a sign of weakness. Before entering into any agreements with the communists, the Joint Chiefs recommended that the administration make a very careful examination of the problems of inspection and control and of withdrawal of US troops. The Secretary of Defense passed these views to the Secretary of State.¹¹

Peace Feelers

Beginning with the bombing halt of 10–18 May, the United States carried out both public and confidential diplomatic efforts to establish positive contact with Hanoi. In doing so, the administration was motivated more by a desire to appease domestic and international opinion than by a belief that fruitful negotiations were possible at that stage.¹²

On the public side, the administration elaborated upon its desire for negotiations and its peace terms. In a speech on 25 June, President Johnson called upon all nations of the world “to use all their influence, individually and collectively, to bring to the tables those who seem determined to make war.” He promised that the United States would support their efforts. In a Voice of America broadcast on 4 July, Secretary of State Rusk announced that the United States on several occasions, acting through an intermediary, had asked North Vietnam what would happen if the US stopped the bombing. “... We’ve never had a reply,” he declared.¹³

In mid-year, the Secretary of State signaled a possible change in the US position on negotiation. He told interviewers that the United States would not object to the presence of the Viet Cong in the North Vietnamese delegation to any peace parley. He noted that neither Beijing nor Hanoi had shown any interest in peace talks. Turning to North Vietnam’s four points, Secretary Rusk singled out Point Three (the call for settlement of South Vietnam’s internal affairs in accordance with the program of the NLF) as not acceptable to the South Vietnamese or to their friends. “But,” he added, “we should be glad to go to the conference table to take up those agreements of 1954 and 1962 to see where things went wrong, to try to bring the situation back to those basic agreements”

The United States further clarified its terms in response to an initiative by UN Secretary General U Thant. On 28 July, President Johnson asked U Thant for any helpful suggestions he might have to “strengthen our common search for the road to peace in Southeast Asia.” In mid-August, the Secretary General presented his proposals for a settlement to the United States, North and South Vietnam, and Communist China. In doing so, he noted that the Geneva Agreements seemed to offer the best road to a negotiated settlement, and that the stated positions of the parties involved seemed similar, at least in respect to the military neutralization of Vietnam and elections under international supervision. He called for a well-planned cessation of all military operations by both sides and for inclusion in the settlement of all those who were actually fighting.¹⁴

State Department officials responded with skepticism to the Secretary General’s views. They noted that U Thant’s proposals slighted the Saigon government and called for admission of the NLF as a participant in any talks. They denied that the United States believed that internationally supervised elections would settle the political problems or that, if elections were held, the ICC was the proper body to supervise them. Although U Thant seemed to think it would occur, the United States had little evidence that North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front would uphold the political procedures of the

Geneva Agreement. Nor was the United States convinced of the advantages of a cessation of all military operations prior to negotiations, since this would tend to weaken the allies' position at any conference.¹⁵

On 27 August, Secretary Rusk replied to the Secretary General. He expressed general agreement with U Thant's overall approach to a settlement but added that: 1) the United States would be "ready and eager" to withdraw its forces from South Vietnam when favorable conditions had been created; 2) neither "zone" of Vietnam should interfere in the affairs of the other; 3) troops and cadres infiltrated from the North must be withdrawn from South Vietnam; and 4) free and secret elections to determine unification of Vietnam "without interference from an aggressive neighbor to the north" must be guaranteed. The United States, Rusk reaffirmed, remained prepared to engage in "unconditional discussions looking toward a peaceful settlement whenever the other side is ready."¹⁶

While these more or less public exchanges went forward, during the summer and autumn a series of private negotiating initiatives unfolded. They featured at various times French, Soviet, Polish, Italian, and North Vietnamese officials with equally various American interlocutors. None of these initiatives produced meaningful negotiations. During these often prolonged feelers, the communist side made increasingly clear that the United States must cease unconditionally its bombing of North Vietnam before any substantive talks could begin. The Johnson administration rejected this condition while reiterating its willingness to enter negotiations without preconditions and to include Hanoi's Four Points among the items for discussion.¹⁷

Holiday Truces

Beyond expressing their views on general aspects of negotiations and a settlement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not involved in the various peace feelers of 1965. They did become engaged, however, in the Johnson administration's planning and execution of successive Christmas and Tet holiday truces, the latter of which expanded into a major United States diplomatic initiative.

The holiday truce discussions took place as President Johnson and his senior advisers deliberated during late November and early December about a new peace initiative, likely to include a pause in ROLLING THUNDER attacks. During this time, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and other senior presidential advisers gradually reached a consensus that a bombing suspension was essential, if only to test communist claims that Hanoi would negotiate if a halt occurred. If Hanoi did not respond positively—and the officials doubted that it would—a pause was needed to prepare domestic and world opinion for the new warlike actions coming in early 1966, in particular the large troop reinforcement for MACV and a major new budget request to pay for the war. By early December, a bombing pause appeared inevitable, with its timing and duration the principal remaining points at issue.¹⁸

From the beginning of the war, the opposing forces in Vietnam had curtailed their military actions during Tet, the lunar New Year holiday, a time of great family and religious significance for the Vietnamese. On 7 December, the Viet Cong's clandestine Liberation Radio broadcast an offer to observe an additional 12-hour truce on Christmas Eve. Initially, Secretary Rusk characterized this offer as being of no political consequence and a matter for local authorities in South Vietnam to decide. Soon, however, the question took on great political importance. The end result was a substantial reduction in allied military pressure on the enemy for a considerable period, with adverse effects on the friendly tactical position in the field and with little tangible political benefit.¹⁹

On 13 December, the State Department informed the US Ambassador to South Vietnam that the Viet Cong proposal was attracting considerable attention and that "wider cease-fire" initiatives might be forthcoming shortly. The US Mission Council in Saigon had already approved a policy for the Tet period, 21–23 January, which called for major reduction in air operations over North Vietnam and Laos and virtual cessation of military operations in South Vietnam, apart from necessary defensive measures.

With the enemy having seized the initiative on a Christmas truce, Ambassador Lodge on 17 December recommended that the United States and South Vietnam issue a statement, in broad terms, on how they would reduce military activity during Tet. By doing so, they could "pre-empt VC initiative in announcing Tet season ceasefire." With regard to Christmas, the US Mission Council recommended that the United States not respond publicly to the Viet Cong offer and continue bombing in Laos and North Vietnam during the holiday. However, allied military operations in South Vietnam should virtually cease, except for air attacks against Viet Cong base areas. Ambassador Lodge noted that this course would not in any way mitigate Viet Cong propaganda advantages and suggested that the United States make proposals "for a real cease-fire which would win for us considerable propaganda gains."

In the meantime, the Joint Chiefs of Staff learned that the State Department was preparing proposals for Christmas and Tet holiday truces that went far beyond anything the Viet Cong had proposed. Apparently because of a sense of urgency, the Departments of State and Defense on 19 December hurriedly dispatched a message to Saigon before the Joint Chiefs of Staff could consider it formally. The message proposed to the Ambassador certain definite actions with regard to the Christmas truce.

In line with Ambassador Lodge's reasoning, State Department officials believed that the allies should answer the enemy's Christmas offer with a South Vietnamese Tet initiative. However, they were concerned that "some quarters," even perhaps a responsible government, might appeal for "a more forthcoming response" on the Christmas truce and that the United States should be prepared for this. (On 19 December, the Pope commended the Viet Cong truce proposal "for the blessed Christmas Day" to the "wisdom and heart of the responsible leaders.") The State Department officials suggested that the United States and South Vietnam announce jointly that their forces would "respond appropriately" to the other side's actions on 24 and 25 December. Further, the allies should consider some "acceptable and attractive" proposal for the Tet period, to

be announced before Christmas. These actions, State officials believed, would much improve the US public relations posture with little military disadvantage. So would an unannounced suspension of bombing over North Vietnam for a 24-hour period beginning on Christmas Eve. The allies should drastically reduce air operations in South Vietnam and halt other operations there on Christmas except for those absolutely necessary to security of forces.

Ambassador Lodge opposed a public announcement accepting the Viet Cong offer, which he called a farce. However, he agreed with the State Department position on suspension of bombing in North Vietnam and other actions in the South. He opposed making a Tet truce offer before Christmas, saying it would be better to make such an announcement in early January.

In view of the State Department suggestions to the Ambassador, the Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately asked CINCPAC to assess the effects of the truce proposals on operations. Admiral Sharp replied on 20 December that suspension of bombing in North Vietnam and of ground and air offensive operations in South Vietnam for Christmas would not result in any significant military disadvantage. That same day, Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance called upon the Joint Chiefs of Staff for views on the Christmas truce for use by President Johnson in a news conference slated in less than an hour. Meeting hurriedly, the Joint Chiefs agreed to recommend to the President that no statement on the subject be made to the press, but that if one must be made, it should follow the lines of Ambassador Lodge's recommendation. That is, the United States should make no overt response and continue air operations in North Vietnam and Laos, but with some curtailment of offensive actions in South Vietnam. The Acting Chairman, General McConnell, immediately relayed this position to Mr. Vance. The White House endorsed the Pope's call for peace in Vietnam but did not comment directly on his call for a Christmas truce.

On the afternoon of 20 December, Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) McNaughton informed the Assistant to the Chairman, Lieutenant General Andrew Goodpaster, USA, that State and Defense were sending a joint message to Saigon. The departments were instructing the Ambassador to persuade the South Vietnamese government to issue an announcement that "no military action will be initiated except in self-defense in either North or South Vietnam from 1800 on December 24 to midnight on Christmas Day Saigon time." There would be no announcement of Tet policy until after Christmas. The Secretary of Defense had instructed Mr. McNaughton to inform the Joint Chiefs of this message because he realized that the Chiefs opposed the "self-defense language." Mr. McNaughton stated that the message was going out despite this opposition; and in fact it was dispatched late in the afternoon of 20 December, Washington time.

On 21 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff belatedly recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the United States adhere to the Mission Council position on the Christmas truce because the Council was "in the best position to determine the risks and benefits of a Christmas stand-down...." Events, however, had passed the JCS by. On 22 December, Ambassador Lodge notified the State Department that the South Vietnamese government had accepted in principle the Christmas truce policy proposed on the 20th. It had also

accepted the program for Tet that Ambassador Lodge had outlined earlier, saying that its forces would carry out no major military operations in that period.

Shortly thereafter, General Westmoreland informed CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff of his plans for the period from 1800, 24 December, to 2400, 25 December. During that time, his forces would: 1) assume a posture of extreme alertness, continue normal security precautions, and keep ready reaction forces prepared for prompt response to any Viet Cong initiatives; 2) units in contact with enemy forces would not break contact; 3) MACV would conduct no ground offensive operations but all units would be prepared to react promptly and destroy Viet Cong or North Vietnamese forces if the enemy started operations; 4) the allies would conduct air operations only in support of friendly forces in contact, but the 2nd Air Division would maintain aircraft on ground and air alert as requested and required and its planes would jettison unexpended ordnance in unpopulated areas of previously specified strike zones; and 5) route security operations would continue. The RVNAF Joint General Staff was ordering its forces to follow these same ground rules.

On 22 December, the State Department instructed Ambassador Lodge to have COMUSMACV announce as early as possible that US forces would cease fire except in self-defense from 1800, 24 December, to 2400, 25 December. On the same day, the Secretary of Defense ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to put into effect the Christmas truce plans the State and Defense Departments had outlined on 19 and 20 December. The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately directed CINCPAC and CINCSAC to stop all air operations over North Vietnam and Laos, as well as ARC LIGHT missions in South Vietnam, during the specified truce. Air and ground operations in South Vietnam would be carried out in accord with the policy COMUSMACV had set forth. Saigon took similar action with its own forces. BLUE SPRINGS reconnaissance operations over the North could continue during the period so long as manned support aircraft were not used.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had opposed a Christmas stand-down in response to what was essentially an enemy initiative. But, in view of the short duration of the truce and the caveats and safeguards written into the policy, they were not greatly concerned over the military consequences. Subsequent actions by higher authority, however, did concern the Joint Chiefs, who protested them on what they considered to be sound military grounds. On the evening of 24 December, Washington time, while the Christmas truce was in effect, the Deputy Secretary of Defense sought Joint Chiefs of Staff agreement to a State-Defense proposal to extend the ceasefire period. The extension was aimed at turning international public opinion in favor of the United States by placing the onus for renewal of fighting on the enemy, ensuring that the end of the Christmas truce was not "signaled before the world by US acts of violence." The Acting Chairman objected to such an extension on military grounds, but the President decided to extend the truce. He did, however, direct the inclusion of a discretionary provision in the message to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV which stated:

We recognize the heavy responsibility these instructions place on all concerned and we want you to know that you are free to make your own decisions

within the spirit of these instructions and that those decisions will have our full support.

With this caveat added, the State and Defense Departments on 25 December issued orders that the restrictions on operations in North Vietnam and on ARC LIGHT were to continue. CINCPAC could resume full air operations over Laos, but the missions must not be flown from South Vietnamese bases. In South Vietnam, General Westmoreland, “consistent with the safety of his forces,” could carry on normal patrolling required for self-defense but must conduct all other operations so that responsibility for renewing hostilities would fall on the Viet Cong. In coordination with the Embassy, he was to ensure that the South Vietnamese followed the same course as the United States in this matter. The Embassy was to assure the Saigon authorities that the extension did not modify or dilute the US commitment to South Vietnam and was for the sole purpose of securing the overwhelming support of the American people and the broad understanding of the international public. There was to be no public discussion of the extension. These restrictions would remain in effect until CINCPAC could present publicly confirmed evidence of renewed enemy violence, which State and Defense officials expected him to be able to do within a day or so.

Even with the latter proviso, General Wheeler, then in Bangkok, expressed “grave concern at the military hazards inherent in the directives.” He believed the administration was creating a “de facto in-place cease-fire for US/GVN forces while permitting VC/PAVN forces complete freedom of movement.” The Chairman feared that the other side would capitalize on American restraint by not renewing open hostilities.²⁰

On the latter point, General Wheeler’s fears proved groundless. General Westmoreland reported on 26 December that, between 1800, 24 December and 0300, 26 December, Saigon time, the Viet Cong had initiated 71 significant incidents, a level at least double the pre-ceasefire rate. He called for immediate lifting of all restrictions on his operations in South Vietnam. CINCPAC concurred and, further, asked that ROLLING THUNDER be resumed immediately.

With little hesitation, the Acting Chairman, General McConnell, on the basis of the discretionary provision in the truce-extension directive, told CINCPAC that so far as he was concerned the enemy had broken the truce. He authorized CINCPAC to lift all restrictions on operations in South Vietnam if the Pacific commander judged it necessary. The Acting Chairman interpreted the discretionary provision as giving CINCPAC the authority to decide whether to resume operations in South Vietnam, but not in North Vietnam. Hence, the suspension of ROLLING THUNDER remained in force. Admiral Sharp at once instructed General Westmoreland to resume offensive air operations, except for ARC LIGHT strikes, and unrestricted ground action in South Vietnam. The Deputy Secretary of Defense, contacted by General McConnell immediately after CINCPAC’s message went out to COMUSMACV, agreed that the action had been proper. On 27 December, higher authority permitted resumption of ARC LIGHT and some reconnaissance programs over the North. Despite strong JCS recommendations, however, the administration withheld authority to resume ROLLING THUNDER.

General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp added their voices to the call for resumption of the northern air campaign, but the ban on ROLLING THUNDER continued into the new year.

From a military standpoint, the Joint Chiefs told the Secretary of Defense, the Christmas ceasefire had brought no advantages and distinct disadvantages. During the 36-hour truce, the enemy had launched 85 significant incidents in which 73 friendly troops had been killed and 101 wounded. Permitted unhindered movement, the other side had taken full advantage of it. Friendly patrols had been made more vulnerable by cessation of artillery and air support. A psychological letdown and reduction in alertness had occurred. With reconnaissance over North Vietnam shut down, the airfields at Vinh and Dong Hoi had gone unobserved for 48 hours. This, in view of the enemy's IL-28 bomber force, had endangered US bases at Da Nang and Chu Lai. With ROLLING THUNDER suspended, the communists could carry on an unrestrained logistic buildup, including infiltration of men, repair of road and rail routes, redeployment of air defense forces, and a general strengthening of their position.

The Tet Truce

Ambassador Lodge had succeeded in postponing any announcement of US intentions for the Tet holiday until after Christmas. Nevertheless, higher authorities kept the matter under active consideration. On 22 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff received a request to concur in a draft State Department message to Ambassador Lodge. In the message, State agreed with the view of the Mission and the Saigon government that allied forces should repeat their Christmas policy—no initiation of military activity in North or South—during the three-day Tet period.²¹

Due to other more pressing matters, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not address this issue until 27 December. On that date, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that they, as well as COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, opposed any relaxation of military effort during the Tet holidays. Their experience with the Christmas truce had more than convinced them that such actions were not in the best interests of either the United States or South Vietnam. Knowing, however, that Saigon intended to modify its operations to some degree during Tet, the Joint Chiefs, in accord with the field commanders, recommended that, if the United States was going to follow Saigon's lead, the minimum posture for Tet should be what Ambassador Lodge and the US Mission Council had recommended on 14 December.

Those recommendations called for continuance of air operations over North Vietnam, with emphasis on special measures to minimize civilian casualties, and also over Laos. In South Vietnam, forces in contact with the enemy would not break off, but the allies would mount no ground offensive operations. Forces would be ready to react promptly and take other measures for their own security. So far as possible, the allies would not conduct ground operations around hamlets or villages. Viet Cong base areas

would be subject to air attack, but strikes in hamlets and villages would be avoided. The allies would intensify intelligence and psychological warfare measures during the truce.

General Wheeler, who was in Thailand at the time, informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff of his strong opposition to a stand-down of all military operations during Tet. But, in the event the Joint Chiefs were overruled, he called for a “bare survival level” of security operations, including increased ground observation and patrolling, and extensive air reconnaissance to detect possible threats to US forces. He advocated also increased reconnaissance over North Vietnam.

On 28 December, again stealing a march on the allies, the Viet Cong, through their Liberation Radio, called for a four-day ceasefire during Tet. During the period from 2400 on 19 January to 2400 on 23 January, they promised to fire only in self-defense and to allow visits and attendance at celebrations by South Vietnamese government soldiers as long as no weapons were carried. The Viet Cong made no mention of privileges for US and Free World soldiers.

On 31 December, Ambassador Lodge informed the State Department that he proposed to announce that Free World forces would not launch offensive operations during Tet, although they would maintain the right of self-defense and would continue to patrol. He understood that the Saigon government was going ahead with its earlier plans on Tet and asked for authorization to coordinate US plans with those of the South Vietnamese. The State Department concurred but instructed the Ambassador to say nothing publicly at this time concerning military operations against North Vietnam, which the President had decided to suspend indefinitely as part of a new peace offensive. Commenting on Ambassador Lodge’s proposed policy, Admiral Sharp noted that it seemed to rule out offensive air operations in South Vietnam. CINCPAC considered this satisfactory so long as the enemy did not initiate offensive action. He recommended that the stand-down over North Vietnam not continue until Tet, although the United States could live with a stand-down during the holiday itself, provided reconnaissance operations continued.

In accord with this policy, on 5 January 1966 the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that Tet would be observed from 210001 to 232400 January (Saigon time). During this period, the United States and South Vietnam would conduct no military offensive operations with the following exceptions: 1) they would keep up security patrols, with reaction forces ready to respond at once to any enemy initiative; 2) friendly forces would maintain contact with the enemy unless he was trying to disengage or the operation was over; 3) the allies would mount no offensive air operations in South Vietnam unless necessary for security of friendly forces, although COMUSMACV could authorize air or naval support of ground forces if needed and request ARC LIGHT strikes in normal fashion; 4) friendly forces would conduct intensive aerial reconnaissance; and 5) any operations conducted would avoid populated areas if possible.

With these instructions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff intended to put US and Free World forces and, where feasible the RVNAF, in a position to meet any enemy attacks during Tet with full capabilities and to lessen the chances of the enemy exploiting the Tet stand-down to his military advantage. The Joint Chiefs of Staff warned CINCPAC that

the enemy might concentrate any holiday attacks on the US and Free World forces, avoiding the RVNAF for psychological reasons. To give American commanders as free a hand as possible, the JCS included a permissive clause in their instructions. While it was US policy to fix the blame for any renewal of fighting during Tet on the enemy, the Joint Chiefs said, "US commanders retain full responsibility for safety of their forces and full authority to act to protect them, including reinstatement as necessary of all military actions suspended by these instructions." Prime Minister Ky concurred in the US/Tet policy and tacitly agreed that the RVNAF would follow the same rules. CINCPAC directed his field commanders to continue, during Tet, all security precautions and patrol activity, including MARKET TIME and reconnaissance over North Vietnam and the Tonkin Gulf.²²

In the second week of January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again were alarmed by talk of prolonging the Tet stand-down to put the onus for resumption of fighting on the Viet Cong. General Wheeler learned at a White House meeting on 10 January that the administration was considering instructions to Ambassador Lodge that the United States meant to resume regular military operations "as soon after expiration of VC-announced Tet cease-fire period ... as we can consistent with the importance of establishing that VC initiated hostilities." The aim would be to show that the other side had failed to observe their own announced truce period and to present specific evidence that they had stepped up their activities immediately after Tet, requiring the allies to respond. The draft message would ask the Ambassador to inform Washington as soon as possible if the Viet Cong appeared to be keeping the truce after the Tet period had terminated. The renewal of hostilities or the announcement of intention to do so would be delayed until Washington gave its approval.²³

On 21 January, General Wheeler informed the Secretary of Defense that the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed any extension of the truce. The JCS believed, he stated, that continuation would cause the United States to slip into a *de facto* ceasefire in place. An extended truce would give significant advantage to the enemy and would cause unnecessary casualties to Free World forces. Experience with the Christmas stand-down had shown that there would be "no demonstrated off-setting gains" from an extension or from the conditions set for resumption of operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed sending the draft message. If additional guidance had to be given, they insisted that it not modify the instructions which they had sent to CINCPAC on 5 January. In the end, the draft instructions were not sent.²⁴

On 14 January, the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff issued a ceasefire directive for the period 201200 to 231200 (Saigon time), a truce 24 hours shorter—starting 12 hours later and ending 12 hours earlier—than the ceasefire the Viet Cong had announced. COMUSMACV following the JGS lead issued similar instructions to his own forces. Concurrently, he reported to CINCPAC the capture of a document revealing Viet Cong plans to resume fighting immediately after their ceasefire ended. General Westmoreland believed that if the United States wanted to extend the truce after Tet to prove the enemy had broken the ceasefire, a new approach to the Saigon government would be necessary. He recommended against such an effort. If the truce were extended, General

Westmoreland emphasized, he would need at least 72 hours to get the word out to all his troops and to coordinate the necessary measures.²⁵

Admiral Sharp notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the South Vietnamese Tet announcement, noting that the hours were at variance with the JCS instructions of 5 January. He joined General Westmoreland in recommending that the allies resume military action 12 hours before the time set by the Viet Cong, that the ceasefire should not be extended beyond the period already announced, and that if any extension were considered he be notified “well in advance.”²⁶

On 19 January, with the approval of the Secretary of Defense and the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff changed the Tet stand-down period to begin at the time announced by the South Vietnamese, 201200, but set the ending at 231800 (Saigon time), six hours later than Saigon’s termination time. The ceasefire went into effect as scheduled, but the enemy did not keep the peace completely. At the conclusion of the period, General Westmoreland reported that the Viet Cong had initiated 106 incidents of violence of varying severity. They had made 77 attacks against US/FWMAF and 29 against the RVNAF, resulting in 13 friendly troops killed, 26 wounded, and one missing. Fifty-seven enemy had been killed. MACV and the RVNAF resumed normal operations on schedule in South Vietnam, but the suspension of the bombing of North Vietnam continued.²⁷

The Peace Offensive

When the Christmas truce expired, the United States had resumed military operations in South Vietnam and Laos but continued its self-imposed pause in bombing North Vietnam. The principal US means for keeping pressure on Hanoi, ROLLING THUNDER, remained in suspension during January as the result of a decision by President Johnson to explore exhaustively the possibilities of peaceful settlement. In this period, the President directed a series of coordinated political actions designed to bring the enemy to the conference table, or at the least, to determine his attitude toward negotiation. If the United States showed forbearance, officials hoped, the Soviet Union or even Communist China might be persuaded to counsel Hanoi in favor of compromise.²⁸

President Johnson’s peace offensive was driven by a number of considerations. During 1965, the cost of the war to the United States had risen sharply in dollars and, more important, in casualties. By the end of the year, it was clear that the continuing and accelerated fighting, especially the bombing of North Vietnam, was also costing the United States dearly in prestige and good will among neutral nations and even among its allies. At the same time, segments of US domestic opinion were hardening against the national policy in Vietnam, as reflected in demonstrations by activist groups and public statements against the war by prominent Americans, including members of Congress. Moreover, the United States was seeking limited objectives in Vietnam, not the destruction of North Vietnam or the overthrow of its government. Finally, the administration wanted to soften the foreign and domestic impact of the additional military measures

already decided upon for 1966, including the near doubling of General Westmoreland's American forces, by actions demonstrating a continued American desire for peace.²⁹

In the light of all these factors, President Johnson took advantage of the natural breaking point in hostilities at Christmas and Tet to initiate an active quest for a peaceful solution to the Vietnam war. On 28 December, he sent emissaries, including Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, Secretary of State Rusk, Ambassador Harriman, McGeorge Bundy, and UN Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, to key world capitals to present the US case and to spell out the details of the US position and desire for a peaceful settlement. In all, American officials and diplomats visited 34 capitals and communicated with 115 governments. At the same time, the State Department provided American representatives throughout the world with a clear statement of the US position on Vietnam, instructing them to use it "in an effective manner." In the statement, the United States held to the premise that "external aggressions" had caused and were sustaining the war in Vietnam. US troops sent to Vietnam to repel the aggressors would stay until aggression had ended. The United States had more at stake than Vietnam or Southeast Asia; it had to consider the integrity of its commitment and the importance of that commitment to the peace of the whole world. Reiterating the US desire for peace, the position statement presented fourteen points as a basis for negotiations on Vietnam.

These fourteen points, publicly announced on 28 December, were: 1) the United States accepted the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Agreements as an adequate basis for peace; 2) the United States would welcome a conference on Southeast Asia or on any part of that region; 3) the United States would welcome "negotiations without pre-conditions" as proposed by the 17 nonaligned nations; 4) the United States would welcome unconditional discussions as proposed by President Johnson; 5) a ceasefire could be the first order of business at a conference or could be the subject of preliminary discussions; 6) Hanoi's four points of April 1965 could be discussed along with points that others might wish to propose; 7) the United States wanted no bases in Southeast Asia; 8) the United States did not want a continuing military presence in South Vietnam after peace was assured; 9) the United States supported free elections in South Vietnam; 10) Vietnamese reunification should be determined by free decision of the people; 11) the nations of Southeast Asia could be "non-aligned or neutral" if that was their choice; 12) the US was prepared to contribute \$1 billion to a regional development program for Vietnam, including North Vietnam; 13) the Viet Cong would have no difficulty in having their views represented at a conference after hostilities had ceased; 14) the United States "could stop the bombing of North Vietnam as a step toward peace although there has not been the slightest hint or suggestion from the other side as to what they would do if the bombing stopped."³⁰

While the majority of nations consulted, even some communist nations such as Yugoslavia, reacted favorably to the United States peace offensive, the key countries of the communist bloc apparently dismissed it as a propaganda effort. The Soviet Union declined to take any positive action to bring about negotiations. Communist China, which had not been visited by US representatives, blasted American actions as a hoax and as a prelude to the expansion of the war. United States efforts at direct contact with

North Vietnam through diplomatic channels were fruitless. Hanoi termed the American initiative “deceitful” and labeled the suspension of bombing a “trick.” North Vietnam restated its four points as a basis for beginning negotiations and refused to moderate its stand in any respect. Nevertheless, the United States persisted in its course. It also maintained its suspension of ROLLING THUNDER, through the rest of January, in spite of increasingly urgent protests by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders.

ROLLING THUNDER Resumes and Expands

All during January 1966, as the United States refrained from bombing North Vietnam in pursuit of its peace offensive, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders continued to press for a renewal of ROLLING THUNDER. Because they believed that the enemy was deriving both military and political advantage from the bombing halt, they sought this renewal at a substantially higher level—one that would quickly reduce Hanoi's temporary military edge and that would be more apt to impel the enemy toward negotiation. Once the bombing resumed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to advocate more aggressive air operations than did other advisers to the President. The Joint Chiefs of Staff generally approved and endorsed the measures that the field commanders proposed to counter enemy support of the war in the South. Advisers at the State Department, OSD, the NSC, and the White House consistently were more conservative in their recommendations.

During the spring and early summer of 1966, pressures mounted and issues were joined. Advocating stronger actions against North Vietnam, military authorities sought to persuade their civilian superiors that time was running out on moderation. In this period, decisions of great consequence took shape slowly but steadily. Repeated military recommendations for stronger action against North Vietnam backed by that most cogent of arguments, the failure of extant measures to achieve US objectives, began to receive grudging approval. By mid-1966, proposals from the field that early in the year seemed to have little chance of acceptance were accepted in principle and some had been put into effect.

The Debate over Resuming the Bombing

The Joint Chiefs of Staff began their campaign to restart ROLLING THUNDER early in January. On 4 January, they asked CINCPAC to evaluate the impact of the bombing

suspension on the allies' negotiating posture and to provide such evidence as he had that the enemy was indeed taking advantage of the pause to increase his military capabilities. Within a few hours, Admiral Sharp replied that the continued suspension of ROLLING THUNDER was weakening the United States and South Vietnamese negotiating position. By holding off the air attacks on North Vietnam, the United States was relinquishing the main pressure which might force Hanoi to negotiate. On the basis of the scant evidence then at hand, CINCPAC could not say that the enemy had increased his capabilities as a direct result of the standdown. Nevertheless, the communists were building up forces around Quang Tri and Saigon, indicating they planned to go ahead with combat as usual. In addition, North Vietnam appeared to be exploiting the pause to return to normal daytime operations, including reconstruction and use of lines of communication. Taking account of an expected visit to Hanoi of a member of the Soviet Presidium, Alexander Shelepin, CINCPAC urged that the US resume air attacks either before Shelepin's arrival or after his departure. This way, the United States could avoid any possible serious incident that might disrupt what American officials believed might be the Russian's mission—talking to the North Vietnamese about negotiations.¹

On 8 January, based upon CINCPAC's evaluation and views, the Joint Chiefs recommended that the United States terminate the bombing standdown within 48 hours after Mr. Shelepin left Hanoi. In justification, the JCS informed the Secretary of Defense that Hanoi was using its immunity to repair lines of communication, strengthen air defenses, and generally to recover from the ROLLING THUNDER damage of the past ten months. Unless the United States resumed and expanded operations soon, the costly bombing which had cut the enemy's capabilities in 1965 would have been wasted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff urged that the United States not wait for positive proof of infiltration, which was hard to confirm, but resume air raids on the basis of the enemy's known capability to improve his military posture. Breaking off the cessation, the Joint Chiefs warned, would become more difficult the more time passed. Protracted negotiations could be costly in American lives. Early resumption of the air offensive was essential "if we are to avoid a misinterpretation of US resolve in Southeast Asia, redress advantages accruing to the DRV from the standdown, and enter into meaningful negotiations from a position of strength."²

On 12 January, before the Secretary of Defense could reply to this recommendation, Admiral Sharp told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that when the United States resumed bombing North Vietnam, which he believed would have to be done soon, it should bomb at a level that would force, rather than persuade, Hanoi to change its policies. He pointed out that the nature of the war had changed since ROLLING THUNDER began. The United States, therefore, should now alter the nature of ROLLING THUNDER. CINCPAC was not sanguine about the chances of bringing the North Vietnamese to the conference table, although he considered a negotiated solution "infinitely preferable to a long, bitter and costly war." Admiral Sharp wanted any future ROLLING THUNDER program to achieve three essential objectives: 1) denial of external support to North Vietnam; 2) destruction in depth of the North's existing resources and permanent military facilities,

and harassment and disruption of dispersed military operations; and 3) harassment and obstruction of the movement of men and materials through southern North Vietnam into Laos and South Vietnam.

Admiral Sharp then recommended specific actions to achieve these objectives. His cumulative proposals encompassed air attacks on all POL, all electrical power facilities, and all large military installations. In addition, he wanted to mine ports, interdict all land communications to North Vietnam from China, and conduct armed reconnaissance against lines of communication in the northeast quadrant of North Vietnam. He also asked for intensified armed reconnaissance on all routes south of the 20th parallel with no restrictions on the number of sorties.

CINCPAC called attention to the high morale and tenacity of Communist forces. He attributed these qualities to the enemy's conviction that they could out-last the United States. To generate "internal US pressures" to end the war, the other side was counting on inflicting high American casualties, even at the cost of "staggering losses" to its own forces. In Admiral Sharp's view, Hanoi had staged a "remarkable world-wide political and propaganda campaign" which had forced the United States into its present uncomfortable position. The enemy had recognized that the political battle, not the military battle, was crucial and was now fighting to achieve a permanent bombing cessation.³

On the same day that CINCPAC made his recommendations, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, asserted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, in order to convey American determination clearly, the standdown in air operations against North Vietnam must be "broken dramatically by attacks more forceful than any heretofore." He favored relatively unrestricted strikes against key target systems, with continuing intense effort until Hanoi stopped supporting the insurgencies. He recognized, but discounted, the possibility of Chinese intervention resulting from stepped-up bombing. General McConnell also recognized the danger of an adverse reaction in the noncommunist world, but was more concerned over whether or not the bombing would actually change North Vietnam's policy or limit significantly its support of the fighting in the South. He believed that it would. Accordingly, General McConnell recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff ask the Secretary of Defense to seek authority, immediately upon termination of the stand-down, to direct offensive air operations against key North Vietnamese military targets and to carry out sustained day and night armed reconnaissance to interdict major lines of communication. If approved, these operations should be conducted "under minimum constraints beyond prohibition on the use of nuclear weapons and on attacks against the population in NVN."⁴

At their meeting on the 12th, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the Joint Staff to prepare a program of renewed air operations against North Vietnam, taking into consideration the recommendations and views of CINCPAC and the Chief of Staff, Air Force. The Joint Chiefs approved the program thus developed on 17 January, and on the next day submitted recommendations and views generally paralleling those of Admiral Sharp and General McConnell.⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that limited air strikes of the type thus far conducted would not achieve the primary US objective—causing Hanoi to stop its support and direction of the insurgency in South Vietnam. Because ROLLING THUNDER attacks had been piecemeal, the enemy had enjoyed great freedom to replenish his forces, disperse his stocks, redirect the flow of materials, and improve his defenses. Geographic restrictions and limits on the number of sorties over the North had prevented effective interdiction of railways, highways, and waterways. Moreover, the Joint Chiefs observed, “these restrictions and the requirement for single coordinated attacks on specified targets have exposed our forces to greater risks.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the course of action which they had proposed in November 1964, more than a year earlier, still offered the best chance of gaining US objectives. A sharp initial blow, followed by sustained and increasingly heavier attacks, would bring optimum results with least risk, casualties, and cost, and would minimize the chance that the enemy would mistake US intentions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed CINCPAC’s three specific military objectives—reduction of external support; destruction of resources and military facilities; and interruption of the flow of men and supplies southward.

“Military considerations,” the JCS declared, dictated immediate mining of North Vietnam’s ports, particularly Haiphong. However, because of the sensitivity of this question and the need to fit the mining into the proper political context, they did not at this time directly recommend that this be done. On the other hand, the Joint Chiefs of Staff called directly and strongly for authority to destroy all POL storage and associated systems, as well as the communication lines that supported southward movement. They also recommended intensified, around-the-clock, armed reconnaissance with no limit on sorties. They assured Secretary McNamara that all attacks would be designed to minimize civilian casualties. At the same time, the United States must keep the MIG threat under constant surveillance and neutralize their bases if the enemy jets interfered with operations in the North or were used against South Vietnam. The same principle, the Joint Chiefs said, applied to the SAM threat. They recommended that the operational commander be given authority to deal with the SAMs as necessary to keep them from interfering with ROLLING THUNDER.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff acknowledged that a sharp increase in ROLLING THUNDER, especially the mining of North Vietnamese ports, would bring an adverse international reaction. Nevertheless, they believed that Free World leaders would acquiesce in these moves because they recognized the problem and understood the need for these stronger measures. The Chinese Communists might enter the war directly, either through mistaken judgment or gradual escalation. In the Joint Chiefs of Staff view, however, continued United States restraint might increase rather than reduce the possibility of Chinese intervention. On the other hand, both Free World and communist leaders could very well interpret continued restraint as vacillation.

Finally, the Joint Chiefs recommended to the Secretary of Defense that: 1) the authorized area for offensive air operations be expanded to include all of North Vietnam less

the areas encompassed by a ten-mile radius around Hanoi/Phuc Yen airfield, a four-mile radius around Haiphong, and a twenty-mile China buffer zone; 2) removal of numerical sortie limitations on armed reconnaissance over North Vietnam; and 3) elimination of tactical restrictions or limitations upon the execution of specific air strikes.⁶

On the day following submission of these recommendations, Secretary McNamara responded to the memorandum the Joint Chiefs of Staff had sent him on 8 January. He said, "As you know the problems surrounding resumption of the ROLLING THUNDER program are under continuing and active review within the government. Your recommendation and its supporting rationale will be given full consideration in this process." McNamara told the Joint Chiefs that he had forwarded their 8 January memorandum to the Secretary of State. By this time, in fact, President Johnson and his senior advisers had decided in principle to resume ROLLING THUNDER; but they wanted to delay until after Tet and until certain peace feelers had played themselves out.⁷

On 19 January, the CIA provided to the Secretary of State and other senior officials a discussion of the likely effect of an accelerated ROLLING THUNDER upon North Vietnamese capabilities. The CIA analysis declared that heavier bombing and interdiction would harass, disrupt, and impede the movement of men and material into South Vietnam and make it much more difficult for North Vietnam to support the insurgency. Nevertheless, North Vietnam could still move substantially greater amounts into South Vietnam than it had in 1965. American bombing certainly would set some limit to the expansion of the other side's main force units and activities, but because of insufficient data no accurate estimate of this limit was possible. The enemy undoubtedly meant to expand further and to increase his firepower in South Vietnam with modern, heavier weapons. He already had begun introducing heavier mortars, 120 mm, and might be moving in light antiaircraft guns. Despite any US bombing program, the communists probably would achieve their planned reinforcement level of 4,500 men per month. If the United States did not close the ports, much of the impact of the bombing would be lost.⁸

General Westmoreland Calls for Bombing

Valid evidence of accelerated enemy infiltration, which had been lacking earlier, began to appear in mid-January. On the 17th, General Westmoreland reported to Admiral Sharp that aerial reconnaissance had detected large convoys moving southward during daylight. He urged immediate planning for a "maximum coordinated effort" to catch the enemy off guard on the first feasible day after ROLLING THUNDER was resumed. He wished to destroy as much enemy traffic as possible before it reverted back to night movement. COMUSMACV called also for strikes on preplanned targets in the wake of armed reconnaissance to wreak the greatest possible destruction of lines of communication. To give American pilots at least 24 hours to exploit lucrative targets, General Westmoreland asked that public announcement of the resumption of the bombing be withheld. Admiral Sharp agreed. On 20 January, he recommended to the Joint

Chiefs of Staff that ROLLING THUNDER be resumed without warning in order to assure destruction of “perishable targets.”⁹

On 23 January, at the end of the Tet holiday period, COMUSMACV again called for immediate restart of ROLLING THUNDER. According to intelligence reports, North Vietnam was stockpiling supplies just north of the DMZ and was continuing to infiltrate men and material through southeastern Laos. General Westmoreland was most concerned over the two northern provinces of South Vietnam, where the enemy buildup and preparations in the I CTZ suggested he might be readying a major offensive, and where United States and South Vietnamese forces would have significant problems countering enemy initiatives. If the restrictions on air operations in North Vietnam continued, COMUSMACV judged it essential that “we be provided the authority to meet and deal with the threat of military offensive operations staging from the area immediately north of the DMZ.” He wanted that area to be considered an extension of South Vietnam for air operations only. He had concluded that this was militarily necessary to protect his forces in I CTZ and to prevent the establishment of an enemy “sanctuary” immediately north of the Demilitarized Zone.¹⁰

The JCS Prepare for Resumption

On 25 January, following up their 18 January memorandum, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided to the Secretary of Defense specific recommendations for resuming air attacks against North Vietnam. They proposed simultaneous armed reconnaissance operations against the lines of communication and against the infiltration-associated North Vietnamese POL system. These operations would require for support more carrier-based aircraft as well as US planes based in Thailand. As soon as most perishable targets had been attacked, the United States should carry out a follow-on program of armed reconnaissance and strikes against fixed targets, such as transportation hubs and logistics centers. The Joint Chiefs recommended that the air campaign be initiated without any prior announcement in order to achieve maximum surprise and effectiveness. They included in their memorandum a draft planning message, with the request that Secretary McNamara approve it for dispatch “now” to allow CINCPAC maximum time for planning.¹¹

On the same day, the Chairman asked CINCPAC to forward an outline plan for the first 24 hours of attacks after ROLLING THUNDER resumed. He told Admiral Sharp to base his plan on the following guidance: 1) strikes would be against perishable targets associated with infiltration into South Vietnam; 2) POL targets not involved in line of communication operations would not be included; 3) strikes would be restricted to the area south of Hanoi; and 4) fixed targets would be set forth along with “weight of effort” intended for each. CINCPAC was to keep his forces on a 24-hour readiness status and be capable of mounting more than 400 sorties in the first 24 hours of operations.¹²

Obviously, Admiral Sharp had been anticipating such an order. His plan reached the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the 25th. Since maximum success would depend upon a combination of surprise and good weather, CINCPAC suggested that authorization to resume ROLLING THUNDER be “on or after the selected date based on the tactical commander’s analysis of the weather.”¹³

The Peace Offensive Ends; ROLLING THUNDER Resumes

Tet came and went, but the United States peace offensive brought nothing but silence or rejection from the major nations of the communist bloc. Reviewing the 29-day diplomatic effort on 21 January, Secretary of State Rusk said that there had been overwhelmingly favorable response to American efforts “except from those who could, in fact, sit down and make peace.” Rusk asserted that the United States had provided Hanoi with every opportunity to make some serious response but that none had been received. He emphasized that the United States sought in South Vietnam “peace under law,” but repeated President Johnson’s statement of the previous day that “the door of peace must be kept wide open for all who wish to avoid the scourge of war. But the door of aggression must be closed and bolted if man himself is to survive.” Secretary Rusk concluded by pledging that the United States would do what it could to bring peace to Southeast Asia and what it must “to prevent the success of cruel aggression.”¹⁴

In the last ten days of the month, when the bombing pause and the sustained political efforts to bring the enemy to the conference table did not elicit a favorable response, President Johnson began preparing the way for resumption of ROLLING THUNDER. He informed foreign capitals that the US government could not continue “to expose its forces and the forces of its allies to jeopardy.” He took this position in light of the following considerations: 1) that both direct and indirect approaches to Hanoi had gone unheeded and had been met with denunciations of US motives in suspending the bombing; 2) reliable evidence indicated that North Vietnam had continued infiltrating men and equipment through Laos into South Vietnam; and 3) the Viet Cong had violated their own ceasefire. As a result, the US government concluded that further efforts along the same tack would yield no positive results. On the other hand, the military situation of the United States and its allies in Vietnam could be expected to worsen under the existing self-imposed restrictions.¹⁵

During the last days of January, after lengthy discussions with the Secretaries of State and Defense, White House advisers, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, congressional leaders, and prominent retired officials, President Johnson ordered an end to the bombing pause. Anticipating the order, on 28 January, General Wheeler instructed the Joint Staff to draft for him an implementing message for resumption of ROLLING THUNDER. The Staff prepared the draft in line with guidance from the Chairman and CINCPAC’s outline plan. The next morning, General Wheeler took the draft “execute” message (ROLLING

THUNDER 48) with him to a meeting of the NSC and presented it for approval. After the President approved the message, the Chairman ordered the bombing directive sent to CINCPAC.¹⁶

The directive's provisions fell far short of the stronger action which CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been urging upon the Secretary of Defense. Admiral Sharp was to resume bombing North Vietnam at 0001 31 January (Saigon time) but to limit the attacks to armed reconnaissance of designated areas and routes. "Intensive day and night armed recce will be conducted, with emphasis during first twenty-four hours, to seek out and destroy moving targets." US aircraft were to strike secondary targets, such as pontoon bridges, truck parks, and dispersed storage areas if moving targets could not be found. Key infiltration routes into Laos and the principal north-south rail, highway, and water routes were to receive first attention, but follow-on missions could hit other communication lines and static installations. CINCPAC could conduct a maximum of 300 armed reconnaissance strike sorties during each 24-hour period. He was to achieve tactical surprise if at all possible and to execute all strikes to the degree feasible on 31 January, regardless of weather conditions. Fixed targets were excluded from RT 48, and the directive set the geographic limits for armed reconnaissance well below what they had been before the bombing halt. The limit thus established prevented armed reconnaissance over the northwest portion of North Vietnam which had previously been open for attack.¹⁷

CINCPAC was not as disappointed with the limits as might have been expected. On 30 January, Admiral Sharp told General Wheeler, "ROLLING THUNDER 48 gets us off to a running start." He considered that the "constraints" imposed were understandable but that "hopefully" they would be offset by the element of surprise. Nevertheless, he wanted his earlier flexibility in bombing North Vietnam restored as soon as possible. The authorized limit of 300 sorties, Admiral Sharp believed, would "give us excellent freedom of action for the initial period" and would punish the enemy if the weather were favorable.¹⁸

President Johnson informed the major allies on 29 January that the United States intended to resume bombing North Vietnam on the 31st. He emphasized that the United States had reached this decision only after thoughtful consideration and intensive effort toward negotiation. Most Free World governments received the decision with disappointment but understanding; communist governments received it with indifference. Any remaining hope for the success of the US peace initiative was dashed on 31 January. On that date, a North Vietnamese representative, who had been contacted earlier through Rangoon, informed a US representative, in an aide memoire, that Hanoi rejected the American position and declared that the only basis for a political settlement was Washington's acceptance of North Vietnam's four points.¹⁹

On 30 January, Ambassador Lodge confirmed his support of renewed bombing. He added, "We should bring all possible conventional firepower to bear on the enemy, which is exactly what he is doing to us with every means at his disposal. If our forbearance and efforts have not by now convinced world opinion of our desire for peace, and their

desire for conquest, they never will. We should stop worrying about it and hit the enemy with all available conventional means.”²⁰

High hopes for a dramatic resumption of ROLLING THUNDER with an initial heavy blow were not realized. In the first 24 hours of RT 48, bad weather over North Vietnam severely restricted air attacks and few good targets appeared. Of 274 USN and USAF sorties, 100 were diverted and 71 cancelled outright. Of the remaining sorties, only 56 struck targets. Enemy air defense units brought down three US jets.²¹

The Target Systems: Lines of Communication, Ports, and POL

Once ROLLING THUNDER was resumed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC adopted as their main military objective during 1966 the destruction of the principal systems supporting enemy infiltration into South Vietnam. These were North Vietnam's lines of communication and POL. Working from their recommendations of mid-January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC launched additional strong efforts to secure presidential authority for effective attacks on these systems. In seeking this authority, the military leaders encountered opposition from some of the President's advisers, who were uncertain about the actual military value of destroying the target systems in question. Beyond this, their efforts were hampered by a general belief that large-scale attacks to knock out the communications and POL systems would bring adverse political effects. Nevertheless, the Joint Chiefs and CINCPAC persisted during the first half of 1966 in their attempts to persuade the President that the best way to reduce substantially the enemy's infiltration was to destroy the means by which he moved.

North Vietnam's rail lines and highways outside the restricted areas had been attacked during 1965. Hanoi's ports and related facilities, however, had remained immune from attack. The Joint Chiefs of Staff continually made recommendations aimed at more effectively interdicting the railroads and highways and at curtailing the operations at North Vietnam's ports.

On 11 January, the Secretary of Defense inquired of the Joint Chiefs of Staff why the rail lines leading from Hanoi to China were still operable despite US air attacks. He asked also what air actions would be required to successfully interdict these lines and if the cost in lives would be offset by “adverse effect of the interdiction” on North Vietnam. To put these lines out of service, the United States had to destroy and keep destroyed the major bridges. This had not been accomplished, owing to bad weather, operational restrictions, and the enemy's repair capability. On 25 January, General Wheeler explained that the lines could be kept inoperative by “a commitment of approximately 750 strike/ combat support sorties monthly providing six strikes per month on each line” Based on experience to date, these operations would cost the United States four aircraft destroyed and one crew member killed each month. General Wheeler stated that the

Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that these costs would be warranted by the impact upon North and South Vietnam.²²

Not an industrial power, North Vietnam relied on imports for most of its military equipment as well as civilian goods. In 1965, the North had imported 1,000,000 short tons, 70 percent by sea, mostly through the port of Haiphong. The Joint Chiefs of Staff fully realized the obvious advantages to the allies of stopping this flow. In August 1965, they had proposed that Haiphong and the smaller ports at Hon Gai and Cam Pha be closed by aerial mining of their approaches. Their proposal had been sent to the State Department for assessment of political risks, but by the beginning of 1966 State still had not replied. The Joint Chiefs of Staff again raised the problem on 18 January without making a specific recommendation.²³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff approached this issue with caution because they realized that mining the ports could have serious international political consequences. US intelligence estimated that reactions, even among nations friendly to the United States, would be adverse in most cases. Since much of the shipping then using North Vietnam's ports was of Free World origin, to mine the ports and possibly destroy ships from such nations as Great Britain could alienate countries the United States wished to keep on its side. Communist powers, particularly the Soviet Union, could be expected to protest vigorously any mining of North Vietnamese ports and possibly attempt some type of action against the United States in the United Nations. It was unlikely, however, that the Soviet Union would risk sending its ships into harbors known to be mined.²⁴

Practical considerations also weighed against mining the ports. Closing the main seaports to normal shipping would force North Vietnam to turn to rail, small craft, and coastal vessels and would result in a reduction of some imports. But the chances of stopping all shipping would not be very promising. Even if the ports were closed effectively, the North Vietnamese could shift to use of shallow-draft coastal craft and off-loading by lighters. Air attacks could reduce drastically rail transport from China, but, based on experience in World War II and Korea, could not stop it entirely. The enemy would probably expand road transport. While mining thus could reduce the level of imports substantially, the enemy could still bring in enough supplies to meet its minimum domestic needs and support the war in South Vietnam.

If mining the ports was unpromising, POL attacks seemed to offer more decisive results. In January, a Joint Staff study revealed that North Vietnam's facilities to receive, store, and distribute petroleum products were particularly vulnerable to air attack at that time. Only a tiny fraction of the 172,000 metric tons (MT) of POL imported in 1965 came from Communist China; the rest came by ship from the Soviet Union to Haiphong, the only North Vietnamese port capable of receiving bulk oil shipments. Within the country, distribution was normally by railroad, but by early 1966 rail interdiction under ROLLING THUNDER had compelled extensive use of highways and waterways for moving POL.

US reconnaissance and intelligence had identified 13 significant POL storage areas in North Vietnam. Before US air strikes had taken their toll, these contained 97

percent of the estimated 216,000 MT total national storage capacity. After attacks on four of these areas, about 179,000 MT of capacity remained. Two sites contained over half of the remaining POL capacity, one in a lightly populated area near Hanoi and the other similarly located in Haiphong. Disturbing to US planners, the enemy was dispersing stocks away from these concentrated storage areas into small buried facilities, which gave greater protection and reduced the value of individual POL targets. The Joint Staff urged that the main storage areas be attacked before North Vietnam succeeded in fully dispersing its POL. The most important single target within the POL system was at Haiphong, with over 40 percent of the remaining known bulk storage. If 85 percent of the capacity at Haiphong were destroyed, the port would not be able to handle arriving shipments.

Strengthening the case for destroying the POL, a joint J-3/DIA report noted that North Vietnam was becoming more dependent on the use of motor vehicles. In 1965, US bombers had destroyed 800 enemy trucks; but this loss had been more than offset by importation of about 2,000 vehicles from China and the Soviet Union in the same period. Hanoi had asked the Soviet Union for 2,700 additional vehicles and was seeking about 1,000 more from China and the European satellite nations. According to the report, North Vietnam had about 10,000–12,000 motor vehicles but required more because US bombing had increased the mileage that vehicles must travel and had increased the number of trucks needed to accomplish a ton-mile movement.²⁵

As in earlier years, the enemy's principal infiltration route into South Vietnam ran through Laos, where the Ho Chi Minh Trail—a network of 500 miles of developed road as well as numerous lesser pathways—led down the mountainous, heavily forested panhandle. Using large numbers of people and great energy, Hanoi was keeping about 200 miles of this road net open year round, from the 17th parallel through Laos and Cambodia to the Ca Mau Peninsula at the southern tip of South Vietnam. Hanoi had also begun sending men and supplies into South Vietnam through the Demilitarized Zone. Although the DMZ, under the 1954 Geneva Accords, was to remain free of armed forces, the Viet Cong had operated there for some time. By 1966, the enemy had stepped up infiltration from North to South directly through the zone and appeared to be preparing to expand his activities there. US planes had detected many camouflaged roads and trail nets running through the DMZ, along with new road construction and support structures.²⁶

Intelligence Raises Doubts

Even as ROLLING THUNDER resumed, two intelligence analyses raised doubts about the military effects of the bombing. In late January, CIA experts informed the Secretary of State that even the maximum level of air attacks proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff would not have a critical impact on the communists' combat ability in South Vietnam. They pointed out that the enemy in the South was estimated to need only an average of about 12 tons of outside supply per day. Even with the force increases

MACV projected for 1966, and at greatly intensified levels of combat, this requirement would average no more than 165 tons a day. The weakest part of the enemy lines of communication, the Laos corridor, could carry about 400 tons a day, despite the current high levels of allied bombing of the route.²⁷

In a Special National Intelligence Estimate produced at this time, the intelligence community reached the same conclusion—that enemy forces in South Vietnam required only a small amount of external supply. The enemy secured the food and POL they needed from sources in the South. During 1965, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese had received an estimated 5,000–10,000 tons of outside supplies, and some of these had been put into stockpiles. (The other side’s official history claims that during 1965 the Ho Chi Minh Trail moved a volume of material almost equal to the total volume transported during the previous five years, along with nearly 50,000 soldiers and cadre.) The intelligence community expected demands for outside supply to increase as a result of growing infiltration from the North, the introduction of heavier weapons, and the standardization on the 7.62 mm family of communist bloc small arms. Thus it appeared that the total requirements for 1966 would be higher than those of 1965. The communists were not using their existing infiltration routes at anywhere near their estimated capacity. Nevertheless, they were making a strong effort to increase their infiltration capabilities, probably anticipating increased requirements and seeking to build a greater margin of excess capacity in order to keep operating under the intensified aerial attack.²⁸

RT 49

Early in February, when the Secretary of Defense visited CINCPAC in Hawaii, Admiral Sharp’s staff briefed him on the dimensions of the air effort required to reduce significantly imports of war material into North Vietnam and to curtail infiltration into the South. To accomplish these tasks, CINCPAC would need 7,100 sorties per month: 60 percent of these would be for interdiction of the overland flow of cargo into and through the Hanoi/Haiphong complex; 10 percent would attack key port facilities and high value targets within the Hanoi and Haiphong areas; and the remaining 30 percent would be directed against lines of communication directly supporting infiltration into South Vietnam.²⁹

On 12 February, Secretary McNamara, recalling this briefing, intimated to the Chairman that CINCPAC had recommended a monthly level of 6,000 combat sorties in North Vietnam. He asked General Wheeler to review ROLLING THUNDER operations at that level (200 sorties per day) against the area presently authorized, plus the northwest quadrant. Secretary McNamara said that the northeast quadrant, which included the Hanoi/Haiphong complex, “posed special difficulty” at this time. He stated that CINCPAC should assume that he would be required to stay within the 6,000 sortie limit, but he could carry over sorties not flown on a given day due to bad weather or other operational factors. The difference between CINCPAC’s recommended 7,100

sorties and Mr. McNamara's 6,000-sortie figure, General Wheeler believed, stemmed from the Defense Secretary's having subtracted the recommended effort against key ports and high value targets in the northeast quadrant.

On 13 February, General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that authority to carry over sorties would increase the field commanders' flexibility. He added that he expected the Joint Chiefs of Staff to propose, "without being sanguine of immediate acceptance," reduction of the Chinese border buffer zone and the Hanoi sanctuary, operations against the POL complex, and the opening of the northeast quadrant for armed reconnaissance.³⁰

Admiral Sharp informed General Wheeler on 16 February that, given the restriction on operations in the northeast quadrant, he could profitably use at least 6,000 sorties in the south and northwest. The real limiting factor was the bad weather which, unless it improved significantly, would probably prevent even 6,000 sorties a month from being flown. He confided to General Wheeler that, while the general briefing had set 7,100 sorties as a goal, he had told Secretary McNamara privately that he would prefer 7,400 sorties per month. Even this figure was not optimum but rather a compromise solution based on the total forces and ordnance estimated to be available in Southeast Asia during CY 1966.³¹

On 19 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented the Secretary of Defense with the review of *ROLLING THUNDER* he had requested. They pointed out that if the northeast quadrant could not be attacked in the near future, two alternative courses of action were open. The United States could resume armed reconnaissance throughout the area authorized before the Christmas truce; or it could reduce the excluded areas in the northeast quadrant and carry out operations throughout the redefined quadrant.

With respect to the first alternative, US forces had struck practically all the Joint Chiefs of Staff fixed targets in the area, and the expenditure of 6,000 sorties per month would be primarily against lines of communication and related targets. This would have little effect on Hanoi. In the absence of authority to attack the entire northeast quadrant, the preferable course would be to redefine the quadrant, reducing the forbidden zone to a smaller area encompassing Hanoi, Haiphong, and Phuc Yen airfield. The Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed new boundaries that would open up for attack about 650 miles of major rail, road, and water routes, 5,000 square miles of territory, and 18 JCS numbered targets.

In any case, the Joint Chiefs of Staff insisted, so long as the northeast quadrant remained sacrosanct, air power could not effectively attack the influx of support to North Vietnam, an operation essential to the accomplishment of US military objectives in Vietnam. Because of this bar on attacks against remunerative targets and lucrative interdiction areas, the United States must make a greater effort elsewhere to compensate partially for a "self-imposed operational restriction." The Joint Chiefs commended to the Secretary as the "soundest program from a military standpoint," which offered "the greatest return for air effort expended," the proposal they had forwarded to him a month earlier, on 18 January. This program was the minimum essential effort

needed to further US military objectives in Southeast Asia. But if other than military considerations forbade such a program, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, as an alternative, the redefinition of the northeast quadrant and authorization for CINCPAC to employ a monthly total of 7,400 combat sorties in North Vietnam and 3,000 in Laos and to use these sorties as weather and operational factors dictated. Failing that, they asked that, at the least, the present RT 48 operation area be expanded to include that authorized for attack as of 24 December 1965, and that CINCPAC be granted the same flexibility he enjoyed at that time. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that if sortie allocations must be limited for “nonmilitary reasons,” such allocation should be on a monthly rather than a daily basis in order to enhance CINCPAC’s flexibility.³²

The new ROLLING THUNDER package, RT 49, which the President approved on 26 February, reflected to a degree the Joint Chiefs of Staff views. It restored the armed reconnaissance and IRON HAND areas that existed on 24 December 1965. The package authorized 5,100 sorties per month for North Vietnam and 3,000 for Laos. CINCPAC could interchange sorties between Laos and North Vietnam as weather and operational factors dictated. Effective 1 March, RT 49 had no terminal date, since the monthly sortie authorization would not require a monthly renewal. RT 49 also reinstated the authority for coastal armed reconnaissance north of 20 degrees 30 minutes N to a point 25 nm from the Chinese border, which had been originally authorized on 18 December but not included in RT 48.³³

On 26 February, General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that RT 49 was a step in the right direction despite several outstanding defects, such as lack of authority for IRON HAND in the northeast quadrant and the maintenance of the quadrant itself as a sanctuary. “I propose to push ahead in these areas in the weeks to come,” he told CINCPAC. General Wheeler asked Admiral Sharp to keep a close eye on the results of RT 49 and to submit any comments and recommendations for improvement. The Chairman was particularly concerned by the greater threat to US aircraft now posed by SA–2 missiles and higher-grade MIG jets in the northeast quadrant.³⁴

The Mining Issue Again

At the beginning of March, the question of mining North Vietnam’s ports again came under scrutiny. On 1 March, in a concept of operations for Southeast Asia prepared for the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff included provisions for aerial mining of the ports together with interdiction of inland waterways, coastal waters, harbors, and water lines of communication.³⁵

On the following day, 2 March, Ambassador Lodge reported a Viet Cong attack on a friendly vessel in the Saigon channel and asked Washington to consider possible retaliatory strikes against Haiphong harbor. He suggested mining of the Haiphong channel as being preferable to bombing or naval blockade. CINCPAC agreed with Ambassador Lodge that mining the Haiphong channel was the most appropriate means of reprisal.

Admiral Sharp noted that plans had been prepared and could be put into effect with only 72 hours notice.³⁶

On 10 March, after considering the recommendations of the Ambassador and CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary of Defense to approve the total air campaign against North Vietnam proposed on 18 January. The earliest attack should be on the POL storage target system, followed by interdiction of the principal land routes from China and mining of deep-water ports. The Joint Chiefs believed that the recent Viet Cong attacks on shipping in the Saigon channel had diminished the political sensitivity of mining the North's harbors. Secretary McNamara waited several weeks before replying that he would consider the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations in future ROLLING THUNDER decisions. The mining of North Vietnam's harbors, however, was never approved.³⁷

COMUSMACV Proposes a Shift in Air Effort

By mid-March, General Westmoreland was reporting greatly accelerated enemy infiltration through Laos and the western portion of the DMZ. In response, he called for a shift in the air effort in North Vietnam. The MACV commander believed that attack and destruction of the enemy's infiltration capabilities in southern North Vietnam and the Laotian panhandle was of more immediate importance than striking the northern area of North Vietnam, which he described as the "strategic rear." On 17 March, he informed CINCPAC and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that the enemy was moving men and supplies into South Vietnam at an accelerated rate, obviously bent on maximum reinforcement before seasonal bad weather closed his routes through Laos. COMUSMACV recommended, therefore, that the United States shift the weight of its air effort southward to southern North Vietnam and Laos. In this effort, no arbitrary sortie limits should be set. The weight of effort could shift back to the enemy's "strategic rear" in about six weeks, after infiltration into the South had diminished. General Westmoreland also asked that bombing restrictions in the western DMZ be lifted to counter enemy movement through that area.³⁸

Admiral Sharp opposed COMUSMACV's proposal to set aside strikes in northern North Vietnam and focus "all our effort ... in the Laos Panhandle and southern North Vietnam." In CINCPAC's view, the enemy's strategic rear was not in North Vietnam but outside the country, where war making hardware was manufactured. Although the United States could not strike at the source, it could attack this hardware close to its entry points in North Vietnam before it was dispersed over the lines of communication. Interdiction "in depth" was needed to destroy the enemy's resources, increase his repair problems, and force him to spread his defenses over a wider area. CINCPAC agreed with COMUSMACV that the DMZ should be attacked but wanted bombing to be conducted throughout the DMZ, excepting only centers of population.³⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff attempted to strike a balance between the two field commanders. On 4 April, the Chairman informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that the Joint

Chiefs of Staff concurred in the objective of disrupting the enemy's infiltration efforts in the South as much as possible during the remaining good weather. Current ROLLING THUNDER and STEEL TIGER programs already assigned a substantial weight of effort to southern North Vietnam and Laos. Further intensive studies were under way of enemy infiltration patterns and methods. Nevertheless, the Joint Chiefs did not believe that it was necessary to concentrate on the southern infiltration routes at the expense of the "strategic rear." Interdiction in the northern area was also important and should be applied "throughout maximum depth." As to sortie restrictions, the present limit was well above the commanders' current needs, particularly in view of the bad weather. With regard to the DMZ, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were preparing a recommendation for some air operations there.⁴⁰

On 1 April, when Admiral Sharp issued a new basic operations order covering ROLLING THUNDER and IRON HAND, General Westmoreland gained some of what he wanted. For planning purposes, and to facilitate the assignment of responsibilities to his commanders, CINCPAC had established seven geographical zones in North Vietnam, designated as Route Packages (RPs). In this new basic operations order, CINCPAC assigned primary responsibility for armed reconnaissance, photo reconnaissance, and intelligence analysis in the southernmost package (RP 1) to COMUSMACV. Admiral Sharp acted in response to quiet but persistent lobbying by General Westmoreland. The MACV commander now could conduct strikes in RP 1 under direction of forward air controllers, similar to the pattern of operations in TIGER HOUND in southern Laos and could adjust the weight of effort between RP 1 and the Laos panhandle as he saw fit. CINCPAC allocated to him sorties from the carriers and Thailand and allowed Westmoreland to also use aircraft from South Vietnam when COMUSMACV considered this "advantageous to the overall battle." This action in effect gave General Westmoreland control over US air operations in RP 1.

Similarly, Admiral Sharp allocated to CINCPACFLT responsibility for RPs 2, 3, 4, and 6B and to CINCPACAF responsibility for RPs 5 and 6A. This arrangement gave the Navy control of air operations in North Vietnam's coastal zones and narrow panhandle while the Air Force was responsible for the campaign in the northern and northwestern parts of the country. The sanctuary zone around Hanoi was split between RPs 6A and 6B. CINCPACFLT was named coordinating authority to prevent mutual interference of forces during air operations. CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT would direct sorties into each other's primary areas if weather conditions dictated such a move or when both commanders deemed it advisable.⁴¹

The Search for Expanded Authority: RT 50

The current ROLLING THUNDER program to which General Wheeler had referred in discussing the priority of effort was RT 50. Developed in the last ten days of March, this program contained much stronger provisions than had its predecessor. On 21 March, General Wheeler had begun action on RT 50 by discussing its parameters and

objectives with Secretary McNamara. The next day, the Chairman reported to Admiral Sharp that the Secretary had broached the possibility of authorizing a “controlled armed recce program” within the northeast quadrant (RPs 6A and 6B). Mr. McNamara visualized a level of 600–700 strike sorties per month against lines of communication in the northeast quadrant, to be charged against the current authorization of 8,100 sorties for Laos and North Vietnam. He had informed the Chairman that, although he would not remove restrictions on the sanctuary areas along the Chinese border and around Hanoi/Haiphong, he might consider strikes against a cement plant and associated power plant near Haiphong along with attacks on two or three of the major bridges on the Hanoi/Lao Cai rail line to China.

General Wheeler expressed concern to CINCPAC that Secretary McNamara continued to believe that ROLLING THUNDER had had relatively little effect on the enemy. Apparently, General Westmoreland’s recent recommendations to shift the air effort away from the enemy’s “strategic rear” had reinforced this belief. The Chairman concluded, “To say that this attitude disturbs me greatly is to put it mildly because this conviction is used to argue against expansion of the air campaign against highly remunerative targets such as the POL system.”⁴²

Admiral Sharp was anxious to resume operations in the northeast quadrant. However, on 25 March he informed General Wheeler that to do so with only 600 to 700 sorties a month would merely harass the enemy and not significantly reduce his external support. Because the enemy had built up his air defenses and improved his ability to repair roads, railroads, and bridges, any effective operations in the northeast quadrant would require large-scale support against air defenses and a very heavy effort to destroy lines of communication and to keep them inoperable. CINCPAC estimated that 2,500 strike and support sorties per month would be needed in the northeast quadrant.

Admiral Sharp proposed that, if he was to make less than an “optimum effort” in the northeast quadrant, he should concentrate initially on destroying all known POL storage and distribution facilities, rather than dispersing an inadequate number of sorties over several target systems. The weight of effort needed to destroy the POL would be negligible compared to that needed for effective interdiction. CINCPAC informed the Chairman that to “go into the northeast” as proposed by the Secretary of Defense was not the answer to the problem. “Results can be expected to be inadequate,” he said, “and the current criticisms will only be intensified because of certain increase in losses.” The United States should go into the area only for objectives worth the risk. These were the objectives he had proposed on 12 January. “If not those,” he concluded, “then POL.”⁴³

Secretary McNamara had raised other aspects of the POL problem with General Wheeler during their discussion on 21 March. He had asked, for example, if it would be wise to attack the POL system in the absence of a decision to mine the ports. He had also asked what follow-up air actions would be needed once the main POL storage facilities were destroyed, which elements of the POL system would be attacked, and how many sorties would be required. Although concerned that attacks on the POL

would trigger MIG reaction, Secretary McNamara had assured General Wheeler that he would assist in getting approval for the POL strikes and for a controlled reconnaissance program in the northeast quadrant.⁴⁴

On 26 March, the Joint Chiefs recommended to the Secretary of Defense that RT 50, a program of air strikes which took into account CINCPAC's proposals on POL, be initiated on 1 April. They noted that controlled armed reconnaissance in the northeast would place additional pressures on North Vietnam. A monthly rate of 600 sorties would be sufficient against the rail lines and the three principal highways in the northeast quadrant. With an additional 300 sorties, the United States could also interdict effectively the principal alternate routes. Further strikes to destroy the key bridges on these main routes should be conducted and other JCS targets restruct.

To deprive North Vietnam of the materials needed to repair its bridges and highways, the Joint Chiefs recommended bombing the Haiphong cement plant, the Thai Nguyen iron and steel combine, and a large thermal power plant located near the Haiphong cement plant. Because of nearby enemy MIGs, planes on these missions should attack and destroy the early warning (EW) and ground control intercept at Kep airfield. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended attacks against nine POL storage areas, including those at Hanoi and Haiphong, and against six bridges, three of which had been struck previously.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff assured Secretary McNamara that, whether or not the United States mined the ports, it should destroy the POL receiving, handling, storage, and distribution systems because of North Vietnam's great dependence on petroleum products. American forces should also make follow-on attacks at Haiphong, which possessed the North's only deep-water installation for offloading tankers. As US attacks came closer to Phuc Yen and Kep, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, MIG attacks on US planes might increase. North Vietnam had 78 MIGs in the Hanoi/Kep area, two-thirds of them operational. Although US pilots could defeat the enemy interceptors, American plane losses would be inevitable. From a strictly military point of view, then, the United States should destroy the enemy air capability before bombing the POL. Because of the political risks involved in such actions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were willing to accept the military danger for the moment and not attack the MIGs. They recommended, however, destroying EW/GCI radars at Kep airfield in North Vietnam. When and if the MIGs interfered with US strike operations, the enemy jets and their bases should be attacked.⁴⁵

On 31 March, the Secretary of Defense discussed with the President the air program the Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed, which Mr. McNamara endorsed with some modifications. President Johnson approved this program with respect to the southern and northwestern quadrants of North Vietnam. In addition, he reopened the northeastern quadrant to armed reconnaissance, allowing use of 900 of the authorized 8,100 sorties in RPs 6A and 6B "at the discretion of the military commands." He authorized attacks against six main roads and three railroads within the quadrant but outside the Hanoi 30-mile circle, the Haiphong 10-mile circle, and the 25- to 30-mile China border

strip. That was the limit to how far President Johnson would go in escalation. Of six bridges the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended for attack, he approved only four. He deferred strikes which the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended against the Haiphong cement plant and power plant, against seven POL storage facilities including Hanoi and Haiphong, against the Kep EW/GCI, and against the Viet Tri Railroad/Highway Bridge. Secretary McNamara ordered these targets deferred until specifically authorized but directed that plans be made to strike them in April.⁴⁶

General Wheeler was disappointed by the deferment of these targets. But he was “happy to state” to Admiral Sharp that he was “confident authority will be forthcoming in the near future.” The Chairman was concerned that US planes would suffer heavy losses in the northeast quadrant, which the enemy had turned into a “hornet’s nest.” He cautioned CINCPAC that “while it is most desirable from our point of view to resume air operations in the excluded area and interdiction of the northeast rail line would be militarily remunerative, bridges are tough targets and the cost would be high.” Noting that weather conditions had been “atrocious,” he saw no reason to endanger air crews by sending them in before the skies cleared. General Wheeler ended by assuring CINCPAC that there was no pressure or requirement from Washington that he send his pilots in “full bore” against the northeast quadrant without regard for the safety of his airmen.⁴⁷

On the same day it was approved, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent the execute order for ROLLING THUNDER 50 to CINCPAC. RT 50 became effective 1 April to continue through 30 April. Except for the changes discussed above, RT 50 resembled its predecessor. US planes now could conduct armed reconnaissance in all the route packages. The VNAF could fly armed reconnaissance between the DMZ and 19 degrees North. In keeping with Secretary McNamara’s instructions, CINCPAC was to make plans and preparations to attack the Viet Tri Bridge, the Haiphong cement plant and power plant, the Kep EW/GCI, and seven major POL storage sites, including those at Hanoi and Haiphong.⁴⁸

In passing on the authorization for RT 50 to his major commanders, Admiral Sharp echoed General Wheeler’s words of caution. He warned that during the lengthy hiatus of operations in the northeast quadrant, the enemy had undoubtedly built up his air defenses to a considerable extent. For this reason, and because of the poor weather in the entire area, he cautioned commanders not to rush into anything simply because they had been authorized to attack in the northeast. “It will be far better to have fewer sorties flown than authorized,” he said, “rather than many unremunerative sorties flown simply to meet the sorties rate with attendant risks outweighing the results.” He was pleased with certain features of his new instructions, for example the fact that his airmen were not expected, as in the past, to take out tough fixed targets immediately and in a single strike. Commanders should not interpret authority for maximum day and night interdiction of lines of communication as requiring continuous or necessarily frequent strikes; rather they should view it in terms of results to be achieved.⁴⁹

Allocation of Air to the “Extended Battlefield”

In early April, a shortage of air munitions again brought the allocation of air effort in Southeast Asia under close scrutiny. On 12 April, during discussions with the Chairman, the Secretary of Defense expressed concern that priority of air effort might be going to ROLLING THUNDER at the expense of air operations in South Vietnam. Mr. McNamara stated that his statistics showed that since the initiation of RT 50 the sorties against North Vietnam exceeded those against targets in South Vietnam. He reminded the Chairman that they had repeatedly emphasized to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that first priority for air operations must go to South Vietnam and that “not until the full South Vietnamese requirements are met are they to utilize ... air ... against targets in Laos and North Vietnam.” In view of these explicit instructions, the Defense Secretary assumed that the preponderance of effort against North Vietnam in the first ten days of April reflected a temporary reduction in General Westmoreland’s needs in the South. Nevertheless, he asked General Wheeler to repeat to the field commanders that priority must go to air operations in South Vietnam.⁵⁰

The Chairman immediately informed Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland of Secretary McNamara’s concerns. General Wheeler told the two commanders that he had pointed out to Mr. McNamara that the air strikes in support of ground operations in South Vietnam were actually at a high level; hence, it appeared the allocation of effort was sufficient to the need. Nevertheless, because of the Secretary’s unusual personal interest, General Wheeler called on CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to insure that their subordinate commanders fully understood that air support in South Vietnam had higher priority than air strikes in North Vietnam and Laos. “Please advise me,” he asked, “whether or not the ... policy is understood by all responsible commanders and is being followed in programming air operations.”⁵¹

General Westmoreland was disturbed by what he viewed as a threat to his flexibility in using his air power in Laos and southern North Vietnam, his newly acquired “extended battlefield area.” He replied immediately to General Wheeler that, as the responsible commander in South Vietnam, he would never contemplate withholding air support from his own troops. He then turned to his earlier concept for disruption and destruction of enemy infiltration throughout the “extended battlefield,” stating that he had been concentrating his air power in accord with that concept. He considered Laos, the DMZ, and RP 1 to be extensions of the southern battlefield. Since the tactical battle in this area was being waged without regard to boundaries, weight of effort could not logically be divided or identified by in-country or out-of-country segments. General Westmoreland believed that his approach—the integrated application of resources as necessary to cope with his enemy on the battlefield—was the only proper one. “I regard as unacceptable,” he said, “the allocation of air effort predicated on policy formula.” He advocated strongly taking advantage of the flexibility of air power by shifting its weight where it was needed, when it was needed, to do the most good. Subject to these views, COMUSMACV reassured General Wheeler that all responsible commanders

understood the policy and were following it in their planning and programming. If Mr. McNamara did not agree with his approach, General Westmoreland asked whether the Secretary intended that COMUSMACV's "on-the-ground judgment in these particulars be supplanted by formalized adherence to allocation of air effort by policy formula."⁵²

General Wheeler discussed General Westmoreland's message with the Secretary of Defense. They agreed that it would not be possible to give a "Yes or No" answer to his direct question but rather a "Yes" and "No" answer. The Chairman informed General Westmoreland that he believed, frankly, that COMUSMACV had missed the point of Secretary McNamara's concern. The Secretary considered that ROLLING THUNDER per se definitely had second priority of demand on air resources. But he was not attempting to take away COMUSMACV's prerogatives or initiatives nor to direct air allocation by policy formula.

In the meantime, General Wheeler had also heard from CINCPAC, who stated that he and his commanders did understand the policy and were complying with it. On 14 April, addressing CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, the Chairman closed the matter for the time being by saying that he concluded "that your allocations are compatible with the policy; namely, attack sorties made out-of-country with in-country resources are not at the expense of sorties required for direct support of the campaign in South Vietnam."⁵³

Also on the 14th, the Secretary of Defense gave direct support to COMUSMACV's concept of the extended battlefield. He ordered that requirements for air operations in South Vietnam, Laos, and RP 1 be completely filled before any strikes were made in the other Route Packages in North Vietnam. Just two days later, on 16 April, in a personal message to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, Secretary McNamara reiterated his order that requirements in the extended battlefield area came first. Commanders could carry out operations in the other RPs only if they did not jeopardize actions in South Vietnam, Laos, and RP 1. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC agreed that General Westmoreland's concept was now being implemented.⁵⁴

On 7 June, CINCPAC again set forth the policy on priority of air effort in Southeast Asia. He stated that the first priority task was support of operations within South Vietnam. CINCPACFLT was to support this in-country effort with one carrier. Aircraft from two carriers and USAF planes from Thailand would fly missions in Laos and North Vietnam, but no Thailand-based planes would be used in South Vietnam. The VNAF would continue to participate on a "token basis" in operations in RP 1 in North Vietnam, but only if it could do so without detracting from the effort in the South.⁵⁵

The Campaign for POL Strikes—RT 50A

On 26 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that effective 1 May RT 50 would continue under that designation until further notice. The Joint Chiefs of Staff warned CINCPAC specifically, however, that this did not authorize him to strike the ten deferred targets. During April, the Joint Chiefs also passed on further guidance for RT

50 in the northeast quadrant. CINCPAC could strike bridges on assigned line of communication segments which were JCS numbered targets, regardless of whether they had been bombed before. However, targets not associated with these communication routes and not previously bombed could not be attacked. Also, as a result of State Department objections, the administration specifically exempted from attack the railroad yards at Cam Pha, which included some port facilities and which had been struck by mistake.⁵⁶

During May and June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concentrated their effort and attention on convincing the President, against the advice of some of his chief policy advisers, to open up the ten deferred targets for attack. On 2 May, the Chairman briefed the President in detail on the need to strike the POL systems, with particular emphasis on those targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong restricted circles. On the same day, in anticipation of a policy discussion luncheon at the White House scheduled for 4 May, General Wheeler directed the Joint Staff to prepare a draft execute message for a new ROLLING THUNDER program to supersede RT 50. The new program was to follow the general pattern of RT 50 but would add features to increase its effectiveness. It would authorize strikes against the Haiphong and Hanoi POL complexes, on the same day if operationally possible, but only in good weather.⁵⁷

The Joint Staff furnished the draft execute message to the Chairman on 3 May. In addition to the specific measures and provisions which he had directed, the proposed order opened up a new route in the northeast quadrant for armed reconnaissance. It also authorized attacks on the Joint Chiefs of Staff numbered targets in that quadrant, including six previously struck in the Hanoi/Phuc Yen and Haiphong restricted areas. The order lifted the previous limit of 900 sorties in the northeast quadrant in order to allow CINCPAC greater flexibility in taking advantage of improving weather. The Joint Staff proposed a total of 8,100 attack sorties for the period 5–31 May.⁵⁸

The draft message designated the revised program RT 51. At the direction of the Chairman, however, the Joint Staff recast the message as a revision of the existing program, RT 50. It authorized strikes against the ten fixed targets deferred on 31 March, but it also warned that great care must be taken to avoid causing excessive numbers of civilian casualties. This draft was not immediately approved, however, and remained in abeyance.

On 4 May, CINCPAC proposed that strikes against the ten targets authorized for planning purposes be approved for execution. In the same message, Admiral Sharp also pointed out that of the bridge targets authorized earlier, three had been put out of commission and the fourth damaged. In addition, Admiral Sharp noted, a large number of North Vietnamese lighters and cargo craft were moving supplies from ships at anchor in coastal ports north of 20 degrees 32 minutes North latitude. He asked authority to attack the small craft. Although CINCPAC had been instructed not to strike the Cam Pha area, armed reconnaissance along Route 18 near Cam Pha and Hon Gai port was authorized. Admiral Sharp, therefore, asked for permission to strike certain facilities near Hon Gai associated with the Route 18 armed reconnaissance. The Joint Chiefs of Staff forbade him to do so, telling him that such strikes would cause “tactical difficulties.” The Joint

Chiefs informed Sharp that they were focusing on the issue of strikes against North Vietnam's POL. Strikes against Hon Gai port would "complicate and obstruct this effort."⁵⁹

National authorities hesitated to approve bombing the ten fixed targets mainly because these targets were near centers of population. The President and his advisers feared that bombing so close to Hanoi and Haiphong might kill and injure many civilians and raise an even greater outcry against US policy in Vietnam. Reflecting this concern, in early May the Chairman had instructed the Joint Staff to include in the draft execute order specific warning against inordinate civilian casualties. At a White House meeting on 5 May, the Secretary of State echoed this sensitivity by claiming that hospitals, schools, and temples were located very close to the POL facilities in Hanoi and Haiphong. When he investigated the accuracy of this statement, General Wheeler learned from DIA that no such sites would be endangered by attacks on the POL installations.⁶⁰

Because of their desire to secure authority for bombing the ten targets, the Joint Chiefs of Staff adamantly opposed any action that did not fit into their strategy for obtaining approval. For this reason, during May, they turned down proposals from COMUSMACV to incorporate the ten targets into a program of retaliation for Viet Cong attacks on comparable installations in South Vietnam. They refused as well to seek approval for strikes against concentrations of enemy missiles in storage areas near Hanoi and Haiphong. CINCPAC assessed these concentrations to be targets of considerable value, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not believe it "expedient" to endanger their efforts on the POL by asking for approval to hit the missiles.⁶¹

Commenting on COMUSMACV's retaliation proposal, General Wheeler told Admiral Sharp on 24 May that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not want targets kept in a "reserve category" for retaliation because of the inhibitions inherent in such an arrangement. He then reviewed for CINCPAC his efforts to secure Presidential approval to bomb the ten targets. He had just proposed to the Secretary of Defense a reduction of the sanctuary areas around Hanoi and Haiphong so that "additional targets of high worth would be open to attack." At the same time, he had asked Mr. McNamara if the current restrictions against these POL strikes were apt to continue for very long. The Secretary of Defense had observed that the single remaining obstacle to the POL attacks was the current political turmoil in South Vietnam, where noncommunist dissidents in Hue and Da Nang were in open rebellion against the Saigon regime. He believed that as soon as this situation was resolved, the President would agree to bomb the POL system.⁶²

On 27 May, CINCPAC advised General Wheeler that he appreciated the reasons for delaying strikes on the ten targets. He would live by the rules "with the express intent of not jeopardizing your efforts to get approval of these ten targets, particularly the seven POL targets." Admiral Sharp had rejected recommendations by his field commanders to strike some relatively minor POL sites and other facilities because they were on the borderline of populated centers and might upset the efforts of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He warned, however, that the enemy was dispersing his POL into smaller and smaller increments, implying that if the main areas were not struck soon their target value would dwindle.

Admiral Sharp then made specific recommendations, repeating previous proposals in some cases, for new ROLLING THUNDER ground rules to take effect on 1 June. In order of priority, these were: 1) authorization to strike the ten targets, particularly the POL facilities; 2) authority to bomb POL targets anywhere in the northeast quadrant; 3) authority to strike selected targets in the Hon Gai and Cam Pha complexes; 4) relaxation of rules for coastal armed reconnaissance north of 20 degrees 32 minutes North; 5) reduction of the Hanoi/Haiphong restricted circles; and 6) relaxation of rules to open more lucrative targets in the northeast quadrant to armed reconnaissance.⁶³

By the end of May, the arguments raised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders appeared to be having some effect. On 31 May, Secretary Rusk and White House adviser Walt Rostow concurred in the addition to RT 50 of seven line of communication associated targets, including a POL storage area less than ten miles from Haiphong. General Wheeler considered this a very encouraging sign, marred, however, by the continuing political crisis in South Vietnam. “It is quite clear that authority to attack the POL system was within our grasp,” the Chairman told Admiral Sharp on 2 June, “when the political turmoil in SVN rose to a height which caused many people here to take a second look.” (General Wheeler was referring to the Saigon government’s military drive into Hue to end the I Corps rebellion.)⁶⁴

Within the next week, the “political turmoil” subsided as Saigon re-established its authority in Hue. General Westmoreland then sent a message to Admiral Sharp recommending immediate attacks against the ten deferred targets. He emphasized the psychological advantage of striking while Hanoi was still dismayed by the ending of the I Corps revolt without wholesale bloodshed or mass defection of the dissidents to the Viet Cong. On 6 June, Admiral Sharp strongly seconded General Westmoreland’s recommendations. He argued that attacks now on the ten targets would encourage Saigon and improve South Vietnam’s political situation. Immediate strikes would also make it harder for the enemy to disperse his POL, directly affect the movement of North Vietnamese trucks and water craft, and have a “critical impact” on the enemy’s thinking at a time when he was hoping for some seasonal successes from operations across the borders of Laos and Cambodia.⁶⁵

On 6 June, General Wheeler told Admiral Sharp that, if the South Vietnamese political situation did not worsen, he expected within a few days authority to strike the ten targets. However, he noted a new potential obstacle to the raids. “You should know,” he told CINCPAC, “that this first intrusion into the Hanoi/Haiphong sanctuary will raise ... specters of large numbers of civilian casualties in the target areas.” To allay fears on this point within the administration, the Chairman had insured the inclusion in the draft execute message of admonitions on weather, crew experience, ordnance, and the like, which he normally would not send to a field commander. He assured Admiral Sharp that this had been done merely to smooth the path to authorization.⁶⁶

A week later, the Secretary of Defense advised Admiral Sharp directly that the final decision on attacking the POL, the power plant, and the cement plant would be influenced by the extent to which these targets could be bombed without killing significant

numbers of civilians. He asked what preliminary steps CINCPAC recommended to keep casualties down, and how many casualties would result if such steps were taken. The Joint Chiefs had already furnished Secretary McNamara with estimates of probable casualties. They had also given him five general measures which could be taken to reduce collateral damage.⁶⁷

On 14 June, Admiral Sharp cabled the Secretary that, in order to minimize casualties in attacks on the Hanoi/Haiphong storage facilities, he intended to take five steps. They were: 1) conduct the strikes only in favorable weather; 2) select an axis of attack so that normal weapons distribution would avoid populated areas; 3) use the most accurate weapons available; 4) use electronic countermeasures (ECM) to the maximum to thwart enemy missiles and antiaircraft fire and reduce pilot distraction during attacks; and 5) use his most experienced pilots and brief them thoroughly. Under favorable weather conditions, the most important factor, CINCPAC expected no more than 50 civilian casualties in attacking the Hanoi and Haiphong POL and the Haiphong thermal power and cement plants. General Wheeler, who was in Paris at the time, immediately cabled Secretary McNamara supporting CINCPAC's measures and estimate. He recommended that "we proceed to execute as soon as possible."⁶⁸

Secretary McNamara called CINCPAC's "preliminary steps" excellent, but he was still apparently uneasy. On 15 June, he asked Admiral Sharp what restrictions should be placed upon flak and SAM suppression missions before and during the attacks to ensure strafing and bombing of the weapon sites, many of which were located in the midst of civilian communities, did not hit populated areas. The Secretary again warned that permission to strike the targets would depend largely on whether or not officials judged that civilian casualties could be kept to a minimum.⁶⁹

In reply, CINCPAC informed the Secretary that the restrictions already in effect were sufficient. He did not intend to go on a "SAM hunt" before the raids, nor to mount any massive flak suppression effort, although flak suppression in the immediate vicinity of the targets would be needed. Admiral Sharp expected that most civilians would be warned in time by air raid sirens and would take cover. "It is unlikely," he concluded, "that civilian casualties in any number would result from flak and SAM suppression."⁷⁰

At a National Security Council meeting on 22 June, President Johnson reviewed again the political and military aspects and polled his senior advisers, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Then he authorized strikes on the ten targets. That same day, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to bomb the seven POL targets and the Kep airfield radar at first light on 24 June. They directed CINCPAC to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong POL on the same day, if possible, and then to strike the remaining targets. Attacks must be made only under good weather conditions. The execute message included other caveats; including the measures which CINCPAC himself had devised to minimize civilian casualties. In addition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC that, if weather or some other operational factor delayed the strikes, he was positively not to start the bombing on Sunday, 26 June.⁷¹

This decision had cost national authorities, including those at the highest level, much soul searching. Hence, they displayed intense interest in every aspect of the impending

operations. On the day before the strikes were scheduled, the Joint Staff J-3 informed CINCPAC that the President and the Secretary of Defense “have been on the phone repeatedly.” Their concern stemmed from the expectation that a worldwide storm of criticism would follow the bombings near Hanoi and Haiphong. “Fear of adverse reaction has been carefully implanted, nurtured, and amplified by those here who oppose more effective actions against the North,” the J-3 observed to the CINCPAC J-3 on 23 June. “As you know, that group poses the greatest danger to hopes for more effective action.”

The Joint Staff J-3 said that it was hard to believe the difficulty encountered in securing the bombing authority. Much, he said, would depend on the way the attacks were carried off. The J-3 cautioned field commanders that much would depend also on the manner in which the President and the Secretary of Defense were informed of what took place at each step of the way. Both wanted extremely detailed information on almost every aspect of the operations and they wanted it swiftly. The J-3 warned that the field commanders must use special measures to get this information to Washington in time and in the form desired. He asked especially to be told about every change in the weather forecast in the target area.⁷²

The CINCPAC J-3 reassured his Joint Staff counterpart that he was taking extraordinary steps to develop the best possible reporting procedures. The weather, however, was bad, and it appeared that it would not improve within the next 48 hours, thus almost automatically precluding launch of the strikes on 24 or 25 June. Because the 26th was Sunday, the prospect of hitting the targets before 27 June was not very good.⁷³

CINCPAC recognized that bombing near Haiphong entailed the danger of striking a ship belonging to a nation other than North Vietnam. He believed, however, that the risk had to be taken. Currently, for example, a Soviet tanker was in Haiphong; and CINCPAC assumed that it was anchored off the pier at the main POL facility discharging its cargo. CINCPAC told his air commanders that, even though a tanker was berthed off the end of the servicing pier, their planes could bomb the POL storage area. If, however, the tanker was anchored and off-loading its cargo, the servicing pier was not to be attacked.⁷⁴

Before CINCPAC could launch the strikes, stories appeared in the world press predicting air strikes against the Hanoi and Haiphong POL storages. These accounts gave the sequence of strikes and the reasons for them, making accurate guesses as to timing, and speculating that the bombing had been delayed solely by bad weather. On 25 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, considering that the operation had been “thoroughly blown” and that North Vietnam would have increased its air defenses to meet the attacks, cancelled CINCPAC’s authority to bomb the POL. General Wheeler explained the reasons for cancellation to Admiral Sharp. He added that, since the weather forecast was unfavorable for the next six or seven days, not much was lost. He was convinced, said the Chairman, that once the weather cleared and CINCPAC was ready to go, the JCS could obtain immediate approval for the POL strikes.

The Chairman asked CINCPAC to keep a close weather watch, to maintain his strike forces at the ready, and to speak up when he was ready to go. As an alternative to the POL strikes, General Wheeler requested Admiral Sharp to bomb the rail and highway

bridge at Viet Tri on one of the lines between Hanoi and China. He warned Admiral Sharp that Washington was much concerned that the enemy would have stepped up his air defense in the Hanoi/Haiphong target area. He also raised the possibility that “they will attempt to turn these strikes into an aerial Dien Bien Phu perhaps to the point of sacrificing their MIGs in a full-blown air battle and launching their IL-28s against the fleet or against Da Nang.”⁷⁵

On 28 June, CINCPAC, following instructions, cabled that his forces were ready and the weather favorable for strikes against the POL system. He requested authority to initiate operations after 291100H Saigon time. Almost immediately, General Wheeler transmitted to Admiral Sharp full authorization to begin bombing the POL. The first attacks took place as scheduled on 29 June, knocking out about 40 percent of the storage capacity at Haiphong and destroying a large oil tank farm near Hanoi. The enemy responded with a heavy barrage of SAMs and antiaircraft fire but brought down only one American jet. Four MIG-17s challenged the attackers; they lost one of their number and inflicted no US losses. The POL bombing continued over the next two days, and restrikes were authorized on 5 July. As expected, the attacks provoked a domestic and worldwide outcry. However, an overwhelming majority of the US Congress approved as did 67 percent of the respondents to a Harris poll.⁷⁶

Deployments and Forces, 1966

In 1965, US troop strength in South Vietnam had increased from a little over 20,000 to approximately 184,000. Between February and April 1966, Secretary McNamara, in consultation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, worked out a reinforcement plan, called Program #3. Under this plan, US strength in South Vietnam was projected to reach 392,000 by the end of 1966 and 434,000 by June 1967, including 82 maneuver battalions. Even as Program #3 forces flowed into South Vietnam, the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered requests from COMUSMACV and CINCPAC for still more troops to counter a growing enemy threat.¹

An Expanding Threat

The enemy responded to the US buildup with one of his own. New North Vietnamese troops traveled down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the Viet Cong recruited actively in the South, despite allied pacification efforts and government control of many heavily populated areas. According to a North Vietnamese account, the total number of full time troops in South Vietnam grew from 166,248 at the end of 1965 to 219,640 at the end of 1966, with much expansion of specialist elements, such as sappers and artillery. By the end of the year, eight mobile main force divisions and one artillery division, along with a number of separate infantry regiments and battalions and specialty branch units, were operating in South Vietnam. These troops were equipped with more and heavier rockets, mortars, and machine guns; and AK assault rifles were appearing among local force units.²

American officials were aware that this buildup was occurring, though not of its full details. By late April, the Secretary of Defense estimated that there were eleven or more North Vietnamese regiments in South Vietnam. In late June, in a public effort to justify US air strikes against the Hanoi and Haiphong oil depots, Secretary McNamara explained

that North Vietnam had increased its infiltration of personnel into South Vietnam by 120 percent and supplies by 150 percent during the past year. He believed the number of North Vietnamese units in the South had increased by 100 percent.³

Another Call for Reinforcements

Secretary McNamara hardly had approved Program #3 when Admiral Sharp initiated planning for its successor. Early in April, CINCPAC and his subordinates, including COMUSMACV, began considering adjustments to their CY 1966 force requirements and their additional requirements for CY 1967. On 18 June, CINCPAC submitted the results to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. For CY 1966, Admiral Sharp called for approximately 475,000 US personnel in South Vietnam by the end of the year, an increase of more than 100,000 from the 376,500 figure the Secretary of Defense had approved in April. This would provide 79 maneuver battalions, 74 combat support battalions, 84 helicopter companies/squadrons, and 34 tactical air squadrons. The adjusted 1966 requirements also called for about 46,000 allied troops, including 23 maneuver battalions, to be in South Vietnam by the end of 1966.

For CY 1967, CINCPAC asked for 84,000 additional troops. With this increase, the United States would field a force in South Vietnam of approximately 543,000, including 90 maneuver battalions, 89 combat support battalions, 88 helicopter companies/squadrons, and 39 tactical air squadrons. Allied strength would increase to 59,000 (30 maneuver battalions). To meet requirements outside Vietnam, CINCPAC requested 148,000 troops by the end of 1966 and an additional 24,000 during 1967.

These requirements, CINCPAC explained, stemmed entirely from the threat posed by North Vietnam's continuing and increasing support of the war in South Vietnam. He pointed out that, although the air campaign against the North had made enemy infiltration more difficult, it had not sufficiently reduced it. The enemy had built up his stockpiles in both North and South Vietnam and now could field and support more maneuver battalions in the South than ever before. If the enemy capability to field and support combat units in South Vietnam was not reduced, CINCPAC declared, more US ground forces than those he was currently requesting would probably be required.⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the adjusted 1966 and 1967 requirements and, on 5 August, forwarded them to the Secretary of Defense for information. In brief, the Joint Chiefs found CINCPAC's requirements valid for force planning and budgeting purposes, representing "a logical and progressive build-up necessary to the attainment of US military objectives." The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Secretary McNamara that they and the Services were determining capabilities to meet these added requirements, in addition to sustaining the forces already in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had scheduled a planning conference for October to correlate requirements and capabilities into a comprehensive program for presentation to the Secretary of Defense in late October or early November.⁵

Secretary McNamara replied the same day. He recognized the established policy of furnishing the troops, weapons, and supplies that General Westmoreland requested at the times he desired them; and he promised to accord these latest requirements the same consideration. Nevertheless, he desired a detailed analysis of the requirements to determine that each was essential to the war. He cautioned that:

we must send to Vietnam what is needed, but only what is needed. Excessive deployments weaken our ability to win by undermining the economic structure of the RVN and by raising doubts concerning the soundness of our planning.⁶

Secretary McNamara's cautionary remarks reflected his growing skepticism about further United States expansion of the war in the air over North Vietnam and on the ground in South Vietnam. He was influenced by the analyses of his civilian "whiz kids" and by concern over growing American domestic opposition to the war, some of it among his own personal friends and associates. What he perceived as the meager results of the POL strikes for which the Joint Chiefs of Staff had campaigned so hard reinforced his doubts, and a visit to CINCPAC in July did not dispel them. He was growing to suspect that further expansion of the US military commitment in Southeast Asia would bring little in the way of improved results.⁷

In addition to Secretary McNamara's doubts, the new reinforcement request, dubbed Program #4, ran into a shortage of military resources. Without a reserve mobilization, the Services, especially the Army, strained during 1966 to fulfill Program #3 requirements on schedule while replacing combat losses in South Vietnam. By early October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had concluded that only a callup of as many as 600,000 reservists would allow the Services to meet Program #4 requirements without drawing down forces earmarked for NATO and other commitments; but the President considered a reserve callup politically out of the question. Aware of these problems, General Westmoreland during the summer prepared to scale back his troop request to a force structure that would be sustainable indefinitely without mobilization. He estimated the size of such a force as between 470,000 and 500,000 men.⁸

CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, COMUSMACTHAI, and representatives of the Joint Staff and the Services met in Honolulu from 5 through 14 October to validate PACOM force requirements. The conference produced an updated intelligence estimate, a concept for the employment of forces, a Southeast Asia air program, and a comprehensive force deployment program. The intelligence estimate set forth the enemy threat from which the concept of operations was derived. Together, they were the basis for the force requirements.⁹

After reviewing the conference report, the Joint Chiefs of Staff developed a refined force deployment program for South Vietnam for CY 1966/1967. On 4 November, they submitted this program to the Secretary of Defense, stating that it met CINCPAC requirements as closely as feasible. Reflecting the increasingly strained condition of the Services, the program did not meet all of CINCPAC's desired closure dates. It omitted certain requirements altogether (six infantry battalions for I CTZ, three helicopter squadrons,

two artillery battalion equivalents, an aircraft carrier, 12 destroyers, three tactical fighter squadrons, and certain combat support units). Although the program was less than CINCPAC desired, the Joint Chiefs considered it adequate for effective execution of the concept of operations developed at the Honolulu conference.

Specifically, the Joint Chiefs' 4 November program provided for a US strength in South Vietnam of 382,756 by the end of 1966—nearly 90,000 less than CINCPAC had called for on 18 June. The 382,756 figure included 82 maneuver battalions, 49 field artillery battalions, 51 helicopter companies/squadrons, and 32 tactical fighter squadrons. Third country strength would go up to 51,000, comprising 23 maneuver battalions. By the end of 1967, the JCS program projected the US force in South Vietnam at 497,168, with a total of 94 maneuver battalions, 66 field artillery battalions, 77 helicopter squadrons/companies, and 34 tactical air squadrons. The increase in forces would generate an estimated expenditure of 46.21 billion piasters in CY 1967. The Joint Chiefs of Staff contemplated no further buildup of third country strength in 1967 or beyond; but they estimated that the United States would have about 524,000 troops in South Vietnam by the end of 1968, with the number of maneuver battalions remaining at 94. For PACOM outside South Vietnam, the JCS program provided for 157,847 troops by the end of 1966, 201,140 by the end of 1967, and 206,429 by the end of 1968.¹⁰

Program #4

After reviewing the Joint Chiefs of Staff submission, Secretary McNamara decided that the proposed deployment was so large that it would exacerbate South Vietnam's already serious inflation. In addition, he had already discussed a level-off force with General Westmoreland, who had indicated he could live with a more modest reinforcement. Accordingly, the Secretary of Defense told the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 11 November that, to retain popular support for the Saigon government, a "reasonably stable" South Vietnamese economy was essential. The United States, therefore, must fit its deployments to South Vietnam's capacity to bear them without undue inflation. Ambassador Lodge had already asked that US military spending in South Vietnam be held to a 42 billion piaster level in 1967. Consequently, the Secretary found the Joint Chiefs of Staff 46 billion piaster program self-defeating.

The Secretary of Defense approved a plan, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #4," that appeared to be the maximum consistent with any hope of achieving economic stability. Program #4 called for a total of 463,000 US personnel in South Vietnam by the end of 1967, as contrasted with the Joint Chiefs' recommendation of 497,168; 87 maneuver battalions as opposed to 94; and 62 artillery battalions versus 66. The program projected US strength in South Vietnam by June 1968 at 469,300 but did not go beyond that date. (On 16 December, Secretary McNamara revised Program #4 to call for 460,000 troops by the end of 1967 and 467,000 by June 1968; he made no change in the number

of battalions.) The Defense Secretary invited the Joint Chiefs of Staff to suggest changes in the unit mix of Program #4, but not in the troop totals.¹¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not satisfied with Mr. McNamara's version of Program #4. On 2 December, they informed the Secretary of Defense that, while restoration of South Vietnam's economic stability was important, its achievement would depend primarily on the ability of allied military forces to defeat the enemy and provide the secure environment necessary for political, economic, and social development and for pacification. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the imposition of Program #4 would reduce US ability to complete its military tasks in South Vietnam and achieve its national objectives. They added that the rate at which US forces could undertake area control, open land lines of communication, and provide security for pacification and other programs would be slower under Program #4 than with the forces they had requested on 4 November. With the smaller reinforcement, the intensity and frequency of combat operations might be restricted, lengthening the war at increasing costs in casualties and materiel.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed their support for their 4 November program. Since it had not been approved, they recommended to the Secretary of Defense certain modifications to Program #4. These modifications made no changes in the approved troop numbers, but they did make substantial changes in the unit mix in order to create a better balanced force. Secretary McNamara accepted these modifications, with the exception of certain new Army units totaling 2,803 spaces. Thus, the 1967 deployment figures were at last fixed.¹²

During the second half of 1966, US combat units continued to flow into South Vietnam. Operation ROBIN, the deployment of the 4th Infantry Division, began on 21 July with the arrival of advance parties of the 2nd Brigade at Pleiku. The remainder of the division closed in the following three months with the last units arriving on 18 October. As 1966 ended, the 9th Infantry Division was coming in, and MACV was planning to station elements of the division in IV CTZ. At the end of December, American strength in South Vietnam stood at over 383,000, more than double the 184,000 troops that had been there at the beginning of the year. Another 80,000 had been approved for deployment in 1967. By the end of 1967, the United States would have nearly half a million men in Vietnam.¹³

As mentioned previously, the enemy also increased his forces during 1966. The Secretary of Defense estimated that there were 275,000 hostile troops in South Vietnam at the close of the year. This figure included 54,000 North Vietnamese regulars—more than double the 26,000 in the country in late 1965—62,000 main force Viet Cong troops, 11,000 local and district Viet Cong guerrillas, and 58,000 political and administrative cadres and support troops, such as supply, medical, and communications personnel. Secretary McNamara found one bright spot in this picture; enemy strength during the second half of 1966 had remained level at about 275,000.¹⁴

On his part, General Westmoreland expressed optimism. While visiting the United States in late December, he stated in a television interview that “the tide had turned in our favor during the year 1966.” But he was quick to caution that the length of the war

must be measured in years and that “more troops will be needed from our country and, hopefully, from free world allies.”¹⁵

Third Country Forces, 1966

During 1966, third country strength in South Vietnam increased from 22,404 to 52,602. This 30,000-man increase included a South Korean division and separate regiment with supporting elements, a two-battalion Australian task force, and a 2,000-man Filipino civic action group.¹⁶

In early 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Joint Staff to analyze third country participation in Vietnam and to determine what additional assistance would be useful. The study, noted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 July, found that, with the exception of certain Free World nations in the Pacific, efforts to procure military assistance for South Vietnam had not yet yielded significant results. However, the Free World military assistance that had been contributed had been “highly effective and of material assistance” to the allied war effort. The United States could meet shortfalls in its own military capabilities in part through increased Free World Military Assistance Forces, especially in the areas of transportation, construction, maintenance, and medicine. The study cautioned, however, that such contributions would only supplement, and not replace, the approved US deployments. By country, the study listed the Free World forces that might be available for Vietnam. In addition to the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines, the study suggested as possible contributors several European countries (Greece, The Netherlands, Italy, and Spain), Turkey, India, South Africa, Jordan, Israel, Iran, and a number of Latin American nations. The study did not recommend any specific courses of action. After noting the study, the JCS merely returned it to the Joint Staff for use as a reference.¹⁷

While the Joint Chiefs of Staff were analyzing the broad question of Free World assistance to South Vietnam, actual third country deployments moved ahead. As had been the case in 1965, during 1966 the Republic of Korea was the largest third country troop contributor. CINCPAC’s CY 1966 force requirements, submitted in December 1965, had included an additional South Korean division and regiment. On 8 January 1966, the Secretary of State instructed the US Ambassador in Seoul to begin negotiations for these forces. President Park Chung Hee agreed on 29 January to provide the requested units, contingent upon approval by his National Assembly. In return, the United States promised to equip this force and pay all its additional costs. As ultimately worked out, the South Korean augmentation included the desired infantry division and regiment, along with assorted logistic, medical, and other support-type units, for a total of 23,488 men. Added to the forces already in country, this reinforcement would raise total South Korean strength in South Vietnam to approximately 45,600.¹⁸

South Korea announced its planned force increase on 28 February, and its troops began deploying on 29 April. Operational control of the expanding Korean contingent

remained a matter of contention between MACV and the Commander, ROK Forces Vietnam. As the largest third country contingent, the Koreans could and did set their own terms on this issue. The Koreans refused to make any written agreement covering operational control of their forces in Vietnam. Instead, their commander, Major General Chae Myung Shin, informally promised to act as though under the orders of General Westmoreland and the US I Field Force commander, so long as the orders were couched as requests. In practice, the Koreans conducted operations independently in their areas of responsibility in I and II CTZs, under only the most general US direction. Concentrating on defense and pacification of the coastal districts they controlled, they conducted offensive operations only after much US persuasion and after being assured of lavish American air and artillery support. These drawbacks notwithstanding, the South Koreans relieved United States and South Vietnamese forces of responsibility for securing a heavily populated region that contained major ports and allied bases; and their presence contributed to President Johnson's effort to secure "more flags" in Vietnam.¹⁹

In May, COMUSMACV, in drafting his CY 1967 force requirements, called for provision of a South Korean marine division. COMUSKOREA, however, expressed serious reservations about this proposal. He believed that such a request, prior to the South Korean presidential election scheduled for early 1967, might adversely affect President Park and his political party. COMUSKOREA also doubted that the Koreans could provide additional marines without an extensive expansion of their Marine Corps base structure. Consequently, the United States took no further action on this matter in 1966.²⁰

Late in 1965 and early in 1966, the United States asked Australia to increase its troop commitment to South Vietnam. Despite some initial reluctance, the Australians agreed early in March to augment their force. The augmentation would consist of a two-battalion task force, totaling about 4,500 personnel.²¹

In the light of the pending troop increase, the United States and Australia negotiated a new Military Working Arrangement, replacing the one of 5 May 1965. Like the previous one, the new arrangement, signed on 17 March 1966, vested command of the Australian contingent in the Commander, Australian Force, Vietnam (COMAFV). Unlike the arrangement with the South Koreans, the arrangement with Australia affirmed the operational control of COMUSMACV over COMAFV. Under a Logistical and Administrative Supplement and a Financial Working Arrangement, MACV was to continue providing logistic and administrative support for the Australian forces and Australia would reimburse the United States for this support.²²

The advance party of the Australian Task Force (ATF) arrived in South Vietnam during April, and the main body followed in several increments, completing its deployment by 5 June 1966. COMUSMACV located the ATF at Ba Ria in III CTZ, placing it under the control of CG II Field Force, Vietnam (FFORCEV). Australia requested and received US assurances that its troops would not be used in operations near the Cambodian border, since Australia had diplomatic relations with Cambodia. With the arrival of the ATF in South Vietnam, the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, that had been in Vietnam since mid-1965, returned home.²³

In August, the United States considered approaching Australia for another commitment of forces for Vietnam. COMAFV advised COMUSMACV, however, that the Australian government did not wish to raise the matter of further troops for Vietnam until after the Australian elections in November. The Australian commander indicated that his government was aware the ATF needed additional forces and would make a troop increase after the election. This indication proved correct. On 22 December 1966, the Prime Minister announced that Australia would send a squadron of light bombers (B-57 Canberras), a new guided-missile destroyer, and 900 more army personnel to South Vietnam. This would increase Australian strength to about 6,300, but these reinforcements did not reach Vietnam until the spring of 1967.²⁴

Early in 1966, the United States sounded out New Zealand with regard to deployment of an infantry battalion to South Vietnam. New Zealand, like Australia, faced an election in 1966. Its government, although inclined to agree to the US request, preferred not to introduce the question of more combat troops for Vietnam into the election campaign. While not providing the infantry battalion at this time, New Zealand did bring its artillery battery (sent to Vietnam in 1965) up to strength by adding two 105 mm howitzers and 27 men. It also augmented its medical team at Qui Nhon with six additional men, raising the total New Zealand strength in Vietnam to 155.²⁵

During 1966, the Philippines contributed a 2,000-man civic action group to the Vietnam effort. The United States had suggested this move in 1965 and the Philippine president had agreed, but the Philippine Congress had refused to approve the deployment. In early 1966, President Fernando Marcos again asked his Congress for authorization to send the group. To assist in the passage of this measure, the United States made “judicious use” of MAP aid in areas suggested by Marcos, including the delivery of four Swift boats for anti-smuggling operations, M-14 rifles and machine guns for a constabulary battalion combat team, and equipment for three engineer battalions. The Philippine Congress passed the necessary legislation on 5 June 1966, and the Philippine Civic Action Group (PHILCAGV) began arriving in South Vietnam on 16 August.²⁶

The PHILCAGV consisted of engineer construction, medical, and rural community development teams with the necessary security support units. On 20 July, the United States and the Philippines signed a Military Working Arrangement placing all elements and personnel of the PHILCAGV under a Philippines military commander (COMPHILCAGV). The arrangement did not place the Philippine contingent under the operational control of COMUSMACV. Instead, it provided for a Free World Military Assistance Policy Council (FWMAPC) consisting of the Chief of the RVNAF Joint General Staff, COMPHILCAGV, and COMUSMACV or their representatives to prescribe the concept of employment of the PHILCAGV units. MACV would provide all support for the Philippine force, with no reimbursement by the Philippine government.²⁷

The only other Free World nations providing military assistance to South Vietnam in 1966 were Thailand and Spain. On 17 February 1966, Thailand activated the Royal Thai Military Assistance Group, Vietnam (RTMAGV). The Thai assistance group took command of the Royal Thai Air Force contingent that had been in Vietnam since 1964. On

23 March 1966, the United States and Thailand signed a Military Working Arrangement identical in its main points with that between the United States and the Philippines. As was the case with most of the other third country forces, COMUSMACV would provide logistic and administrative support for the Thai contingent, with no reimbursement from Thailand. By the end of 1966, Thai strength in South Vietnam stood at 224.²⁸

The Spanish contribution consisted of a 12-man military medical unit. The Madrid government had announced in December 1965 that it would send a medical team to Vietnam. Not until 9 September 1966, however, did the four doctors, seven nurses, and one quartermaster captain arrive in South Vietnam.²⁹

Other Possible Flags for Vietnam

During 1966, the United States canvassed the possibility of acquiring still more third country forces. One major candidate with a large and competent army was Nationalist China on Taiwan. Use of the Chinese had been considered previously, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps raised the question again in April 1966. General Greene told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that objections to employment of the Chinese Nationalists in South Vietnam normally were based on “the historical, traditional antipathies of the Vietnamese people for the Chinese.” However, the Commandant claimed, he had witnessed enthusiastic exchanges between prominent Vietnamese and Chinese leaders concerning Nationalist participation in Vietnam. The Commandant believed that by “isolating the purely military consequences,” great benefit could come from bringing in the well-trained and well-equipped Nationalist Chinese soldiers. General Greene’s observations did not bear out the “long accepted hypothesis” of Vietnamese antagonism toward such a proposal. (It should be noted that thousands of Chinese Communist troops served in North Vietnam during the war, primarily in engineering and air defense roles.)³⁰ Consequently, the Marine Commandant recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff request the preparation of a Special National Intelligence Estimate to consider both South Vietnamese and Communist Chinese reaction to the introduction of Nationalist Chinese combat troops in South Vietnam.³¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the special estimate, but the resulting SNIE gave no support to the Commandant’s position. Instead, the authors of the SNIE found that Saigon’s military leaders, although concerned “to some degree” about popular reaction, would probably agree to the deployment of Chinese troops. Nevertheless, there would be little popular support in South Vietnam for Chinese Nationalist participation. The estimate predicted that the Chinese Communists would interpret deployment of the Nationalists to South Vietnam as a significant change in US policy with potentially serious implications. Possible CHICOM reactions included: increased pressure on and harassment of Taiwan; reinforcement of Chinese forces along the North Vietnamese and Laotian borders; public acknowledgement and reinforcement of CHICOM military forces in North Vietnam; and increased Chinese pressure on Hanoi to reject any negotiation

and to hold out for total victory. The Chinese Communists, the SNIE concluded, would probably not move “volunteers” into South Vietnam; but Free World countries would react with alarm to the increased chance of a US-CHICOM war.³²

Despite the pessimistic conclusions of the SNIE, the Commandant of the Marine Corps pressed the issue. On 31 May, he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, fully recognizing the military, political, and economic factors involved; he still favored the use of Chinese Nationalist troops in South Vietnam. He proposed that the United States ask the Republic of China to provide a Marine brigade for duty with the III MAF in I CTZ. On the other hand, CINCPAC, responding to a JCS request for his views, acknowledged the military benefits of a Nationalist deployment; but he noted that the US Embassy in Saigon had reservations. According to Admiral Sharp, Ambassador Lodge believed that, while the introduction of Chinese Nationalist troops would not bring Communist China into the war, the deep-seated anti-Chinese attitude of the Vietnamese would limit the usefulness of the anti-communist Chinese. Moreover, the Ambassador had warned that the rest of the world would view a Nationalist deployment as an expansion of the war.³³

After considering the Marine Commandant’s recommendations and CINCPAC’s views, the Joint Staff concluded that, while the employment of Nationalist Chinese combat troops would be “militarily useful,” the possible negative political consequences outweighed the purely military factors. Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took no further action on the issue of Nationalist Chinese combat forces for South Vietnam. As had been true for some time, the Republic of China continued to furnish a small amount of noncombat support to the allied effort. At the request of the United States, the Taiwan regime provided two LSTs, originally given it under the US MAP program, to assist in coastal shipping. Chinese naval crews, in civilian clothing, manned these ships, but they were supported and paid by the United States.³⁴

During the latter half of 1966, two other suggestions for deployment of additional third country forces came under consideration. The first was a COMUSMACV proposal, which Ambassador Lodge supported, for the formation of KANZUS—a multinational brigade size force of Korean, Australian, New Zealand, and United States troops—to assist in countering the large-scale North Vietnamese infiltration through the DMZ. By late September, however, before Washington took any action on the proposal, CINCPAC advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff that KANZUS had been overtaken by the enemy buildup in I CTZ, which had reached multiple division size and would require a considerable greater allied force to counter it. As a result, KANZUS was shelved.³⁵

The second possibility was the introduction into South Vietnam of a British Gurkha brigade. This Nepalese unit of the British Army, composed of men with a ferocious fighting reputation, was currently employed in the Malaysia-Borneo area, but was expected to be phased out of British service in the near future. In early October, the Adjutant General of the British Army raised with the US Army Attaché in London the question of using this Gurkha brigade in South Vietnam. The matter soon became academic when Britain decided to retain the Gurkha brigade in its service at least until 1969.³⁶

By the end of 1966, the array of allied flags in South Vietnam was complete. The Australians, New Zealanders, South Koreans, Filipinos, and Thais, along with the tiny contingents of Spaniards and Nationalist Chinese, would comprise the third country element through the rest of the war. Some national contributions, notably that of Thailand, would increase substantially. America's major western allies held conspicuously aloof from the conflict in Southeast Asia. While the third country contribution was far from negligible, the burden of the steadily growing struggle would be born by the United States and South Vietnam.

The War in South Vietnam—1966

During 1966, the war in South Vietnam presented a picture of gains in some aspects and stalemate in others. On the military side, as the strength and effectiveness of US/FWMA forces mounted, General Westmoreland was able to launch increasingly aggressive operations designed to destroy the enemy and seize the initiative. As the year progressed, his troops carried out sustained attacks against Viet Cong strongholds while at the same time securing friendly bases and major population centers. In operations of increasing duration, allied forces entered regions which for many years had been under exclusive Viet Cong control, searching out and destroying enemy command and operations centers, supply bases, and training areas. Allied units initiated security measures to protect rice and salt producing areas, both vital to the rural economy. Air operations in South Vietnam concentrated on combat and logistic support of ground troops. The naval campaign to prevent infiltration by sea was in full swing. During the year, naval bombardment added new fire power to operations against the enemy along the coast.

On the non-military side of the war, less progress was evident, in spite of ambitious United States and South Vietnamese statements of civil and economic goals. Politically, the military junta in Saigon survived a major challenge to its rule in I CTZ and initiated the writing of a new constitution as a first step to restoring civilian government to South Vietnam. The United States and South Vietnam made major efforts to control South Vietnam's debilitating inflation, but with only limited success. Pacification, overshadowed by the growing military conflict, made little progress in wresting people and territory from the Viet Cong; although by the end of the year the United States and South Vietnam were establishing a more effective organization for a renewed effort.

The Honolulu Meeting Goals

At the Honolulu conference of 7–8 February, following two weeks of American deployment planning meetings, President Johnson and a large delegation of senior US officials worked out with Generals Thieu and Ky the allies' military and pacification goals for 1966. The officials announced a policy of "growing military effectiveness and still closer cooperation."¹

At this meeting, military leaders of the two nations developed six specific goals to be achieved in South Vietnam during 1966: 1) by year's end, inflict losses on the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese at a rate as high as their capacity to put men into the field; 2) increase the proportion of base areas denied to the enemy from 10–20 percent to 40–50 percent; 3) increase the critical roads and railroads open for use in South Vietnam from 30 percent to 50 percent; 4) increase the population in secure areas from 50 percent to 60 percent; 5) pacify the four selected high-priority areas, adding 235,000 people to the government controlled population in those areas; and 6) ensure the defense of military bases, political and population centers, and food-producing regions now under Saigon's control.²

Seeking to balance the military emphasis of the conference, President Johnson pressed his own officials and the South Vietnamese leaders to make renewed and stronger efforts in pacification and social and economic development. The President assured Chief of State Thieu and Prime Minister Ky of continued United States support for their Rural Construction (RC) pacification program. Among specific actions, the United States and South Vietnam agreed that ARVN military commanders would give "adequate" priority to rural construction areas; that Saigon would move forward with the election of village executive councils; and that Saigon would give increasing emphasis to training pacification cadres, concentrating on political indoctrination. The South Vietnamese leaders promised that they would direct greater attention to RVNAF troop indoctrination, with the United States promising to study additional support requirements. In addition, Saigon would devote more effort toward development of agriculture, handicrafts, and cottage industries and would seek to expand rural electrification programs and credit facilities for farmers. Even with these improvements, however, Saigon's Rural Construction Minister, General Nguyen Duc Thang, estimated at Honolulu that only 75 percent of the 1966 RC goals could be achieved by the end of the year. This cautious prognosis notwithstanding, the officials issued a joint declaration pledging their two governments "to defense against aggression, to the work of social revolution, to the goal of free self-government, to the attack on hunger, ignorance, and disease, and to the unending quest for peace."³

The JCS Strategic Concept

Shortly after the Honolulu meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff restated, with little change from the 1965 version, their strategic concept of US/FWMAF operations in South Vietnam. On 1 March, they informed the Secretary of Defense that the US

strategy recognized the interdependence of political, economic, sociological, and military factors in the war. In coordination with the Saigon government, US and Free World forces would take discriminate military action to achieve “a stable and independent non-communist government in South Vietnam.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff listed US military objectives in Vietnam as: 1) to cause North Vietnam to cease its control, direction, and support of the insurgency in South Vietnam and Laos; 2) to assist the Saigon government to defeat the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam; 3) to assist Saigon in extending its dominion and control over South Vietnam, including suppression of guerrilla activity; and 4) to deter Communist China from direct intervention in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the Western Pacific and to be prepared to defeat such intervention if it occurred.

To achieve these objectives, the United States must perform military tasks in both North and South Vietnam. The United States, the Joint Chiefs asserted, must selectively destroy North Vietnam’s military capabilities, reducing its capacity to import and distribute war materials. In addition, the United States must destroy other “high-value” targets in North Vietnam in order to punish that nation for its part in the war. In South Vietnam, the United States must find, harass, pursue, and defeat Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units, wrecking their bases and disrupting their lines of communication in the country and outside it. At the same time, the United States and Saigon must protect the South Vietnamese people from communist “subversion and oppression” while liberating selected areas from Viet Cong control. The United States must coordinate all its military operations closely with those of the RVNAF and mesh them as well with the other US programs, political, economic, and social, in South Vietnam.

This concept, the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared, was integrated with and designed to support South Vietnam’s Rural Construction program and the MACV/JGS Combined Campaign Plan for CY 1966. United States, Free World, and South Vietnamese forces would carry out search and destroy operations, clearing and securing operations, and civic actions in areas of primary (national) and secondary (CTZ) priority. These forces would also defend government centers and critical installations. As a rule, United States and FWMA forces would not secure areas in support of Saigon’s RC program except around their bases. On the other hand, every US tactical unit in the field had its own civic action program in the areas around its base—securing rice crops, protecting harvests, and giving emergency medical assistance—all actions which supposedly would develop popular support for the Saigon government.

Outside the secure areas, US/FWMA forces and RVNAF reserves would seek out and attack communist troops and bases. The main body of the RVNAF would defend government installations and clear and secure areas. Search and destroy operations against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese and their base areas would aim at whittling down the enemy main forces and would indirectly shield the Rural Construction effort. Because of the heavy enemy buildup in several regions of South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted the large, combat capable US/FWMA and RVNAF units to place their “prime focus” on search and destroy operations.

Clearing operations, conducted tactically in the same manner as search and destroy operations, would be the first step in the Rural Construction sequence of “clearing, securing, and developing.” But without sufficient trained follow-on troops to establish permanent control and security, the clearing operations would have little value. In theory, regular forces, US or ARVN, would provide initial security, with the Regional and Popular Forces gradually taking over. Concurrently, government cadre and local officials would enter the secured area. The National Police would maintain civil law and order, carry out population and resource control measures, and eliminate Viet Cong agents, terrorists, and political elements. In the past, ARVN commanders, lacking troops, had drafted the RF and PF for offensives against the hard-core enemy units. With the introduction of US/FWMA troops into key areas during 1965, the Joint Chiefs hoped that the balance of forces had shifted so that the RVNAF could be used in pacification as the concept long had provided.⁴

The US Strategy Is Challenged

In the early months of 1966, the US strategy faced challenges from critics in the United States and rebellious elements in South Vietnam. In the United States, Lieutenant General James M. Gavin, USA (Retired), charged in the February 1966 issue of *Harper's Magazine* that the United States was stretching its forces “beyond reason” in an ill-advised effort to secure all of South Vietnam. Rather than pursuing this vain goal, General Gavin maintained, the United States should withdraw all of its troops into a series of strong coastal enclaves, cease bombing the North, and try to negotiate a solution to the war through the United Nations or a Geneva conference. This attack on US strategy by a famous World War II paratroop commander and early proponent of reliance on conventional forces instead of nuclear “massive retaliation,” along with growing criticism of the national policy from several other responsible quarters, disturbed high administration officials. As a result, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were directed to examine General Gavin's proposals.⁵

Predictably, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not agree with General Gavin. On 3 February, they informed the Secretary of Defense that the enclave strategy possessed significant deficiencies and that its advantages were more illusory than real. By forfeiting the initiative, abandoning solid negotiating levers, conceding large land areas to the enemy, and alienating the South Vietnamese and other friendly governments, the enclave strategy would abandon national objectives. It would lead, the Joint Chiefs said, to American and South Vietnamese defeat in Vietnam or ultimate United States abandonment of Southeast Asia.⁶

General Wheeler presented these same arguments in Congressional testimony. Appearing in early February before a Congressional committee considering military appropriations, the Chairman denied that the United States, as General Gavin had charged, was attempting to secure all of South Vietnam. “Our objectives out there are—

and General Westmoreland's strategy is—to defeat, together with Vietnamese forces, the main force of Viet Cong units and the North Vietnamese forces . . .” He said that the United States was helping the Saigon government to establish security for its population in a “police type” operation and was assisting its ally in establishing conditions for maintaining a free government.⁷

Rebellion in I Corps

The beginning of 1966 found the Saigon government in a relatively stable position. The military regime headed by Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky had been in office since June 1965 and was cooperating closely with the United States in the war effort. But this outward semblance of stability belied a number of fundamental sources of trouble, any one of which could erupt and threaten the fragile Thieu-Ky government. Among these sources of trouble, many of them interrelated, were basic dissatisfaction with the military junta among out-of-power politicians and the Buddhists; an uneasy relationship among the senior officers composing the ruling National Leadership Committee (NLC); increasing tension between “northerners” and “southerners” within the government; political differences between Catholics and Buddhists; and a worsening economic situation.⁸

Divisions among the South Vietnamese generals set off a crisis. On 10 March, General Ky relieved the I Corps commander, General Nguyen Chanh Thi, on a charge of failing to obey orders. Thi, a potential rival of Ky, enjoyed great popularity in I CTZ, where he ruled as a nearly independent satrap; and his relief precipitated immediate protests. On the following day, 2,000 persons demonstrated in Da Nang, chanting “Down with the Generals’ Command in Saigon.” In succeeding days, the demonstrations grew and schools were closed in Da Nang and Hue, with the approval of local officials who owed their appointments to General Thi. On 13 March, a general strike in Da Nang was 90 percent effective. The Buddhists, already angry at the regime over a cabinet reshuffle they claimed favored the Catholics, took up Thi’s cause, both in I Corps and Saigon. In the capital, the Buddhist Institute, a center of political agitation, declared the country to be in a “state of crisis” and demanded the return of several generals who had participated in the overthrow of Diem.⁹

A deadlock quickly developed. The NLC endorsed Ky’s relief of Thi, while the latter general entrenched himself in his headquarters at Da Nang. In the last days of March, the demonstrations in Da Nang and Hue continued to grow. The so-called “Struggle Forces” expanded to include Buddhists, students, civil servants, and some ARVN personnel. For practical purposes, the 1st ARVN Division in northern I CTZ engaged in a passive mutiny against the Saigon government, causing a drop-off in RVNAF military activity in the region. By the beginning of April, the “Struggle Forces” were in effective control of Da Nang, Hue, and many smaller towns and villages in I CTZ and a few in II CTZ. Radio stations in both Da Nang and Hue began broadcasting daily attacks against the government

and the United States, and Buddhist demonstrators sacked the US Information Service library in Hue. The Buddhists in Saigon joined in denunciations of the government and mounted demonstrations of their own.¹⁰

The resulting confrontation between the Saigon regime and the I Corps rebels lasted until mid-June and verged at times on full-fledged civil war among the noncommunist South Vietnamese. General Ky's regime alternated threats to use force with efforts at conciliation, principally by reiterating promises to hold a constitutional assembly late in 1966 and national elections the following year. Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland used their influence, including a temporary withdrawal of US advisers from the 1st ARVN Division, on behalf of order and compromise. The US Marines of III MAF protected themselves and US installations while trying to maintain neutrality between the South Vietnamese factions. Gradually, the regime, helped by power struggles among the movement's leaders, separated the more moderate Buddhist elements from the extremists.¹¹

On 15 May, without informing the US Mission or MACV, General Ky moved against the Da Nang rebels. During a week of sporadic street fighting, RVNAF paratroopers and marines secured key facilities in the city and forced the surrender of dissident strong points. They arrested the mayor of Da Nang and other key Struggle Force leaders. Pacification of the city cost 150 Vietnamese killed and 700 wounded; 23 US personnel were injured in the fighting. In June, after further negotiations with the Saigon Buddhists, who accepted a government offer to add 10 civilians to the NLC, the government moved against the "Struggle Forces" that were still holding out in Hue. Between 10 and 16 June, riot police and an ARVN airborne battalion snuffed out the last resistance. General Thi went into exile on a diplomatic mission. In Saigon, on 23 June, without violence, troops and police occupied the headquarters of the Buddhist Institute, signaling the end of the crisis. The regime had managed to survive the troubles without a mass defection of the dissidents to the Viet Cong. For their part, the Viet Cong seem to have made no attempt to exploit the political crisis.¹²

The three and a half months of Buddhist agitation, political crises, and armed confrontations had severely hindered military operations against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, especially in the I CTZ. US and Free World forces had been tied down by the necessity to provide additional troops and aircraft on alert and furnish security for installations, roads, and bridges. RVNAF operations were even more seriously hampered. The 1st ARVN Division conducted markedly fewer large operations, and those it did conduct were usually in areas where the troops could deploy readily to Da Nang or Hue. Present for duty personnel strengths in the division were down 23 percent for officers and 14 percent for enlisted men. The operational effectiveness of both the Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC) and the VNAF was considerably lowered. Overall RVNAF ordnance capability in I CTZ suffered an estimated 20 percent loss, and engineering capability was greatly reduced.¹³

In Washington, the crisis aroused dismay, verging upon despair, among senior officials. The administration delayed ROLLING THUNDER strikes at North Vietnam's

POL facilities because of the instability in South Vietnam. At the height of the troubles in mid-May, Secretary McNamara told Ambassador at Large Averill Harriman that “the government in Saigon will become weaker and weaker as times goes on.” Under these circumstances, McNamara said, “we should get in touch direct[ly] with the NLF, also the North Vietnamese, but particularly the NLF, and begin to try to work up a deal for a coalition government.”¹⁴

General Wheeler was equally disturbed. On 20 May, he warned Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland that the continuing disarray among the South Vietnamese was reinforcing the dissent of Washington’s “flocks of doves” and creating doubt even among reliable supporters of the war and the military. Americans were asking, the Chairman said, “why should my son or brother or husband be killed fighting against the VC/NVA while the South Vietnamese whose country and freedom are at stake engage themselves in political bickering to the detriment of the effort against the enemy.” In conclusion General Wheeler told the field commanders:

My purpose in addressing you is to convey my own deep distress and concern that the lives, the resources, and the political capital we have expended in our effort to preserve South Vietnam as a part of the free world approach the point of having been in vain. Very frankly, I am greatly worried, the more so because in all logic one cannot expect the American people to suffer indefinitely the continuation of this truly sickening situation.... I am usually pretty much of an optimist; but always, I hope, on the realistic side. This time, however, I think I can feel the first gusts of the whirlwind generated by the wind sown by the Vietnamese....¹⁵

General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp both reassured General Wheeler that the situation in Vietnam, while “serious” was not desperate and that Saigon was making progress in restoring order in I CTZ. And in the following weeks, the government did re-establish its authority and bring the trouble to an end. Nevertheless, there was truth to the Chairman’s final thought on 20 May: “We must all recognize that we have lost irretrievably and for all time some of the support which until now we have received from the American people.... Regardless of what happens of a favorable nature, many people will never again believe that the effort and the sacrifices are worthwhile.”¹⁶

Carrying out the Strategy—Combat Operations

On the battlefields, the effort and sacrifices continued and increased. As 1966 began, General Westmoreland admonished his commanders to smash the Viet Cong and destroy the North Vietnamese units in South Vietnam. He directed them to “find, fix and destroy” the enemy by sustained, aggressive actions, employing economy of force to secure critical bases and the principle of mass to attack and destroy opposing units. In all the corps tactical zones where US and Free World forces operated

during 1966, commanders attempted to follow these orders. At the beginning of 1966, however, too few US and allied maneuver battalions were present in South Vietnam to conduct offensives on the scale Westmoreland envisioned, and the logistic base for such operations was still under construction. For the most part, 1966 would be a year of spoiling attacks to keep the communists off balance and pre-empt their offensives while the allies built up for larger and more sustained operations to come.¹⁷

As the battle on the ground developed during 1966, it became apparent that the enemy was still firmly resolved to win. In reaction to the US buildup, the other side continued expanding both its main forces and its local guerrillas. Wherever possible, the communists massed large units to mount major assaults, relying heavily on sanctuary areas in Laos, Cambodia, the DMZ, and North Vietnam. The pattern of infiltration changed markedly as, hampered by increased US pressure in Laos, North Vietnam began moving large numbers of men and substantial quantities of material into South Vietnam directly through the DMZ. Enemy leaders considered northern I CTZ a key battlefield on which to destroy allied forces, and it was there that the most serious threats developed during the year and some of the fiercest fighting took place.¹⁸

To break up enemy forces before they could strike, General Westmoreland relied heavily on the “spoiling attack.” On 5 February, he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that such attacks had disrupted enemy plans for large-scale campaigns, but there were indications that the enemy was continuing to position his forces to conduct major offensive operations. “In the immediate future,” COMUSMACV predicted, the Viet Cong would “continue widespread terrorism, harassment, propaganda . . . and will increase the number of small, hit-and-run attacks in an attempt to control the population and prevent the US from making any significant gains in reconstruction.” At the same time, the VC/NVA would launch mass attacks whenever they believed such assaults would succeed. (Hanoi’s instructions to its forces in fact called for a combination of small- and large-scale actions.) But the enemy was finding it more difficult to mass forces undetected and gain the element of surprise.¹⁹

Pressure in I Corps

Friendly forces in I CTZ suffered a serious defeat in early 1966. On 9–10 March, a North Vietnamese regiment attacked an isolated Special Forces camp at A Shau near the Cambodian border. Despite heroic Marine and Air Force efforts at air support in the face of extremely poor weather, the North Vietnamese overran the camp. Over 250 of the defenders, mainly CIDG troops, were killed or missing, but 103 were successfully evacuated. The loss of this border surveillance camp opened up the A Shau Valley to the enemy, who soon developed it into a major logistic base and supply corridor to the Hue area.²⁰

The battle of A Shau was only the beginning of enemy pressure on I CTZ. After a spring lull, in mid-year, the North Vietnamese *324B Division* invaded northern Quang

Tri Province through the DMZ. Other North Vietnamese troops massed in Laos, raising a possible threat to Hue and Phu Bai from the west. To meet this threat, on 15 June, major elements of the 3rd Marine Division, the 1st ARVN Division (back in the field after the spring troubles), and the ARVN Airborne Brigade launched Operation HASTINGS just below the DMZ. Supported by tactical air, B-52 strikes, artillery, and naval gunfire, the allied troops battled an enemy who fought tenaciously from a major base in the rugged hills north of Quang Tri City. Operation HASTINGS featured a number of sharp small unit engagements and occasional fights with battalion or larger size enemy forces. The enemy had stockpiled supplies in and north of the DMZ. Fortunately, allied airpower had destroyed much of this materiel, leaving the North Vietnamese unable to sustain a long campaign. On 30 July, General Westmoreland reported that the *324B Division* had been “dispersed and apparently demoralized.” Some enemy troops remained in Quang Tri, but many moved back across the DMZ into North Vietnam. Both sides suffered heavy casualties. The Marines reported killing over 700 enemy while losing 126 of their own killed and 448 wounded. The South Vietnamese lost 21 killed and 40 wounded.²¹

The defeat of the *324B Division* was only temporary, and the enemy buildup in I CTZ soon resumed. In September, General Westmoreland reported that the enemy concentration in Quang Tri and in, and just north of, the DMZ, constituted a direct threat to US and Free World forces in that region. MACV intelligence indicated that as many as three additional North Vietnamese divisions were moving into position to reinforce the *324B*. South of Route 9, the east-west highway that ran just below the DMZ, the North Vietnamese were making extensive combat preparations and were probing friendly positions. General Westmoreland feared that the enemy was preparing to “liberate” I CTZ’s two northern provinces, which contained a significant prestige target, the old imperial capital of Hue. The Marines responded to the North Vietnamese incursions with additional search and destroy operations in northern Quang Tri. To disrupt the enemy’s logistics north of the DMZ, where he could not conduct ground operations, General Westmoreland hammered the area with air attacks and naval gunfire.²²

As 1966 came to an end in I Corps, III MAF was engaged in an on-going large-unit battle in Quang Tri Province and contending at the same time with intensified guerrilla and main force activity in the southern provinces of the corps. To bolster the increasingly stretched Marines, in early October General Westmoreland redeployed certain units from other CTZs or diverted them enroute from the United States to I CTZ. These were principally 175 mm gun batteries which, once emplaced, could deliver supporting fire throughout Quang Tri Province from Khe Sanh at the western end of the DMZ to the sea. In addition, the 3rd Marine Division displaced from Da Nang to Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces while the 1st Marine Division took over defense of Da Nang in central I CTZ. MACV deployed a US Army airborne battalion to Da Nang to assist in protecting that city and prepared contingency plans to send larger forces to I CTZ if necessary. As of the year’s end, the enemy had still not succeeded in establishing a major base area in Quang Tri Province. He continued, however, to maintain at least two divisions in the immediate vicinity of the DMZ and to infiltrate through the zone.²³

Action in II CTZ

The II Corps Tactical Zone, the largest in square miles of the four corps areas, was the scene of continual fighting in 1966. In actions ranging from isolated patrol contacts to large-scale coordinated operations, US, Free World, and South Vietnamese forces sought out the enemy and attempted to destroy him. On several occasions, the allies, acting on improved intelligence, launched operations against large enemy concentrations; but the enemy evaded contact and dispersed. Smaller encounters with local Viet Cong produced more enemy casualties in the first months of 1966.²⁴

As the North Vietnamese, abetted by the onset of the southwest monsoon, expanded the scope of their infiltration through Laos and built up their bases in Cambodia, General Westmoreland became concerned that the enemy might conduct widely dispersed coordinated attacks throughout II CTZ. In mid-year, he began operations that pushed westward toward the Cambodian border to flush out the enemy and keep pressure on him. As the scale of fighting increased, MACV committed the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) to support elements of the US 25th Division in the area. General Westmoreland considered these operations satisfactory and effective in inflicting enemy casualties and preventing the enemy from getting set for a major offensive. Simultaneous with these operations, MACV also carried out operations of varying scale in the coastal lowlands, with the intent of driving out all battalion-size Viet Cong units and destroying enemy resources wherever they could be located. Allied forces reported killing more than 1,500 Viet Cong in four such operations during June. During October, South Korean, ARVN, and US forces participated in combined operations along the coast of II CTZ. They severely mauled the enemy, claiming to have killed more than 2,000 and capturing or destroying large quantities of arms, ammunition, and foodstuffs. These operations opened a large area that had been enemy-dominated for several years. In western II CTZ, continuous friendly pressure kept the enemy off balance as he sought to avoid contact, in many cases forcing him to retire into Cambodia to escape destruction.²⁵

III CTZ

In III CTZ, the remaining corps area where US combat forces operated during 1966, MACV, due to differences in terrain, population distribution, and enemy dispositions and objectives, conducted a campaign somewhat different from those in the corps zones to the north. A large low-lying area, split by several major waterways and containing Saigon and its heavily populated environs, III CTZ also was home to major US bases and such formidable enemy strongholds as War Zones C and D and the swampy Rung Sat Special Zone from which the Viet Cong threatened the shipping channel to Saigon. In this region, the allies sought to increase the security of people and territory and to extend the area under government control. Whereas in I and II CTZs, MACV's emphasis in US operations was on locating and destroying enemy forces and resources, in III CTZ the

emphasis was on a more even balance between offensive combat and territorial security. In pursuing these objectives, US units engaged in heavy fighting. During the year, allied strength in this critical region grew from 15 US and FWMAF maneuver battalions to 36; ARVN strength increased from 48 battalions in January to 57 battalions in December.²⁶

Early in 1966, General Westmoreland directed his forces in III CTZ, while continuing to secure critical installations, lines of communication, and national priority areas, to initiate operations against Viet Cong troops and bases to the northwest of Saigon, including the enemy War Zone C. His goal was to eliminate the war zone, hitherto largely free of allied ground attacks, as an enemy operating base. Beginning in late April, US and ARVN units struck into the base area. They discovered and destroyed large stores of enemy materiel and disrupted enemy preparations for offensive operations. Large numbers of Communist troops scattered and fled into Cambodia.²⁷

Keeping pressure on the enemy base areas, early in June two brigades of the US 1st Infantry Division pushed into War Zone C in Operation EL PASO II. Within a month, the American soldiers had killed nearly 800 enemy and captured huge quantities of war supplies. In spite of these losses, the Viet Cong were able to regroup and resupply from nearby bases in Cambodia. By early November, the rebuilt 9th Viet Cong Division had slipped into Tay Ninh Province to attack local objectives and seek battle with allied forces. But before the enemy was ready to attack, he collided with a US brigade. The resulting Operation ATTLEBORO, fought in the snarled thickets of War Zone C, grew into the largest operation of the war to date, with the allies eventually employing 21 battalions. The enemy lost an estimated 1,100 killed in War Zone C, once again along with large amounts of supplies. More important, Operation ATTLEBORO and its predecessors opened to allied forces an area that had been a communist stronghold for 30 years.²⁸

US units in III CTZ, notably the 25th Infantry Division west of Saigon, conducted attacks on the enemy's main forces and conducted continuous operations against the guerrilla's in the villages and hamlets. Working closely with South Vietnamese territorial forces and police, elements of the division cordoned and searched hamlets, engaged in civic action, and conducted innumerable small patrols and night ambushes. Operations of this type produced relatively few major fights, but US commanders believed they enhanced security, thus helping to win the local peasants away from the Viet Cong. In spite of these efforts, however, the III CTZ countryside was far from fully pacified at the year's end.²⁹

Looking at the Delta—IV CTZ

The United States had no ground combat troops in the Mekong delta, although several thousand Americans provided combat support to the ARVN. In the entire area, the Viet Cong maintained a battlefield stalemate with the South Vietnamese IV Corps and drew much of their food and recruits from this rich agricultural region. It was obvious to US planners that to make real military gains in the delta, the United States would have

to introduce its own combat troops. There were, however, valid arguments against such deployments. The ARVN was proud of its unilateral role in the delta and, Americans feared, would resent US “intrusion.” In the thickly populated countryside, the presence of American troops could provoke civilian resentment, adversely affect the economy, and give rise to other social and political problems. From a military standpoint, it would be difficult to find sufficient dry land for a base in the canal-laced rice paddies; and it was uncertain how US troops would operate in that environment.³⁰

After studying the problem during 1966, General Westmoreland developed the concept of a Mekong Delta Mobile Afloat Force (MDMAF). The concept involved stationing a US division in an area where it could operate in and around the shores of the Mekong and Bassac rivers, supported by two US Navy River Assault Groups (RAGs) and by sufficient converted LSTs to house a brigade. Brigades of the division would rotate between land bases and the floating base. COMUSMACV nominated the US 9th Infantry Division, slated to arrive in South Vietnam in late 1966 and early 1967, as the unit to go to IV CTZ, if the plan was approved. On 5 July, the Secretary of Defense approved the activation of the MDMAF to include the two RAGs.

At the same time, CINCPAC requested two additional River Assault Groups that were not part of the MDMAF. The Acting Chairman, JCS, Admiral David L. McDonald, supported this request. He argued that the RAG, which was designed to support one infantry battalion, reinforced, was a valuable adjunct to operations in the delta, particularly when supplemented by the helicopter. Besides being used in the delta, the two RAGs could support US forces in the Rung Sat Special Zone and Long An Province in III CTZ. If necessary, the two assault groups also could reinforce MARKET TIME and GAME WARDEN. Admiral McDonald recommended that the Secretary of Defense support both the MDMAF and the two additional RAGs. Secretary McNamara, however, withheld approval of the additional RAGs at this time.³¹

On 1 August, COMUSMACV published a planning directive for operations in the delta. He established 1 January 1967 as the date when all preparations, including time-consuming dredging and construction to prepare ground and facilities for the force, would be completed. Army and Navy units were to begin operations about 31 January. On 20 September, however, General Westmoreland reported to CINCPAC that, due to demands for forces elsewhere in South Vietnam, deployments to the delta would be delayed until late spring of 1967 at the earliest. Meanwhile, he had deployed one US battalion to Long An Province in III Corps, in the northern delta, and would send a 105 mm howitzer battalion to the delta at the request of the ARVN IV Corps commander. These deployments would provide valuable experience for the larger US elements to go in later. MACV engineers also were dredging an area west of My Tho as the base for a brigade-size force in the northern delta.³²

Although concerned about possible adverse political, social, and economic effects of a US deployment to the delta, Ambassador Lodge recognized that, without American intervention, the war in IV CTZ would remain at best a stalemate. Hence, in late November, he approved General Westmoreland’s proposal to deploy the first US battalion of

the MDMAF in January 1967. The Ambassador specified, however, that the deployment should be carefully monitored and the operation curtailed if the social, economic, and political consequences were unfavorable to overall US objectives. On 19 December, the first elements of the US 9th Infantry Division landed in Vietnam. COMUSMACV estimated that a battalion task force from the division could move to Dong Tam, its delta base, by late January 1967.³³

The “Other War”—South Vietnamese Politics

It had long been a truism among US officials that the conflict in South Vietnam was more than a military struggle. Sometimes referred to as the “other war,” this struggle was waged on political, economic, and pacification fronts and involved the US military as well as civilian agencies.

Following the pacification of Da Nang and Hue and the restoration of government control in I CTZ, the political front saw encouraging developments. The military rulers in Saigon found themselves in a much stronger position and moved at once to take advantage of it. On 5 July 1966, the government inaugurated an 80-man People-Army Council, a predominantly civilian body to advise on political, economic, and social matters. That same month, Prime Minister Ky reshuffled his cabinet, adding four civilians and removing the two members who represented the only significant militant Buddhist influence. Meantime, in I CTZ, a new corps commander, General Hoang Xuan Lam, consolidated public order and restored the 1st ARVN Division to an effective fighting force.³⁴

The military government also moved ahead with its plans for elections for an assembly to write a new constitution, scheduled for 11 September. In early July, the Ministry of Information launched a four-phased program, designed to publicize the election, to explain its purpose and importance, and to get people out to vote. Maintaining a politically neutral position, the United States helped produce election materials and move them to the field. At the time of the election, RVNAF, US, and FWMAF troops provided security for the balloting. On 11 September, undeterred by scattered acts of Viet Cong terrorism, some 4.3 million South Vietnamese, 81 percent of the registered voters, went to the polls to elect the 117 members of the Constituent Assembly. This did not represent an overwhelming endorsement of the Saigon government, since only two-thirds (5 million) of South Vietnam’s adult population was registered. Nevertheless, it was a remarkable event in a nation torn by guerrilla war and went some way to refute Hanoi’s claim that only the National Liberation Front could speak for the South Vietnamese.³⁵

US officials in both Saigon and Washington were pleased with the election outcome, although the State Department and Ambassador Lodge were disappointed that the voting had not encouraged the formation of political parties. The White House expressed its surprise and pleasure with the size of the vote but cautioned that this election was only one step along the road to constitutional government. Hanoi dismissed the election as a

fraud meant to perpetuate Prime Minister Ky in power and to entrench the US military presence in South Vietnam.³⁶

Strengthened by the election results, in late October Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky went to Manila to meet with President Johnson and the leaders of the other Free World nations (Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand) that had sent troops to South Vietnam. The Manila conference of 24–25 October reviewed the progress of the war as well as South Vietnam's political, social, and economic situation. In a joint communiqué, the conferees pledged continued determination to secure freedom for South Vietnam; and the Saigon officials committed their government anew to a Revolutionary Development program.³⁷

At the close of 1966, US officials were optimistic about the political situation in Saigon. After nearly three years of political unrest and revolving-door governments, all indicators seemed to point to a return of political stability to South Vietnam. The Thieu-Ky government had held office for over 18 months and had survived a severe challenge during the early months of 1966. Prime Minister Ky had shown considerable insight and political acuity in the formation of his cabinet, bringing into it a few civilians, as well as military officers, with diverse religious backgrounds and geographical origins. A personal quarrel between the two principal South Vietnamese Buddhist leaders had split that powerful opposition group. Despite Viet Cong threats, 81 percent of the registered voters had demonstrated their support for the government by voting for a constituent assembly to draft a constitution. Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky had publicly committed themselves to submit the constitution to the people in 1967 and, subsequently, to hold national elections. For the United States, the next step was to continue to encourage the South Vietnamese government, watch, and hope.

The “Other War”—Economic Problems

In addition to the political turmoil that plagued South Vietnam in the first half of the year, the country continued to face soaring inflation in 1966. With the accelerated US troop buildup and the construction of the necessary supporting facilities, inflation in South Vietnam, acute in 1965, grew even worse in the following year. Prices rose at a rate of 70 percent annually. The increase of US forces from 184,000 to 389,000 during the year, together with the \$60 million per month peak in military construction, brought a large and rapid inflow of US dollars, further stimulating the already dangerous inflationary spiral. South Vietnam needed to adopt a vigorous anti-inflation program and the United States had to curb its military spending in the country. The governments began such programs in 1965 and continued them in 1966.

To check inflation, the United States and South Vietnam adopted a range of measures. MACV took steps, including expansion of out-of-country R&R and the opening of additional service clubs and PXs, to lower troop spending in the South Vietnamese economy and divert military pay into US channels. Both governments increased their

financing of imports, and the United States pushed forward projects to enlarge the capacity of South Vietnamese ports to handle both civilian and military cargoes. Eventually, MACV took over most non-commercial activities of the busy Saigon port. The South Vietnamese government committed itself to a number of actions, including simplification of import procedures, enlargement of its customs forces, and increasing revenues through more effective tax collection. On 18 June 1966, Saigon devalued the piaster. Taken in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund and with strong US support, this drastic move adjusted the exchange rate from 60 to 118 piasters to the US dollar. At the same time, the South Vietnamese government established a free market in gold to force down the black market price of the piaster.³⁸

Among inflation-related issues, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were most concerned with the question of limiting overall US military piaster spending. The massive US troop buildup and the resulting influx of indigestible amounts of construction money was the most significant factor contributing to South Vietnam's inflation. On 13 July, after completion of a DOD analysis of the impact of further American spending on the South Vietnamese economy, Secretary McNamara set quarterly limits for US in-country military piaster spending. His objective was to keep US military expenditures and their economic impact to a manageable level. He explained to the Chairman that he wanted to hold total US piaster expenditures to the end-FY 1966 level without any reduction of military effectiveness. Mr. McNamara believed that the field commanders could accomplish this through careful management. He fixed the first quarter FY 1967 piaster spending limit at P 9 billion, including spending by military contractors plus P 2.8 billion in support of the jointly funded portion of Saigon's military budget.

The Secretary of Defense instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to plan a total four-quarter spending objective of not more than P 36 billion. He assigned to the Joint Chiefs responsibility, which they could delegate as required to CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and component commands, for enforcing the quarterly limits. In addition, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to establish a system for reporting military spending in South Vietnam and develop and maintain a monthly Activities Cost Index to measure the impact of rising wages and prices on the piaster cost of DOD activities in the country. Secretary McNamara directed the Military Departments, the Assistant Secretaries of Defense, the Director of Defense Research and Engineering, and the Directors of the Defense agencies to assist the Joint Chiefs of Staff in operating within the established limits.³⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff acted at once to implement the Secretary's directive. They assigned CINCPAC the enforcement responsibility and directed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to submit appropriate reports of spending in South Vietnam. The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis (SA) established Activities Cost Guidelines and COMUSMACV maintained the indices.⁴⁰

In early September, the Secretary of Defense set the second quarter FY 1967 piaster spending limit at P 11.8 billion, including an estimated P 2.8 billion for Joint Support. He put the piaster spending limit for the year 1 October 1966 through 30 September 1967 at P 50 billion. On 20 September, MACV objected that the P 2.8 billion of Joint Support

funding would not cover past years' obligations, meet the current year's obligation issued prior to the imposition of controls, and support the RVNAF pay raise granted after the piaster devaluation. Consequently, COMUSMACV requested that Joint Support be raised to P 4.7 billion for the second quarter of FY 1967. CINCPAC confirmed this requirement plus P 25 million to meet other obligations, for a total of P 4.725 billion. General Wheeler endorsed this request, but the Secretary of Defense approved only an increase to P 3.6 billion.⁴¹

On 1 October 1966, Ambassador Lodge recommended to Washington that US military piaster expenditures in the next year be held to P 42 billion, plus P 16 billion for civilian elements. COMUSMACV objected to these figures, but the Agency for International Development Director, David Bell, and Ambassador Lodge were convinced that any higher figure would accelerate inflation and jeopardize political and military programs. In an effort to stay within the 42-billion limit, Secretary McNamara on 11 November rejected a Joint Chiefs of Staff force deployment program for CY 1966/1967 that called for spending P 46.21 billion in 1967. He approved instead Program #4, which he termed the maximum consistent with any reasonable hope for economic stability.⁴²

On 18 November, the Secretary of Defense set the piaster spending limit for the first quarter of CY 1967 at P 10.3 billion and for the second quarter at P 10.7 billion. These limits did not include Joint Support of Saigon's military budget. For use in economic stabilization negotiations with the South Vietnamese, DOD estimated a total spending figure for CY 1967 at P 42 billion. Again, COMUSMACV found these figures too low. The Chairman requested an increase to P 10.5 billion for the first quarter and P 11.0 billion for the second, for a total of P 21.5 billion. He also recommended a negotiating and planning figure of P 44.0 billion for the year. Secretary McNamara increased the quarter figures as the Chairman had requested, but he refused to alter the P 42 billion negotiating figure.⁴³

While Washington officials fixed US spending limits in South Vietnam and tried to fit deployment programs within those limits, the joint command in Saigon continued its own efforts to hold down US spending and eliminate other factors contributing to inflation. MACV and the South Vietnamese government persisted in efforts to reduce port congestion, with only limited success. On 13 September, COMUSMACV issued a comprehensive directive outlining policies, procedures, and responsibilities for limiting US military expenditures. HQ MACV would establish maximum permissible quarterly piaster expenditures for all official MACV activities. The command would control piaster contributions to the Joint Support portion of the South Vietnamese defense budget through a system of cash releases so as not to exceed quarterly and annual limits. COMUSMACV also established a Piaster Expenditures Control Working Group to assess requirements and allot piaster limits for MACV activities. The MACV directive did not restrict individual expenditures, but the command continued to encourage soldier savings programs and direct individual commodity purchases to other than South Vietnamese markets.⁴⁴

Despite the determined efforts of both the United States and the South Vietnamese government, inflation increased at a rapid rate during 1966. Prices rose by 70 percent and shortages developed of essential foodstuffs, supplies, and manpower. Only an end of

the war could eliminate the sources of the inflation. Failing that, the Saigon government and the United States would have to exercise continued vigilance to control inflation and retain a semblance of economic order in South Vietnam.

The “Other War”—Organizing for Pacification

During 1966, the Saigon regime survived four months of severe political turmoil, elected a constituent assembly, and adopted a number of economic measures to check the growing inflation. All these actions were encouraging signs for the future; but if the South Vietnamese government was to become stable and effective, not to mention win its war, it had to obtain the support of the South Vietnamese people. To gain this support, the government must provide adequate local security, meet the people’s basic social and economic needs, and protect the people from Viet Cong terrorism and covert political domination. To this end, Saigon had adopted successive pacification programs. Dating back to 1959, these programs had been characterized by ambitious plans that appeared promising on paper but achieved little success in actual operation.

In December 1965, the Thieu-Ky regime approved a new program, the 1966 Rural Construction Plan, and issued appropriate implementing instructions. The key feature of this plan, which went into effect in January 1966, was the employment of specially selected and trained rural construction cadre groups. The cadres, trained at a new National Training Center at Vung Tau, would live in the villages for six to twelve months, rather than for just a few weeks as in previous programs. They would screen the hamlet inhabitants to establish identities and to determine aspirations and needs. The cadres would follow up the initial census by interviewing all residents at intervals of 10 to 15 days. Then they would attempt to organize self-help programs to solve hamlet problems the people had identified. It was hoped that the local residents would then begin to assist in rooting out the local insurgent underground, thereby breaking up the Viet Cong infrastructure.⁴⁵

The United States continued its support of Saigon’s pacification/rural construction effort. From 8–11 January 1966, senior representatives of the US Mission in Saigon and the Washington Vietnam Coordinating Committee met in Warrenton, Virginia, to review, among other matters, the allied pacification program. Encouraged by South Vietnam’s 1966 plan, the participants recommended that the United States continue: 1) direct funding of the most crucial aspects of the RC program; 2) optimum organization of the US Mission for support of RC; 3) collection by both Washington and Saigon of available material to meet primary needs of the rural population; 4) encouragement of hamlet and village level representative bodies, as well as development of nongovernmental organizations such as cooperatives and labor unions; and 5) guidance to the South Vietnamese government on the proper pacification roles and missions of the RC teams, police, Regional and Popular Forces, and regular forces.⁴⁶

In spite of ambitious plans and declarations, pacification progress on the ground was quite limited during 1966. Early in the year, political turmoil disrupted the effort; and the perennial problems of divided authority (both American and South Vietnamese), South Vietnamese bureaucratic inefficiency, and the indifference to rural needs of an urban-based regime persisted throughout the remaining months. For example, the first RC cadres did not graduate until 21 May. In mid-September, a representative of the President reported that RC had been “relatively slow in gathering speed” and had produced only a “modest gain” in population security. The most important pacification developments during 1966 were organizational, as both the United States and South Vietnam tried to improve the coordination and conduct of civil and military pacification programs.⁴⁷

On 21 February 1966, the South Vietnamese government redesignated its Ministry of Rural Construction as the Ministry of Construction, in order to eliminate the implication that the program concerned only rural and not urban areas. Since the English translation of the new title did not describe adequately the broad objectives of the program, Prime Minister Ky coined the English term “Revolutionary Development” (RD). Saigon defined Revolutionary Development as:

the integrated military and civil process to restore, consolidate and expand government control so that nation building can progress throughout the Republic of Vietnam. It consists of those coordinated military and civil actions to liberate the people from Viet Cong control, restore public security; initiate political, economic, and social development; extend effective Government of Vietnam authority; and win the willing support of the people towards these ends.

The dynamic General Nguyen Duc Thang, who had been Minister of Rural Construction since mid-1965, continued as Minister of Revolutionary Development.⁴⁸

In accord with the 1966 RC/RD plan, Saigon in February established a network of RD councils, extending from the national level down to the district, with the chairman at each level being a member of the council at the next higher level. The Minister of Revolutionary Development chaired the National RD Council. These councils met periodically to review projects and progress, suggest program improvements, and give emphasis and direction to the entire effort.⁴⁹

To improve coordination on RD matters on the US side, General Westmoreland on 24 February named the Chief of his RD Division as an adviser to Deputy Ambassador William Porter, the Embassy’s overseer of pacification support. The MACV adviser served as the focal point for all RD issues requiring coordination with the Embassy. He also presented MACV views to the Ambassador, attempting to ensure that the command’s programs meshed with those of other elements of the country team.⁵⁰

In Washington, President Johnson attempted to unify the American effort. On 28 March, he designated Robert W. Komer as his Special Assistant for Vietnam, responsible for integrating the direction, coordination, and supervision of all US nonmilitary programs for Vietnam, including RD. The President also named Ambassador William Leonhart as Deputy Special Assistant for Vietnam, with the task of coordinating

the RD/pacification program with the programs for combat force employment and military operations.⁵¹

A notably aggressive bureaucratic operator, Komer made regular visits to Vietnam. Very quickly, he and Secretary of Defense McNamara became convinced that the only way to truly unify US pacification support was to place all agencies involved—both civilian and military—under COMUSMACV. This was so because the provision of military security was the essential prerequisite for effective pacification and because MACV controlled more people and resources in the countryside than any other agency. During the summer and autumn, Secretary McNamara and Mr. Komer, with the endorsement of the Joint Chiefs and COMUSMACV, pressed this view upon the President, opposed by the State Department and the other civilian agencies. The civilian agencies wanted to retain their own independence, doubted the military's competence to perform the task, and objected to further militarization of what they considered essentially a political struggle. Although himself desiring tighter management, President Johnson temporized by directing a series of reorganizations of the civilian side of the US Mission. As the first of these, Ambassador Lodge, at White House direction, appointed Deputy Ambassador Porter to coordinate civilian pacification programs.⁵²

During the summer, both Saigon and the United States acted to bolster the lagging RD effort and to step up military support for pacification. On 12 July, the South Vietnamese government elevated General Thang to the position of Commissioner-General for Revolutionary Development, with jurisdiction over the Ministries of Agriculture, Public Works, and Administration (formerly Interior) in addition to his former task of Minister of RD. In late July, the Chief of the Joint General Staff, at COMUSMACV's urging, directed the ARVN to increase the support and tempo of RD operations. The Chief of the JGS emphasized to ARVN commanders the importance of the RD program and instructed them to assign the same priority to pacification activities as to search and destroy operations. In addition, the Saigon government revised the RD mission and instructions for clarity and precision.⁵³

In support of the South Vietnamese actions, COMUSMACV instructed all US advisers to encourage ARVN commanders to comply with the JGS directives. General Westmoreland believed that at least 50 percent of the ARVN forces in I, II, and III CTZs should be employed in direct support of RD. He directed American advisers to urge the ARVN and RF/PF to operate at night, execute small unit operations based on timely intelligence, and carry out long-duration saturation patrolling. MACV advisers would help the ARVN establish education and training programs at all levels to reinforce pacification awareness. In September, General Westmoreland and the Chief, Joint General Staff, agreed to establish combined US/South Vietnamese Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) to provide RD guidance to field commanders and organize a detailed two-week RD indoctrination program for all ARVN maneuver battalions. MACV and ARVN representatives then prepared the necessary guidance, instructions, and training programs; but the programs did not get under way until January 1967.⁵⁴

The issue of unifying US military and civilian support of pacification still remained to be resolved. On 22 September, in a draft memorandum for the President, Secretary McNamara expressed his conviction that the division of pacification responsibility between the military and civilian elements of the country team in Saigon was a major factor in the “negligible” RD progress being made. The civilian element included the Agency for International Development (then called the US Operations Mission), the Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), and the CIA. On the military side, the Revolutionary Development Division of the MACV staff coordinated the command’s support of pacification. Only at the ambassadorial level was there a single in-country manager, and management was not Ambassador Lodge’s strong point. The Secretary of Defense proposed to eliminate this fragmented responsibility by placing all pacification-related US activities and personnel under COMUSMACV, with responsibility delegated to a Deputy COMUSMACV for Pacification. He requested JCS comments on this proposal, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff readily endorsed it.⁵⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed this view on 14 October. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, they stated that the pacification/RD program was not adequate to the situation; they continued to favor the transfer of the entire program to COMUSMACV. But, if for political reasons, the President thought a civilian organization mandatory, they would not object. They were not optimistic, however, that a civilian organization could be created, except at the expense of costly delays.⁵⁶

At a White House meeting on 15 October, the President and his senior advisers considered the issue of responsibility for the pacification program. The Secretary of State strongly objected to the suggestion that this responsibility be transferred from civilian to military hands. President Johnson, although dissatisfied with the progress of the program and leaning toward the military option, was unwilling to override Secretary Rusk. He decided to give the civilian side one more chance to produce an effective organization. He specified, however, that he wanted action “soonest”—within a period of 90 days—and would reconsider the issue if the situation had not improved in that time. At the President’s direction, Ambassador Lodge established within the Embassy an Office of Civil Operations (OCO) under Deputy Ambassador Porter to unify the pacification activities of all civilian agencies except the CIA. The Office of Civil Operations set up single managers in the field at corps, province, and district levels. Progress, however, did not materialize within the 90-day limit the President had set; and in May 1967 COMUSMACV would be assigned responsibility for the pacification program “under the overall authority of the ambassador.”⁵⁷

Early in the year, when it became evident that the allies could not meet all of the 1966 RD goals, the United States and the South Vietnamese government began planning an RD concept for 1967 that they hoped would be more successful. These efforts produced an RD concept for 1967 that was annexed to the Combined Campaign Plan for that year, approved on 7 November 1966. In general terms, the RD concept for 1967 assigned the ARVN the primary mission of providing security for pacification, while US and Free World units would continue trying to destroy the enemy main forces and

base areas. In the three northern corps tactical zones, the ARVN would devote at least half of its efforts to RD support. In IV CTZ, where the ARVN carried the main burden of combat, it might be able to devote only 25 percent of its effort to pacification. Free World forces would support RD by providing security in their tactical areas of responsibility and base areas and by contributing “implicit aid” to RD and South Vietnamese economic resurgence as “a by-product of normal operations.”⁵⁸

Late in the year, as a by-product of the dispute over organizing the US pacification support, General Westmoreland felt compelled to respond to a view circulating in “US civilian circles” in Saigon that the ills of RD were the fault of the ARVN and MACV. In this view, the ARVN had been improperly organized at the outset as a “conventional” rather than a counterinsurgency force. This basic error, compounded over the years by shortsighted US advisers, had produced an ARVN powerless in organization and attitude to cope with the communist infrastructure and guerrillas. In an attempt to refute this view, COMUSMACV made a presentation to the Mission Council, stressing four points: 1) the ARVN’s structure and capabilities had been shaped by its need to confront major conventional enemy forces as well as guerrillas; 2) only the US/Free World buildup had made it possible to shift ARVN emphasis from operations against enemy regular formations to security tasks in support of RD; 3) the RVNAF provided the only feasible framework for mobilizing a major segment of South Vietnam’s manpower, and “with the zenith of the mobilization having been reached,” MACV and the JGS could shift attention to improving the quality of the RVNAF; and 4) the fundamental weakness within the RVNAF was and could continue to be inadequate leadership at all levels.⁵⁹

At the year’s end, there was also some difference of opinion on Revolutionary Development between the military and civilians in Washington. General Wheeler thought that “many Washington agencies” concentrated too much on pacification/RD as the answer to all problems in South Vietnam. He acknowledged “the crucial influence which will ultimately stem from a successful RD/pacification program.” Nevertheless, the Chairman feared that the tendency to seize on one facet of the complex situation in Vietnam as the key to eventual victory might cause an undue focus on that program to the detriment of other critical programs.⁶⁰

As 1966 ended, the pacification/Revolutionary Development situation in South Vietnam remained much the same as it had been at the beginning of the year. Despite the improved military situation, an ambitious South Vietnamese RD program with continued American assistance and support, and improvements in both South Vietnamese and US pacification machinery, Revolutionary Development progress in 1966 was not impressive. The allies were only able to raise the percentage of the population in secure areas by 5 percent during the year, from 52 to 57 percent. On the eve of 1967, as at the beginning of 1966, the Saigon government had a promising program in the wings, and both US and South Vietnamese officials again prognosticated substantial improvement in RD in the coming year. But for the United States the problem was the same. US and Free World forces could keep the Viet Cong from winning a military

victory; the United States could support, pressure, and cajole Saigon on RD matters, but only the South Vietnamese government could “win the hearts and minds” of its people. After a visit to South Vietnam in October 1966, the Secretary of Defense summed up the situation. The government’s pacification concepts, he stated, were sound and Saigon’s leadership “vigorous and able.” Progress, however, was “very slow indeed. This is one area that requires vigorous action during the next year.”⁶¹

The Situation in Late 1966—Contrasting Assessments

In spite of the lag in pacification, by the latter part of 1966, the military situation in South Vietnam, viewed from Washington and Saigon, had improved substantially. The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed this out to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum of 14 October 1966. They noted that, since US and Free World forces had entered South Vietnam, these forces had enjoyed an almost unbroken series of battlefield victories. Such enemy successes as had occurred had been against the Regional and Popular Forces. The Joint Chiefs predicted that the enemy probably would be able to replace his heavy combat losses but stated that the enemy’s many bloody defeats would have an impact on his morale. They cited evidence that the Viet Cong was being compelled increasingly to fill its ranks by forced conscription. Even the North Vietnamese, in replacing casualties to the *324B Division*, had been required to use about 50 percent conscripts. North Vietnamese infiltration had dropped during the third quarter of 1966, and enemy ground combat operations were smaller, less frequent, and shorter in duration than in the early months of 1966. General Wheeler attributed this trend to the attrition of enemy supplies by ROLLING THUNDER and to COMUSMACV’s aggressive combat operations.⁶²

Unfortunately, America’s adversaries also considered 1966 a successful year. According to Hanoi’s official historians, “In spite of many difficulties posed by the enemy’s fierce ‘pacification’ operations, the enemy’s control over many heavily populated areas, and the heavy attrition still being suffered by our reinforcement troops during the long march down from North Vietnam,” the other side had expanded its full time combat force in the South during the year by more than 30 percent. The leaders in Hanoi viewed the war to this point as a “continuous string” of American failures. As the North Vietnamese saw it, the Americans “had not been able to reach their goal of ‘searching out and destroying’ our main force units in South Vietnam and had not been able to secure the battlefield initiative.” Accordingly, when the Politburo met in Hanoi in October, it decided “to intensify the military and the political struggle in South Vietnam ... and to create opportunities and conditions favorable to big operations in the future that would secure a great victory and change the face of the war.” The main force units would develop their combat operations “to a new level to meet our requirement to annihilate enemy battalions, to be able to annihilate entire American and satellite brigades, and to drive each individual

puppet division to its knees.” In spite of the forces arrayed against them, the will of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong remained unshaken, as did their conviction that they were on the road to ultimate victory.⁶³

The Air, the Sea, and the Borders

As ground combat in South Vietnam intensified during 1966, the United States increased the scale of its supporting operations, particularly air support. At the same time, the United States continued and expanded its efforts to interdict infiltration from North Vietnam and to deny or destroy the enemy's sanctuaries in the border areas of Cambodia and Laos and in the Demilitarized Zone. In these efforts, US air power played the dominant role. Throughout the year, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the theater commanders repeatedly sought authority to strike the sanctuary areas; but in many instances their civilian superiors, driven by political considerations, rejected their recommendations. Late in the year, the United States began planning the construction of an anti-infiltration barrier just south of the DMZ—a project military leaders viewed with skepticism but nevertheless prepared to support.

Enhancing ARC LIGHT

During 1966, opportunities arose frequently to take advantage of the tremendous firepower of the B-52. More profitable targets presented themselves for the heavy bombers as the enemy massed forces more frequently, infiltrated troops at greater rates, and built new supply areas and routes. General Westmoreland relied increasingly upon ARC LIGHT strikes for close support of ground operations, for attacks upon enemy logistics and troop concentrations, and for spoiling attacks, particularly along South Vietnam's borders. As a result of recommendations by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders, the problems that had plagued ARC LIGHT from its beginning in June 1965—overly centralized control, slow reaction time, and lack of a planning base—were

gradually alleviated. A marked expansion of B-52 operations occurred, although controversy continued over ARC LIGHT's effectiveness.

Because officials in Washington retained approving authority for B-52 operations in South Vietnam, field commanders had complained throughout 1965 that much of the potential effectiveness of ARC LIGHT was being lost. On 22 January 1966, as a result of a review of ARC LIGHT which the Secretary of Defense had directed on 18 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the current ARC LIGHT procedures were not sufficiently responsive or flexible. The JCS recommended to the Secretary that they be granted execution authority for all B-52 strikes in South Vietnam. If granted this authority, they proposed to delegate it to CINCPAC and CINCSAC. Although the White House and the Secretaries of State and Defense would be kept completely informed of planned B-52 actions, the operational commanders should handle all mission details.¹

On 3 March, the Deputy Secretary of Defense granted the Joint Chiefs of Staff the authority they sought. He stipulated, however, that any B-52 strike which risked border violation or noncombatant casualties must be submitted for State Department concurrence. On 15 March, the Joint Chiefs delegated approval authority jointly to CINCPAC and CINCSAC.²

Further to increase ARC LIGHT responsiveness, General Westmoreland on 11 May suggested the possible employment of the mobile radar (MSQ-77), used for ground-directed bombing, to divert B-52s in flight to lucrative targets of opportunity. He also asked that a force of six B-52s be kept on alert on Guam in order to achieve a reaction time of ten hours from a strike request until planes were over the target. In response to his recommendation, SAC established a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) on Guam on 1 July, with six planes on continuous alert. All were equipped with MSQ-77 systems to allow inflight diversion. Later in the year, the commands took steps to reduce the ten-hour reaction time.³

The United States took additional actions during 1966 to improve the reaction time, operational status, and planning for ARC LIGHT forces. The first of these measures, forward basing, promised to reduce the cost per sortie and the physical strain on pilots, crews, and aircraft. Closely related to forward basing was the establishment of monthly sortie rates that would enable sounder planning, more equitable distribution of effort, and more positive logistic support of the ARC LIGHT program.

At the beginning of 1966, the 30 B-52s flying ARC LIGHT missions were all based on Andersen AFB, Guam. The supporting 45 KC-135 tankers operated out of Kadena AFB, Okinawa. Construction to enable Andersen AFB to accommodate a total of 50 B-52s was scheduled for completion in April 1966. In addition, plans had been made for further expansion at Andersen AFB to allow the basing of 70 B-52s by 1 August.

On 17 December 1965, in connection with efforts to improve support for ARC LIGHT, the J-3 reported to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower) that it would be desirable to be able to base at least 30 B-52s forward of Guam. This would shorten reaction time, reduce tanker support requirements, cut down congestion at Andersen AFB, and provide a contingency and weather evacuation location. He pointed out that Kadena

AFB, which already had a limited B-52 capability, would offer the earliest option for a forward base. Use of Kadena AFB, however, would require preparation of other bases to accommodate the tankers, possibly in Thailand or Taiwan. The Air Force had the matter under study. The tentative forward basing plan called for expansion of Andersen AFB to accommodate 70 B-52s and movement of 30 of those bombers to Kadena as soon as the KC-135s could be shifted, initially to Thailand.⁴

On 11 May 1966, in a message to CINCPAC, General Westmoreland called in broad terms for possible forward basing of the B-52s. Three months later, on 12 August, he renewed this request in more specific terms while giving high marks to the accomplishments and potential of ARC LIGHT. General Westmoreland told CINCPAC that the B-52s gave the ground commander “an unprecedented advantage over the enemy.” The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong reportedly feared B-52 strikes more than any other allied operation. Owing to terrain conditions and the lack of enough friendly troops, the B-52 was often the only weapon which could attack enemy formations building up for offensives. COMUSMACV attributed the enemy’s failure to launch a “planned monsoon offensive” to the success of his own spoiling attacks, in which the B-52s had played a major role.

Because of the success of ARC LIGHT operations, even under existing handicaps, General Westmoreland was all the more anxious to enhance these operations, if possible, by moving the B-52s to bases closer to their targets. “Guam is barely adequate as a base from which to support the war in Vietnam,” he noted. “Strike reaction time ... is much too long, and many valuable targets are lost due to this delay.” Although he recognized the political problems involved, COMUSMACV recommended that the United States “press the search” for B-52 bases in Thailand, the Philippines, Okinawa, or Taiwan, and begin planning and negotiations as soon as possible.⁵

In addition to forward basing, General Westmoreland called for an increase in the number of B-52s available for Southeast Asia, for adequate stocking and production of bombs to support a sustained ARC LIGHT program, and for greatly reduced strike reaction times. Admiral Sharp fully supported COMUSMACV and, on the matter of forward basing, told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he favored placing the bombers at Kadena AFB or at U Tapao, Thailand, as the quickest solution. On 8 September, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, endorsing General Westmoreland’s recommendations, asked the Joint Chiefs to propose to the Secretary of Defense a reappraisal of the political risks of B-52 operations from Okinawa. He proposed further that the United States seek Thailand’s approval for necessary construction at U Tapao and agreement in principle for ARC LIGHT operations from that base.⁶

On 29 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that they had considered Taiwan, the Philippines, Okinawa, and Thailand as possible bases for B-52s. In each case, they had compared flying time to targets, construction requirements and costs, and political implications. They had rejected Taiwan and the Philippines because of political reasons and because of the lengthy time required to construct appropriate facilities. They believed that forward basing of B-52s at Kadena and/or U

Tapao would afford the earliest solution to the requirement for faster reaction times. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that, in view of the estimated completion date of 1 April 1967 for B-52 facilities at Kadena, the State Department should reappraise the political implications of operating ARC LIGHT B-52s from Okinawa and KC-135s from Taiwan. At the same time, the United States should take immediate steps to obtain Thai approval for ARC LIGHT operations from U Tapao with the requisite construction. The Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary of Defense to take up these matters with the State Department.⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff received no immediate reply, but forward basing remained an active issue. In October, during a visit to Andersen AFB, Secretary McNamara directed development of a plan to base the maximum possible number of B-52s on Guam and of a second plan to base 15 B-52s in South Vietnam by mid-February and not later than mid-April 1967. On 3 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that a plan already existed for deploying 70 B-52s to Andersen. They stated further that 70 was the maximum number that should be stationed on Guam because of considerations of safety, rapid launch and recovery requirements, storage facilities, and personnel support.⁸

Both CINCPAC and the Secretary of the Air Force strongly objected to basing B-52s in South Vietnam. They called attention to the substantial construction required, the additional personnel that would be needed, and particularly the serious problem of protecting B-52 bases in South Vietnam. Both officials came out strongly in favor of basing B-52s instead in Thailand. On 19 November, the Secretary of the Air Force informed the Secretary of Defense that earlier studies on B-52 basing in Southeast Asia had been reviewed and updated, and that there were compelling reasons for an early decision on the use of U Tapao.⁹

These objections notwithstanding, on 8 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent to Secretary McNamara a plan for deploying 15 B-52s to Tuy Hoa in South Vietnam. At the same time, however, the Joint Chiefs informed the Secretary that they did not favor stationing B-52s in South Vietnam. A study of the many problems associated with deployment of the bombers to that country reinforced the rationale supporting their earlier recommendation for use of U Tapao. They advised Mr. McNamara that, under a CINCPAC plan, an austere forward base at U Tapao for 15 B-52s could be prepared in four months, provided funds were made available before the “contractor horizontal construction capability” was demobilized in December 1966.¹⁰

At almost the same time, the Secretary of the Air Force had recommended to the Secretary of Defense the early establishment at U Tapao of a base accommodating 30 B-52s. This was to be done in progressive increments starting with three bombers in January 1967 and reaching full capacity by September of that year. In the first half of January 1967, the State and Defense Departments reached an accord on the issue. On 17 January, Secretary of State Rusk instructed the US Ambassador in Bangkok to seek approval from the Thai government to use U Tapao for ARC LIGHT operations. The

Thai government gave its assent early in March, and B-52 deployments began at the end of April.¹¹

To facilitate operational planning, the field commanders pressed for establishment of monthly ARC LIGHT sortie rates. In October 1965, COMUSMACV had forecast that for the first quarter of 1966 he would need 450 ARC LIGHT sorties per month. For the second quarter, he would need 600 sorties per month; and for the last half of the year, 800 per month. However, the forward basing problem and a shortage of air ordnance that came to light in April 1966 complicated the issue.¹²

CINCSAC had the capability to provide 450 sorties per month but could not meet the 600 sortie requirement for the second quarter because of the ammunition shortage. On 24 April, in allocating air munitions among using agencies, CINCPAC was able to set aside for ARC LIGHT only enough bombs for 450 sorties per month through October. In expectation of increased bomb production, he allocated for planning purposes enough ordnance for 600 sorties per month from November through December. On 6 July, the Secretary of Defense approved a sortie rate of 600 per month, to become effective on 1 November 1966.¹³

General Westmoreland continued to insist on the advantages of increasing the ARC LIGHT sortie rate to 800 per month as soon as it was possible to do so. Admiral Sharp supported him in this. On 3 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved for planning purposes an 800-per-month sortie rate to begin on 1 January 1967. Delays in production of certain bombs, however, forced the Defense Department to hold the rate at 600 per month until 1 February 1967. On 11 November, the Secretary of Defense approved for planning purposes a sortie rate of 800 per month effective 1 February 1967. At the end of December, the Joint Chiefs notified CINCPAC that this rate had been finally approved. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCSAC to deploy forces during January 1967 to reach 800 sorties per month by the beginning of February.¹⁴

Evaluating ARC LIGHT

Although General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp strongly endorsed ARC LIGHT's effectiveness and called for its expansion, some US Air Force officers questioned the program's value. In July 1966, the Targets Division of the Seventh Air Force, MACV's USAF component command, reviewed 371 ARC LIGHT missions and found little hard evidence that the B-52 strikes had done much damage to the enemy. Due to difficult terrain and other factors, bomb damage assessment, whether by ground patrols or aerial reconnaissance, was at best limited and inconclusive. Evidence was equally slim to support COMUSMACV's claims that B-52 bombings had significant psychological effects on North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops. The Targets Division concluded that, on the basis of this lack of evidence, the expenditure of ordnance on ARC LIGHT missions could not be justified. Echoing this study, Lieutenant General William W. Momyer, commander of Seventh Air Force and Deputy COMUSMACV for Air, declared, "I have flown over

many B-52 strike areas and looked at the results in detail. There has been no killing of large bodies of enemy troops, no destruction of quantities of enemy materiel, and no denial of territory to the enemy.” Hence, he told CINCPACAF, “I think you would have to conclude the B-52s have been relatively ineffective.”¹⁵

In mid-July 1966, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, directed the Joint Staff to make its own appraisal of ARC LIGHT operations. The Joint Staff reported that since the beginning of ARC LIGHT in June 1965 through 15 July 1966, 427 missions comprising 4,065 sorties had been flown and almost 81,000 tons of bombs expended. Assessment of battle damage and strike effectiveness had mainly been based on aerial photo reconnaissance. In part repeating the Seventh Air Force conclusion, the Joint Staff noted that in 58 instances, ground follow-up of B-52 missions had been carried out but had not furnished conclusive proof of the effectiveness of strikes. Multi-layer jungle canopies limited visual and photographic inspection and ground operations seldom swept the entire impact area because of insufficient men or tactical requirements.

Analyzing the evidence in more detail, the Joint Staff reported that in the first year of ARC LIGHT the bombers had flown 67 interdiction missions, 49 of them against infiltration routes in Laos. Seventy-nine missions had been flown in direct support of ground operations, only 39 with some degree of ground follow-up. The staff suggested, nevertheless, that the success of the ground operations indicated that ARC LIGHT had been a contributing factor of some importance. B-52s had carried out 38 “spoiling” missions, with a limited number of reports indicating structural damage, secondary explosions, and disruption of planned enemy attacks. The fourth category of mission, harassment and disruption, accounted for 243 strikes—more than the other three categories combined. Reportedly, these strikes had destroyed, among other things, fortifications, tunnels, structures, ammunition dumps, and storage facilities. Again, however, the number of comprehensive strike assessments was limited, owing to targets being remote and isolated.

On the positive side, the Joint Staff found that, although the total effects of the B-52 bombings could not be fully assessed, there had been significant psychological results. The bombings had helped to lower Viet Cong morale, increased desertions and defections, forced some changes in enemy tactics, and disrupted to some extent the Viet Cong’s economic base. US ground commanders whose operations had benefited from ARC LIGHT strikes considered that the missions were making a valuable contribution to the total military effort.¹⁶

In response to COMUSMACV’s insistence on the need for an 800-sortie rate, the Deputy Secretary of Defense asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to evaluate the entire program since its inception. He was concerned over the high costs of ARC LIGHT, especially at the 800-sortie level, and the lack of data on the actual effectiveness of the bombings. He noted that for 800 sorties per month the ordnance costs alone would be almost \$500 million for CY 1967. Including other costs, the total figure could reach \$650–780 million per year.¹⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff responded with a strong affirmation of ARC LIGHT's value. On 15 October, they informed the Secretary of Defense that the performance of the B-52 force had been "outstanding." By 30 September 1966, ARC LIGHT planes had flown 597 missions (5,181 sorties) against targets in Southeast Asia and had dropped 101,235 tons of bombs. The average number of sorties per mission had been 8.7. The force had responded to every approved mission and, of 5,266 sorties scheduled, 5,181 had arrived over target. More than 97 percent of the bombs scheduled had been released over the designated targets.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized the valuable and unique capability which ARC LIGHT provided. B-52s could attack the enemy regardless of time of day, weather, or location, deluging a large area in a short time with heavy destructive firepower. The threat of B-52 strikes, the Joint Chiefs asserted, had deterred enemy concentrations and wrought havoc with the morale of his forces. ARC LIGHT had proven itself in the past and would do so again, particularly if the forward basing of B-52s were put into effect. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that "B-52 bombing provides a military capability in Southeast Asia which cannot feasibly be provided by any other available weapon system and which is required by the operational commander in support of combat operations."¹⁸

Strongly endorsed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders, ARC LIGHT operations continued in spite of Air Force doubts of their usefulness. By the end of the year, when the United States suspended B-52 strikes for the Christmas and New Year's holiday truces, the bombers had flown a total of 5,217 ARC LIGHT sorties. Several hundred of these had hit targets in Laos, the DMZ, and North Vietnam.¹⁹

Naval Operations: Coastal and Riverine

Throughout 1966, the US and Vietnamese navies expanded their efforts to deny the enemy use of South Vietnam's coastal waters and rivers. Under MARKET TIME, the allies kept up patrols and surveillance of the coastal waters to interdict seaborne infiltration of men and material. These operations were conducted in the same manner and under the same rules of engagement as in 1965. During the year, the US Navy received its full programmed force of 84 Swift boats (Patrol Craft, Fast-PCP), greatly expanding its capabilities. Unfortunately, as US MARKET TIME forces gradually increased, an almost proportional decline occurred in participation by the VNN Coastal and Sea Forces.²⁰

MARKET TIME vessels searched or contacted thousands of small junks, sampans, and other watercraft. In the course of these operations, they destroyed 60 junks and 22 sampans, killing 129 enemy and capturing 54. In addition to preventing innumerable small-scale infiltration attempts, MARKET TIME foiled two large-scale arms running efforts during the year. On 10 May and 19 June, US coast guard cutters fought engagements with large steel-hulled trawlers, capturing or destroying the vessels and seizing large cargoes of weapons, ammunition, and other material. The true measure of MARKET TIME's effectiveness was the decline of sea infiltration after the commencement

of the operations. In mid-1965, sea infiltration accounted for an estimated 70 percent of the total enemy movement of materiel into South Vietnam; but by August 1966, this figure had declined to 10 percent.²¹

Although US ground forces carried out no combat operations in the Mekong Delta in 1966, US Navy elements did operate against the Viet Cong along the waterways which laced the region. These naval forces also operated in the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ), the area of swamps and jungle through which ran the river channels that carried shipping to Saigon.

During 1966, the South Vietnamese government began large-scale operations to pacify Viet Cong controlled areas in the Delta. Success of these operations depended heavily on effective control of the region's rivers and waterways. Early in August 1965, COMUSMACV and CHNAVGP had developed a concept for maintaining such control. Under it, US Navy boat patrols and inshore surveillance would enforce curfews and prevent Viet Cong infiltration, movement, and supply along the Delta estuary coast and across the major rivers of the Delta and the RSSZ. On 18 December 1965, MACV established Commander Task Force (CTF) 116, GAME WARDEN, to carry out this concept.²²

On 27 June, the South Vietnamese government submitted to the US Ambassador a formal request for US technical, material, and operational assistance in halting Viet Cong actions on its country's waterways. This note, forwarded to Washington on 1 July, constituted the legal basis and authority for US assistance in control of South Vietnam's waterways.

By the time these formalities were completed, GAME WARDEN vessels had been in action for three months. Early in 1966, the enemy increased his efforts to block the channel to Saigon by sowing mines and harassing river traffic with mortar and gun fire. South Vietnamese counteraction, despite US support, was ineffective. In April, two ten-boat sections of the GAME WARDEN force became operational for patrols in the RSSZ. Constructed of fiberglass and lightly armored at vulnerable points, these River Patrol Boats (PBRs) had a top speed of 37 knots with water-jet propulsion. They were manned by US crews and carried twin .50-caliber machine guns fore and aft. The boats conducted patrols, ambushes, and combined operations in the RSSZ. Working in conjunction with armed helicopters flying in from shore bases or off a specially configured LST, the PBRs proved highly effective.

By mid-September 1966, GAME WARDEN had 95 PBRs operating in the major rivers of the Mekong Delta, along with six armed helicopters. In addition, 12 minesweepers (MSBs) were helping to keep open the river approaches to Saigon, and a SEAL (Sea, Air, Land) commando team detachment was conducting surveillance and raids in the Delta. By this time, GAME WARDEN had accounted for 50 Viet Cong killed and 23 captured and had destroyed 9 Viet Cong boats and damaged 13. The Navy patrols had seized or destroyed large quantities of enemy foodstuffs and captured many Viet Cong documents.²³

After the formal establishment of GAME WARDEN in mid-year, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked CINCPAC to submit rules of engagement for the force, which to that point

had operated without such rules. On 18 July, Admiral Sharp forwarded proposed ROE with which Ambassador Lodge had concurred. CINCPAC also included operational guidance for GAME WARDEN. On 17 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded ROE and operational guidance based on CINCPAC's recommendation to the Secretary of Defense, asking for his approval. A week later, the Department of Defense sought State Department concurrence. State did not concur until late October, although GAME WARDEN continued operating in the meantime. Finally, on 8 November, the Secretary of Defense approved the final rules of engagement and operational guidance for GAME WARDEN.²⁴

The rules of engagement for GAME WARDEN were based on those for Southeast Asia issued in April 1965, with slight modifications to meet the operation's particular requirements. When GAME WARDEN forces operated in MARKET TIME areas, they would observe the MARKET TIME rules. When operating near the Cambodian border, GAME WARDEN forces were not authorized immediate pursuit across the line but could defend themselves against attackers located inside Cambodia. The operational guidance directed that to the maximum extent feasible US vessels in GAME WARDEN would have South Vietnamese government representatives on board. These representatives should be very conspicuous to all observers and, if present, lead boarding parties. The South Vietnamese would recommend actions, such as detainment or release of vessels; but the US commander would make the final decision. On 16 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent these approved ROE and operational instructions to CINCPAC.²⁵

By this time, GAME WARDEN had been underway almost a year and was contributing to pacification in IV CTZ. Merchants and farmers in the area could move about much more freely and safely and Viet Cong tax collection and terrorism had been reduced. GAME WARDEN now included 120 patrol boats, 2 patrol air cushion vehicles, 11 mine sweepers, 8 helicopters, and support craft. These forces had killed a total of 239 enemy by body count, plus over 200 more possible. GAME WARDEN patrols had destroyed 352 enemy boats, damaged 75, and captured 37, at a cost to themselves of 8 killed, 80 wounded, and 3 missing in action. One minesweeper had been sunk by an enemy mine and four helicopters lost to hostile action or accident.²⁶

As MARKET TIME and GAME WARDEN expanded, the US Navy needed more efficient command arrangements in South Vietnam. Until early 1966, the Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force (CG III MAF), who controlled the largest number of naval personnel in country, served as the naval component commander under MACV. He performed this duty in addition to his responsibilities as a tactical commander and as the senior US adviser to the ARVN I CTZ commander. Located at Da Nang, the CG III MAF was remote from MACV headquarters in Saigon. In Saigon, the Chief, US Naval Advisory Group, served as COMUSMACV's principal Navy adviser and was responsible as well for MARKET TIME (TF 115) and GAME WARDEN (TF 116). CHNAVGP, however, had no formal link to the naval component commander or to CINCPACFLT.²⁷

In January 1966, after extensive study by MACV and the Naval Advisory Group, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC proposed a new and more responsive naval component command organization. The new Navy command would be entitled US Naval Forces,

US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (NAVFORV), with headquarters in Saigon, commanded by a flag officer, and staffed to discharge component command functions. Assigned to CINCPACFLT, NAVFORV would be under the operational control of COMUSMACV. The commander of NAVFORV would be designated the MACV naval component commander and perform all appropriate functions, including the exercise of operational control of the Naval Advisory Group and TFs 115 and 116. III MAF, with assigned units, would be designated a separate uni-Service command directly subordinate to COMUSMACV, although it would continue under the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (CG FMFPAC), in the Service chain of command.²⁸

The Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted the COMUSMACV/CINCPAC proposals. With Secretary of Defense approval, on 14 February they directed the Chief of Naval Operations and CINCPAC to implement the command changes. On 1 April 1966, Rear Admiral Norvell G. Ward assumed command of NAVFORV.²⁹

The Borders: Cambodia

The problem of enemy bases in nominally neutral Cambodia was not new. In the Fall of 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended to higher authorities a series of political and military actions to eliminate this threat, including permission for maneuver and immediate pursuit into Cambodia. The State Department, however, opposed any actions that would violate Cambodian territorial integrity; and COMUSMACV received authority only to take those counter-actions necessary for emergency self-defense against enemy attacks from across the border. Nonemergency maneuver or return of fire into Cambodia required prior Washington approval.³⁰

In mid-March 1966, COMUSMACV launched Operation LINCOLN, a series of spoiling attacks in western Pleiku province near the Cambodian border. Because the border was ill-defined in this area, and in order to gain tactical advantage and cut off enemy escape routes, General Westmoreland requested authority to maneuver troops into Cambodia. Ambassador Lodge supported the MACV request. In addition, Mr. Lodge suggested that Washington call attention to the Viet Cong violation of Cambodian territory by releasing the growing “definitive evidence” of such activity to the world press.³¹

Washington once again disapproved any incursions into Cambodia. The State and Defense Departments advised Saigon that it was not in the “over-all US interest” to go beyond the existing policy of attacks into Cambodia only for immediate self-defense, and that the suggested release of information was not advisable. In explaining the Washington decision, the Chairman told both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that existing authority should suffice to deal with enemy units in Cambodia. General Wheeler directed the two commanders to use this authority “boldly,” and to advise the Joint Chiefs of Staff promptly of the requirements and circumstances.³²

In addition to the specific request in connection with Operation LINCOLN, on two occasions in the first half of 1966 the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought general authority for

immediate pursuit into Cambodia. The Secretary of Defense denied these requests. He found that the “existing special instructions” regarding operations near the Cambodian border were adequate under current circumstances.³³

As another approach to the Cambodian problem, COMUSMACV, in early February, recommended the development of a force capable of either covert or overt cross-border reconnaissance into Cambodia. Such reconnaissance would reduce the danger of surprise attack from the sanctuaries on US and South Vietnamese forces. Supporting this recommendation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 9 May proposed to the Secretary of Defense that the United States organize, train, and equip an indigenous force, to consist initially of 30 clandestine intelligence agents, sixteen 20-man reconnaissance teams, four 150-man reaction companies, and one 150-man security unit. These troops would be deployed against targets on the South Vietnamese side of the Cambodian border. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also requested the necessary funding and deployment of 156 additional US Army Special Forces personnel to support the indigenous units.³⁴

The State Department accepted the wisdom of planning for possible operations in Cambodia but opposed actual operations at that time. Deputy Assistant Secretary Leonard Unger told the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) on 7 June 1966 that no forces should be designated for possible use in Cambodia since it would inevitably become public knowledge “with unfortunate repercussions.” In addition, there should be no recruitment of ethnic Cambodians (Khmers) residing in South Vietnam for a cross-border reconnaissance force.³⁵

Subsequently, on 13 June, the Secretary of Defense approved the development and funding of a force capable of possible future cross-border operations. He emphasized that this did not constitute approval to commit the force into Cambodia and directed that State Department views, including the prohibition against recruitment of ethnic Cambodians, be taken into account in developing the organization. Several weeks later, the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved deployment of the additional Army Special Forces soldiers to support the new force, which received the code name DANIEL BOONE.³⁶

In addition to military measures, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late 1965 proposed a political and psychological effort. The political side would consist of pressure on the Royal Cambodian Government (RKG, for Royal Khmer Government) to prevent the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese from using its territory. On the psychological side, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed a campaign against North Vietnamese personnel in Cambodia.

In November 1965, the Joint Chiefs proposed diplomatic action to persuade the RKG to cease its tacit support of the Viet Cong, manifested by the Phnom Pen government’s tolerance of the enemy’s use of its territory. They also suggested the enlistment of third countries to pressure Cambodia’s ruler, Prince Sihanouk, to the same end. The State Department rejected this proposal, contending that any specific action might push Cambodia into active belligerency against South Vietnam. (It was questionable at any event whether Cambodia possessed the capability to drive out the Viet Cong, even had it chosen to do so.)³⁷

In April 1966, General Westmoreland, Ambassador Lodge, and Admiral Sharp all requested permission to initiate psychological operations—night leaflet drops—against North Vietnamese personnel in Cambodia. The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the request. Higher authorities, however, approved only the release of leaflets over South Vietnamese territory for the wind to carry across the border. Authorized on 26 May, the operation was extended on 6 June to include a wider area of Cambodia but with leaflet release still over South Vietnam.³⁸

On 27 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again advised the Secretary of Defense of the need for continuing political efforts to persuade the RKG to stop its support of, or collusion with, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong; and they recommended preparation of an interagency psychological operations plan. The purpose of the plan would be to enhance the Cambodian government's understanding of US objectives, the Free World determination to achieve "ultimate victory" in South Vietnam, and the advantages to Cambodia of supporting Free World aims.³⁹

Shortly after making this proposal, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at CINCPAC's urging, asked the Secretary of Defense to seek State Department reconsideration of the recruitment of ethnic Cambodians for possible cross-border operations into Cambodia. The Joint Chiefs explained the operational advantages of using personnel familiar with the area, language, and customs; and they pledged that all Cambodian recruits would be closely screened and that careful security measures would be observed.⁴⁰

The State Department once again objected to the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations on both psychological operations and recruitment of ethnic Cambodians. Appreciating the many policy and operational considerations that had arisen, and promised to arise again, the Deputy Secretary of Defense requested the Under Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence to form a joint State-Defense-CIA Study Group to consider problems associated with Cambodia. Defense would have two representatives, one from OSD and one from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The State Department agreed, and the State-Defense-CIA Study Group was established on 21 December 1966. The Group did not complete its study until May 1967.⁴¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not satisfied with the higher level decisions regarding Cambodia. On 19 December 1966, they urged the Secretary of Defense to seek a review of national policy toward Cambodia in the light of overall US objectives in Southeast Asia and the enemy's continuing use of the Cambodian sanctuary. They noted the proposal for a joint State-Defense-CIA Study Group but pointed out that this approach would take time. In the interval, they recommended expansion and intensification of the overall intelligence collection program in Cambodia, including authorization for ground reconnaissance operations on a regular basis. They also requested authority for medium- and low-level day and night photography, airborne radio detection, and infrared and side-looking airborne radar operations on a continuing basis to a depth of 75 nm into Cambodia (excluding a 25 nm area around Phnom Penh). Further, they sought permission for immediate pursuit of actively engaged Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces that withdrew into Cambodia. They also called for a more extensive coordinated

public affairs and information program and supporting psychological operations to focus attention on Cambodian support of the enemy and to dissuade the RKG from continuing such support. Apparently awaiting the recommendation of the State-Defense-CIA Study Group, higher authorities took no action on these proposals.⁴²

The Borders: Laos

North Vietnam had long used the Laos Panhandle as its primary infiltration route to support the Viet Cong. After US/Free World combat forces entered the struggle in 1965, the enemy also began to rely on Laos as a safe haven for troops hard-pressed in South Vietnam. On 7 January 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary of Defense to approve new rules of engagement for Southeast Asia, including provision for immediate pursuit of hostile land forces into Laos. Receiving no response to this request, the Joint Chiefs on 6 April apprised Secretary McNamara of the increasing threat of enemy forces from Laos. As an example, they cited the 9 March overrunning of the A Shau Special Forces Camp, "one of many US/friendly installations located within close tactical distance of the Laos border." Pending authorization for immediate pursuit, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested authority for US/Free World forces operating in South Vietnam near the Laos border similar to that granted in December 1965 for emergency operations near the Cambodian border.⁴³

After the Secretary of Defense approved this request, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 9 June authorized American forces near the Laotian border, in emergency situations, to take necessary counteractions "in the exercise of the right of self-defense" against enemy attacks from across the line. Such counteractions included artillery and air strikes and maneuver into Laos while actually engaged and in contact with enemy forces. An emergency was considered to exist when, in the commander's judgment, the urgency for action in self-defense precluded prior approval. Under the new authority, Laotian villages were not to be attacked except when fire was being received from them or when it was essential for the preservation of US/Free World forces. Any other operations in Laos continued to require prior Washington approval. In May, the Joint Chiefs had asked the Secretary of Defense to grant blanket authority for immediate pursuit into Laos. Secretary McNamara replied that existing authorities seemed adequate. He added that he would give urgent consideration to this matter when the situation warranted it.⁴⁴

In a further effort to hinder enemy use of the Laos Panhandle, the United States in 1966 expanded SHINING BRASS operations. Early in the year, COMUSMACV requested approval to organize three battalions of Nung tribesmen (a South Vietnamese ethnic minority group) for the immediate purposes of securing SHINING BRASS forward launch bases and operating against SHINING BRASS targets on the South Vietnamese side of the Laos border. Supporting this request, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense the recruitment and funding of three 540-man Nung battalions and the deployment of 127 additional US Army Special Forces personnel to advise the

Nung force. Secretary McNamara approved the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendation on 11 April, carefully stipulating that the battalions would be employed only in South Vietnam. Their use in cross-border operations would be a matter for future decision in light of political and military developments. Five days later, the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the deployment of the 127 Special Forces advisers for the Nung battalions.⁴⁵

Commitment of the Nung battalions to actual cross-border operations in Laos hinged on the concurrence of the US Ambassador in Vientiane, William L. Sullivan. On 18 May, he agreed to a COMUSMACV proposal to send the Nungs into the panhandle. However, Ambassador Sullivan, concerned always with limiting American operations to a level that would not compromise Laotian neutrality, imposed restrictions on the size, depth, and duration of the penetrations into Laos and requested advance notice from MACV of the intent to launch incursions. Subsequently, CINCPAC recommended expansion of SHINING BRASS in accord with the Sullivan-Westmoreland agreement.⁴⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff passed this recommendation on to the Secretary of Defense, who approved it on 16 June. Secretary McNamara directed that both he and the Secretary of State be informed simultaneously with Ambassador Sullivan of the intention to launch missions. This action constituted approval of Phase II of the SHINING BRASS concept accepted in principle in September 1965.⁴⁷

The United States relied mainly upon airpower to attack the enemy supply lines in Laos. In addition to the fighter bombers that flew most missions against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, during 1966 ARC LIGHT B-52s played a growing part in the anti-infiltration campaign. The first B-52 strike outside South Vietnam had taken place on 10 December 1965 when the bombers, with the knowledge of Laotian Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, hit an enemy supply area astride the South Vietnamese-Laotian border. Press reports of the bombing in Laos drew objections from Souvanna Phouma. In response, the United States continued B-52 bombings in the border areas of Laos to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail but did not clear most of the strikes with the Prime Minister. Each strike in Laos was made simultaneously with a “cover” strike in South Vietnam to draw press attention away from the Laotian target.⁴⁸

In March and April 1966, COMUSMACV requested permission to use ARC LIGHT strikes to block the Mu Gia Pass, a principal route from North Vietnam into the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Ambassador Sullivan and CINCPAC concurred in these requests. On 8 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized an ARC LIGHT bombing of the North Vietnamese side of the Mu Gia Pass. The strike took place three days later. When General Westmoreland requested a second strike, Admiral Sharp was initially reluctant but was eventually persuaded; and the attack was authorized on 22 April. Although General Westmoreland asked for continuing ARC LIGHT bombing of the pass, CINCPAC believed it would be a waste of bombs, then in short supply. On 30 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff turned down COMUSMACV’s request.⁴⁹

In late April, General Westmoreland began proposing ARC LIGHT bombing of specific enemy targets that had been detected in Laos. Because these targets were well inside Laos, Ambassador Sullivan objected on the ground that Souvanna Phouma would

have to approve the strikes. The Ambassador was reluctant to seek such approval. He also questioned the military necessity for ARC LIGHT bombings in Laos. Nevertheless, as the enemy buildup in Laos became more and more visible, COMUSMACV pressed his case during May and June for ARC LIGHT bombings well inside South Vietnam's neighbor. Again, Ambassador Sullivan did not concur and the requests were not approved. On 16 July, General Westmoreland, calling attention to the rapid enemy buildup in Laos and just north of the DMZ, once again asked permission for the B-52s to strike North Vietnamese logistical and training areas in Laos. At this time, he also requested authority to bomb identified enemy targets in the DMZ west of the populated areas.⁵⁰

Seeking agreement on lifting restrictions, General Westmoreland met with Ambassador Sullivan at Udorn in Thailand on 19 July. He asked the Ambassador to seek Souvanna Phouma's approval for strikes even though there was a risk that the Prime Minister would turn down the request. COMUSMACV also recognized that a refusal by Souvanna would make it even more difficult to continue the B-52 strikes being conducted along the frontier without the Prime Minister's knowledge. One month later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that "the expected damage to be achieved by striking the proposed targets is worth the risk of possible disapproval of future B-52 strike requests in Laos." The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported COMUSMACV's request that Ambassador Sullivan be authorized to consult with Souvanna Phouma about ARC LIGHT attacks against Laotian targets.⁵¹

The military won their case. On 13 September, the State and Defense Departments cabled instructions to Ambassador Sullivan to seek Souvanna Phouma's approval for eight ARC LIGHT strikes in Laos. The Ambassador was to make clear to the Prime Minister that the United States, while not willing to deny completely communist charges of US air operations in Laos, would meet such allegations with "no comment or confirmation." In addition, each B-52 strike would be accompanied by a cover strike in South Vietnam.⁵²

After meeting with Ambassador Sullivan on 15 September, the Prime Minister approved the eight ARC LIGHT strikes. He stipulated two conditions: first, the bombings must be accurate with no mistakes; second, the United States would say nothing regarding the strikes. No mention would even be made to anyone in the Laotian government. Ambassador Sullivan interpreted the second stipulation as a test of the US ability to control security leaks, and he expressed his belief that permission to conduct future ARC LIGHT operations would depend on American compliance with the Prime Minister's requirements.⁵³

Under these arrangements, ARC LIGHT operations in Laos continued through the rest of 1966. Deep bomber penetrations into Laos required Souvanna Phouma's consent, while raids close to the South Vietnamese border went on without the Prime Minister's consent or official knowledge. Ambassador Sullivan closely scrutinized all MACV target requests. Between September and December, the B-52s flew 234 sorties over Laos, with minimal press and public attention.⁵⁴

The Borders: The Demilitarized Zone

In 1965, US authorities had recognized the threat posed by enemy violation of the DMZ and had considered possible counteractions. In September of that year, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had sought authority for attacks on targets in both the northern and southern portions of the zone by “all appropriate military means.” The State Department had opposed such action and the matter had been shelved.⁵⁵

In March 1966, COMUSMACV, citing confirmed evidence that the enemy was infiltrating through the western portion of the DMZ, requested authority for air strikes in this area. CINCPAC concurred with this request, stating that the enemy now had a sanctuary in the DMZ that should be denied. Subsequently, the Director, Joint Staff, informed the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) of the “strong probability” that the enemy was using the extreme western DMZ for infiltration into South Vietnam. The Director requested that State and Defense resolve their differences over the conduct of air operations in the DMZ so that appropriate instructions could be dispatched to CINCPAC and Ambassador Lodge.⁵⁶

In discussions with Defense Department officials, State Department representatives indicated that tactical air strikes against infiltration routes in the DMZ might be compatible with current US policy under certain conditions. These were: 1) concrete evidence the North Vietnamese were using the zone for infiltration so that US strikes could “reasonably and justifiably” be described as counteractions; 2) an adequate record of South Vietnamese protests to the International Control Commission regarding North Vietnamese violations of the DMZ; and 3) preparation of appropriate public affairs guidance in advance of execution of the contemplated military actions. Consequently, the Director, Far East Region (ISA), suggested to the Director, Joint Staff, that, when “firm military intelligence” was available, the JCS submit specific strike proposals to the Secretary of Defense for State Department and White House clearance.⁵⁷

Such evidence was quickly forthcoming. In June, intelligence sources reported that a North Vietnamese division was moving across the DMZ into Quang Tri Province. Following this movement, other division-size North Vietnamese units deployed to the area of the DMZ. COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC and the JCS of this build-up on 13 July and requested authority for tactical air strikes throughout the entire zone. To counter the increased threat, General Westmoreland planned operations in the immediate vicinity of the DMZ. Since his troops might come under enemy fire emanating from the zone, COMUSMACV intended, unless instructed to the contrary, to authorize return fire and maneuver into the DMZ for the purpose of self-defense. CINCPAC supported General Westmoreland’s assessment of the situation. He recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that air operations and artillery fire be authorized against identified military activity in the buffer zone. The US Embassy in Saigon had already advised Washington that the South Vietnamese government had filed hundreds of protests with the ICC of alleged North Vietnamese violations

of the DMZ. Thus, except for the preparation of public affairs guidance, the State Department conditions for military operations in the DMZ had now been fulfilled.⁵⁸

On 20 July, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the approval of the Secretary of Defense and with State Department concurrence, authorized CINCPAC to conduct “air strikes in the DMZ, and artillery fire (land and naval) into that portion of the DMZ south of the line of demarcation,” against clearly defined military activity. Ten days later, the Joint Chiefs authorized US/Free World forces to maneuver into the DMZ south of the Demarcation Line when in contact with the enemy, or when engagement was imminent, if necessary for preservation of friendly forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff forbade any advance north of the Demarcation Line and required withdrawal from the zone once enemy contact was broken. The RVNAF could participate in operations in the southern part of the DMZ on the same basis as US and Free World forces, but the Joint Chiefs instructed CINCPAC to make every effort to assure that the South Vietnamese observed the same limitations as their allies.⁵⁹

On 20 July, in a further attempt to counter increased enemy infiltration through the DMZ and the buildup just north of it, COMUSMACV began Operation TALLY HO—a program of air strikes and reconnaissance in an extended battle area north of the DMZ. The operation was intended to block or disrupt the flow of men and supplies to the south. During the latter part of July and early August, B-52s supported ground operations (HASTINGS and PRAIRIE) in South Vietnam near the DMZ. On 28 July, COMUSMACV requested approval of three strikes against infiltration routes located between 12 and 14 miles north of the DMZ in North Vietnam. Before receiving authority for these attacks, General Westmoreland requested approval of nine additional bombings of targets located within the DMZ near the southern edge of North Vietnam to “disrupt the enemy’s attempts to mass and maintain supply areas for a possible offensive against Quang Tri Province.”⁶⁰

On 2 September, more than a month after COMUSMACV’s request to use B-52s against the infiltration routes in southern North Vietnam, the Department of State objected to the proposal to strike the first three targets. State declared that “at this time such action would be regarded in many circles and the press as escalation and possibly even a misinterpretation as a softening up for more direct military action on the ground.” The State Department explained that such operations would probably work against current South Vietnamese efforts to persuade the International Control Commission to investigate North Vietnam’s use of the DMZ. However, State would reconsider the issue if intelligence established lucrative targets beyond the capability of tactical aircraft.⁶¹

The Secretary of Defense informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 7 September that “in consideration of the views of the Secretary of State ... I desire that no B-52 strikes be conducted against targets in North Vietnam or the DMZ north of the Demarcation Line.” He would consider, however, on an urgent basis, any “specific strike proposals which might be warranted by military developments of a highly

critical nature.” Mr McNamara offered to arrange for General Wheeler to discuss the problem with the President, if the Chairman considered it necessary. On 8 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of this decision. General Wheeler asked the two commanders to send to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as soon as possible any urgent and critical requirements for ARC LIGHT missions in the forbidden areas. He said that, if circumstances warranted, he would take the matter before the President as the Secretary of Defense had proposed.⁶²

General Westmoreland acted quickly upon the Chairman’s request. On 13 September, he re-emphasized the growing threat presented by the North Vietnamese troop buildup in Quang Tri Province. He cabled to CINCPAC that the enemy’s “buildup, disposition of forces, forward stockage of supplies, AA weapon systems being deployed southward and depth of patrol penetrations indicate by all accepted standards that the enemy is developing an offensive as opposed to a defensive posture.” MACV intelligence had verified that the enemy was trucking supplies up to the Demarcation Line and then moving the goods south by porter, bicycle, and animals over a well-worn trail network. General Westmoreland asked for approval of ARC LIGHT strikes against the transfer point to clear the concealing jungle canopy and open the area for strikes by tactical aircraft. He believed that the target could be described as “highly critical,” thus satisfying the Secretary of Defense’s requirements.⁶³

Evidently, COMUSMACV’s request met the Defense Secretary’s criteria. Late in the evening of the 13th, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the ARC LIGHT attack against the transfer area. The strike, which straddled the Demarcation Line, went in on 16 September. This bombing took care of only one of the nine B-52 targets for which COMUSMACV had requested strike authority on 21 August. On 17 September, he asked to bomb the remaining eight because of their “highly critical nature.” Three of the eight were approved for execution that same day. The B-52s continued to strike north of the DMZ and within its boundaries throughout the rest of 1966. Of 68 targets recommended by COMUSMACV in the last month of the year, six were in the DMZ and four in North Vietnam.⁶⁴

With ARC LIGHT aircraft operating against enemy targets in the DMZ and the southern part of North Vietnam, the danger arose that the North Vietnamese would deploy SAMs within range of the relatively unmaneuverable B-52s. Indicating the reality of this threat, late in September B-52 crews flying close to the DMZ reported that the enemy was trying to track them and that they were receiving signals from the radars used by the SA-2 missile system. On 10 October, a SAM installation was observed about 12–15 miles northeast of Dong Hoi. Tactical aircraft attacked the site two days later. On 18 October, two US pilots reported observing what they believed was a missile in flight approximately 16 miles north of the 17th parallel. The missile could have come from an installation located no more than six to eight miles north of the DMZ.⁶⁵

The following day, ARC LIGHT forces were to conduct a mission, LIGHT SIGHT, in the vicinity of the suspected missile installation. Although CINCPAC assured the

Joint Chiefs of Staff that adequate measures had been taken to prevent a B-52 shoot-down, the JCS disapproved execution of LIGHT SIGHT. Explaining their decision, the Joint Chiefs stated, "considering the world-wide publicity which would result from the loss of a B-52 to SAM action ... this strike should not be undertaken prior to 2 November 1966." During December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized other B-52 raids within and north of the DMZ because intelligence sources concluded that either the SAM installation had been reported erroneously or it had been moved.⁶⁶

In early September, CINCPAC sought permission to conduct "SHINING BRASS type" ground reconnaissance to a depth of 20 km north of the DMZ. This reconnaissance could identify and direct air strikes against enemy infiltration targets. Washington, however, disapproved the request. In response to a further request by CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 20 October asked the Secretary of Defense to approve operations by US-advised reconnaissance teams in the southern half of the DMZ. They also proposed sending all-indigenous teams supported by US-manned helicopters into the northern half of the zone and into North Vietnam to a depth of 20 km.

The Joint Chiefs recognized the political risks of such action but considered that the critical need for "hard intelligence" of the area outweighed the risks. They informed the Secretary of Defense that ground reconnaissance teams could not only verify intelligence obtained by technical means but could also direct immediate air strikes against appropriate targets. The Joint Chiefs added that relatively few US troops would actually be committed to these operations and those only in a supporting role with no US personnel on the ground in North Vietnam. Such reconnaissance missions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, would represent only an extension of the type of operations currently authorized for OPLAN 34A and USAF search and rescue helicopters.⁶⁷

This request became the subject of lengthy debate at the State-Defense level, and a decision was not reached until late January 1967. The State Department objected to sending reconnaissance teams north of the Demarcation Line. As a result, on 28 January 1967, the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved only "ground reconnaissance operations with US-advised teams in the DMZ south of the Demarcation Line."⁶⁸

Despite the US air strikes in the DMZ, artillery fire into the southern portion of the zone, and air operations just north of it, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong continued to operate in the area and to construct fortifications and antiaircraft positions within it. In one day, 11 November 1966, antiaircraft fire from the DMZ destroyed four US aircraft. Intelligence confirmed that the enemy had the ability to construct additional artillery emplacements just above the DMZ which could fire on US and ARVN forces to the south.

On 29 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out to the Secretary of Defense that, with allied land and naval artillery fire restricted to the southern portion of the DMZ, the enemy had been able to improve his field fortifications, particularly antiaircraft positions, making it "extremely hazardous" for forward

air control aircraft to operate in areas north of the zone. The Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the enemy was aware of the US restrictions and was taking advantage of them, together with the cover of bad weather, to develop additional positions north of the Demarcation Line. They requested authority to employ artillery and naval gunfire against clearly defined military activity in that area. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) was prepared to support the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposal, subject to State Department concurrence. However, at the year's end, State still had not replied.⁶⁹

During 1966, US officials considered defoliation as another possible way of inhibiting enemy use of the DMZ, especially the infiltration routes through the zone. The allies had practiced defoliation in South Vietnam and Laos since 1961, clearing approximately 630,000 acres. Defoliation operations had become routine, and the defoliants used were believed at the time to be harmless to human or animal life. Defoliation in the DMZ would remove the dense vegetation there, exposing enemy activity and permitting more effective countermeasures. In August 1966, General Westmoreland suggested to Ambassador Lodge defoliation in the southern half of the DMZ. Mr. Lodge recognized the military advantages of such an operation, but he feared that inadvertently the northern part of the zone might be sprayed, resulting in North Vietnamese charges of chemical warfare. As an alternative, General Westmoreland suggested the defoliation of a large area just south of the DMZ. Ambassador Lodge found this acceptable.⁷⁰

Both the State Department and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) supported the alternate defoliation proposal, but CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff favored COMUSMACV's original suggestion. On 22 September, the Joint Chiefs informed the Secretary of Defense that current defoliation guidelines were adequate to minimize adverse political effects. They requested that he obtain State Department approval for defoliation operations in the southern half of the DMZ. The Chairman suggested to Secretary McNamara that he might present the proposal to the State Department as an action that would assist the International Control Commission as well as COMUSMACV. Mr. McNamara accepted the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposal and on 4 October requested the Secretary of State to concur. He assured Secretary Rusk that such defoliation had political as well as definite military advantages, was defensive in nature, and would assist the ICC.⁷¹

On 18 November, the Secretary of State gave his concurrence. While Secretary Rusk could foresee some unfavorable political reaction to these operations, he believed the reaction could be managed so long as defoliation of any area of North Vietnam was avoided. Implementing this agreement, the Departments of State and Defense jointly authorized defoliation operations within the southern portion of the DMZ, subject to positive control to prevent inadvertent spraying north of the Provisional Demarcation Line. The actual defoliation did not begin until 5 February 1967.⁷²

Meanwhile, on 4 October, Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland had sought Washington consideration of a proposal for defoliation of the northern half

of the DMZ and specified infiltration routes in North Vietnam. Again, the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the proposal. To the Secretary of Defense, they argued on 10 November that the recommended defoliation would aid visual and photographic detection of movement, thereby assisting all other efforts to restrict enemy use of the DMZ. In the light of Secretary Rusk's insistence on limiting defoliation to the area south of the Demarcation Line, Secretary McNamara deferred action on this proposal, pending evaluation of the military and political consequences of the currently authorized operations.⁷³

The Anti-Infiltration Barrier

In addition to authorized military operations, another possible method of impeding infiltration was the construction of a defensive barrier along the 17th parallel in South Vietnam and Laos. Such barriers had long been a feature of counterinsurgency warfare, most recently in Algeria. Washington officials and COMUSMACV had considered the idea of a barrier in the vicinity of the DMZ in 1965. They had rejected the plan as militarily infeasible, and as a "visible, fixed, long-term" violation of the 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos.⁷⁴

Secretary of Defense McNamara raised the question of a barrier again in the spring of 1966. In late March, he requested the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to assess the establishment of "an iron-curtain counter-infiltration barrier across northern South Vietnam and Laos from the South China Sea to Thailand." The Secretary asked the Chairman to determine the effectiveness and engineering feasibility of such a barrier, the time required for construction, and the requirements for construction units and for troops, materials, equipment, and weapons to man the barrier, without weighing dollar costs or the political aspects.⁷⁵

On 18 April, the Chairman forwarded to the Defense Secretary a barrier study prepared by the Joint Staff. The study described a 500-meter wide cleared and mined strip, bounded by two barbed wire entanglements. At the rear edge of this strip would be a chain-link electrified fence with watchtowers or bunkers and lighting for night observation. The barrier would employ a variety of detection devices and booby traps and would be emplaced along the north side of Route 9 for a total length of 225 miles. A lesser barrier on the south side of Route 9 would protect the troops guarding the main barrier from rear attack. The Joint Staff estimated that, overall, such a barrier would require: from two to four years for completion, including assembly and deployment of forces; approximately 206,000 tons of construction materials; 271 engineer battalion months for construction; and a minimum of three US divisions to man it.

The Joint Staff doubted that a barrier would be effective or worth the cost in terms of men and materials. The study pointed out that a barrier could only stop large-scale infiltration, not small groups. The Joint Staff also believed that, with a barrier in place, the enemy would increase his infiltration by sea and through Cambodia. COMUSMACV,

COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and CINCPAC's component commanders all opposed the fixed barrier concept; and the Joint Staff concluded that construction and maintenance of a barrier would require a dangerous diversion of large forces from current missions. According to the study, additional troops, if made available, could be employed to better advantage under concepts previously recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Staff recommended that a barrier system not be undertaken. In submitting the study to the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman supported this recommendation.⁷⁶

Secretary McNamara raised the barrier issue again in the summer of 1966. He had come to doubt that ROLLING THUNDER could halt or diminish infiltration from the North or break Hanoi's will to continue supporting the war. Searching for alternatives, he asked the JASON Division of the Institute for Defense Analyses to study several subjects related to the war in Vietnam, including the feasibility of an anti-infiltration barrier.⁷⁷

The JASON Summer Study, forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 30 August, confirmed Mr. McNamara's doubts about the bombing of North Vietnam and presented a concept for an air-supported anti-infiltration barrier. The concept provided for a barrier with two different parts—one against foot traffic and one against vehicles. The anti-personnel portion would run along the southern edge of the DMZ and part way across Laos. The anti-vehicle portion of the barrier would be an area in Laos of about 100 by 40 kilometers where the road network was more constricted than elsewhere and there was a smaller area available for new roads. While not radically different from previous barrier proposals, the JASON concept contained some new aspects. They included: "the very large scale of area denial," especially mine fields kilometers deep rather than the conventional 100–200 meters; the persistent employment of large numbers of weapons, sensors, and aircraft sorties in the barrier area; and the emphasis on rapid and carefully planned incorporation of more effective weapons and sensors into the system.

The antipersonnel system of the barrier would encompass a constantly renewed field of nonsterilizing small mines covering interconnected valleys and slopes along the entire barrier (the actual mined area would be equivalent of a strip 100 by 5 km). A pattern of acoustic sensors would listen for attempted penetrations as indicated by mine explosions. The anti-vehicle system would consist of acoustic detectors distributed every mile or so along trackable roads in the interdicted area, monitored 24 hours a day by patrol aircraft. Strike aircraft would respond to signals of truck or truck convoy movement. Patrol aircraft would distribute self-sterilizing small mines over parts of the road net at dusk (the self-sterilizing feature was needed so that road-watching and mine-planting teams could be used in this area), and reconnaissance aircraft would cover the entire area each few days.

The authors of the JASON study believed that construction of such a barrier could be initiated using currently available or "nearly available" components, with some necessary modifications. It could be installed within "a year or so" from go-ahead at an estimated cost of \$800 million per year. The study recommended establishment of a task force to carry out detailed design and planning of a barrier, to experiment with and decide on modifications of present components, and to design and accelerate develop-

ment of modified new components to be fed into the barrier. After a few months, and if the prospects still appeared promising, the task force could be merged into a task force charged with helping the operating forces implement the system.⁷⁸

Secretary McNamara was favorably impressed with the JASON barrier concept. On 3 September, he forwarded the concept, though not the entire study, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He believed that the proposal had “sufficient merit to warrant a decision that we will accept the plan or some modification thereof in principle and install it at the earliest practicable date.” He requested the views of the Joint Chiefs on the project, and asked that they prepare them in consultation with CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. If the Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred in this plan, said the Secretary, he would form an organization to expedite plans and supervise the several concerned DOD components.⁷⁹

Secretary McNamara began action on the barrier before he received the reply of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On 15 September, he established Joint Task Force (JTF) 728 (unclassified designation: Defense Communications Planning Group) to “achieve the objective of having” an interdiction system “to stop (or at the minimum substantially reduce) the flow of men and supplies from North to South Vietnam.” The Secretary of Defense directed that the system be designed, produced, and emplaced in South Vietnam and Laos by 15 September 1967. Mr. McNamara named Lieutenant General Alfred D. Starbird, USA, as Director of JTF 728. He authorized General Starbird to report directly to him and to have direct contact with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military services. The Secretary of Defense assigned the project the unclassified name PRACTICE NINE.⁸⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were obviously not enthusiastic about the barrier concept; but, as Secretary McNamara later noted, they “did not actively oppose it.” On 17 September, they informed the Secretary of Defense that they would concur with the concept so long as the barrier was in addition to, and not a substitute for, “any major US or Free World military effort” in Vietnam. They stated that logistical support for the barrier should be sufficient to preclude diversion of critical materiel and strike forces from other combat operations. The Joint Chiefs recognized the “historic use of barriers and the potential inherent in this concept,” but they shared with CINCPAC a concern over its practicality. Although they considered the 15 September 1967 operational date given General Starbird optimistic, they acknowledged that the concept might have “the potential of shortening the war and that proceeding in the manner directed will provide a quick determination of validity and accelerated development of the associated hardware.”⁸¹

JTF 728 proceeded with its task at once. On 29 September, General Starbird provided the Secretary of Defense with a preliminary report, including a draft program with initial estimates of personnel, equipment, and facilities needed to establish and maintain the barrier. Several weeks later, after further refining requirements, General Starbird requested and the Secretary of Defense approved immediate funding authorization for certain research and development and production activities.⁸²

These actions gave the Joint Chiefs of Staff concern. On 10 October, they informed the Secretary of Defense that the JTF 728 draft program would hamper current combat operations by committing critical resources “without prerequisite determination of prac-

ticality.” They recommended modification of the JTF 728 terms of reference to require determination of feasibility prior to commitment of resources, to allow adjustment in the initial operational date, and to provide that the JTF project definition plan be submitted to the Secretary of Defense through the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Secretary McNamara agreed with the Joint Chiefs of Staff that feasibility of the barrier project should be determined before commitment of resources “to the extent it applies to feasibility of components of the interdiction system (munitions, sensors, aircraft modifications, etc.).” The Defense Secretary also instructed General Starbird to make his reports, including the project definition, available to the JCS at the same time they were submitted to him. The Joint Chiefs remained concerned that the barrier would divert essential weapons and materials from current programs, but they decided to reserve their views for the overall consideration of JTF 728’s project definition plan in November.⁸³

Meanwhile, when the Secretary of Defense visited South Vietnam in October, COMUSMACV suggested an alternate barrier plan. General Westmoreland’s proposal included: “a physical barrier, in the traditional sense, on the eastern end of the line where the country is relatively flat and open . . .; secondly, an extension to the northwest from the Laos-South Vietnam border, which would be laid by air and policed by air”; and “a center section through the mountains to the east of the Laos-South Vietnam border” consisting of a series of physical obstructions in the mountain passes. At the Secretary’s request, General Westmoreland refined his proposal into a requirements plan that he submitted on 25 October.⁸⁴

General Westmoreland’s plan assumed that additional forces, over and above COMUSMACV’s operational requirements, would be provided for the barrier construction and manning. But, because of the strength ceilings imposed by Program Four, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV on 18 November that additional forces would not be available to meet the requirements of the barrier plan. Instead, COMUSMACV should plan to meet all PRACTICE NINE requirements from within approved in-country strengths. Subsequently, both General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp protested against this decision, but to no avail.⁸⁵

On 14 November, General Starbird submitted his Project Definition Report to the Secretary of Defense. In it, he analyzed four approaches to a barrier system: the Prescribed Plan, a modified version of the JASON concept providing for a ground-emplaced linear barrier south of the DMZ on the 30 km adjacent to the coast, an air-emplaced antipersonnel barrier from the linear barrier westward into Laos, and an anti-vehicle barrier in Laos; COMUSMACV’s barrier plan; and two alternate proposals that were phased composites of the Prescribed and MACV Plans. The first alternate, titled the Phased Installation Plan (PIP), called for a ground linear barrier from the South Vietnamese coast to the Laos border similar to the MACV proposal. In Laos, the PIP provided for installation of the originally conceived air-supported anti-vehicle portion by 1 November 1967 and the antipersonnel portion by 1 April 1968. The second alternate, the Phased Installation Plan (Modified) was identical to the PIP, except that both the anti-vehicle and antipersonnel portions in Laos would be installed by 1 November 1967.⁸⁶

After reviewing and comparing the requirements of the four proposals for personnel, major equipment, facilities, construction, and unprogrammed funding, General Starbird recommended adoption of the Phased Installation Plan. Secretary McNamara, however, requested JCS views on any increases in programmed forces required to execute the Phased Installation Plan (Modified) and any other comments or recommendations they wished to make.⁸⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff took advantage of the opportunity afforded them to express again their dissatisfaction with the whole barrier concept. On 1 December, the Joint Chiefs recommended that the plan not be approved for execution and, instead, that current efforts to reduce infiltration be continued and expanded. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the United States could provide the forces required for the barrier from Program Four only by jeopardizing existing programs. The troops could not come from out-of-country sources because of equipment and sustaining base limitations. The Joint Chiefs considered the technical and operational feasibility of the plan open to question and the estimated piaster cost of the plan dangerous to the already critical inflation in South Vietnam. They concluded that the barrier would not produce benefits commensurate with the diversion of effort and increased costs involved, and with the loss of military initiative and momentum in current programs.⁸⁸

After considering the JTF 728 Project Definition Plan and the subsequent JCS comments, the Secretary of Defense directed General Starbird to prepare a revised barrier plan. The plan was to minimize the impact on other Southeast Asia missions and require only minimum additional forces from the United States. General Starbird submitted the revised plan on 22 December. It provided that materials for the linear portion of the barrier should be procured and in-country by 1 July 1967, but without a commitment for deployment. Aircraft and other resources unique to the air-supported portion of the barrier were to be developed and prepared on a schedule to permit operational availability in-theater by 1 November 1967—again without a decision for deployment. Under the 22 December plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to task COMUSMACV and CINCPAC to prepare plans for the conventional linear barrier by 10 February 1967 and for the defile barrier in South Vietnam and an air-supported barrier in Laos by 15 April 1967. The Secretary of Defense would have deployment decision points of 25 February 1967 for the linear barrier and 15 July 1967 for the air-supported barrier, looking toward an operational date of 1 November 1967 for both. The field commanders were to submit to the Secretary of Defense requests for “minimum essential augmentation forces” beyond those currently programmed.⁸⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were still dissatisfied with the barrier plan. At a meeting on 6 January 1967, they reaffirmed their opposition to a barrier until plans could be properly evaluated. They stated that, if the Secretary of Defense had decided to construct a barrier, then they would proceed as directed; but since he had not made such a decision, they wished their concern to be understood. Rather than repeat at length their position, the Joint Chiefs, on 9 January 1967, merely called the Secretary’s attention to their views on the barrier as stated on 1 December. They also requested certain

minor revisions in the 22 December plan. Apparently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not expect Secretary McNamara to reverse his support for the barrier; they had already instructed COMUSMACV and CINCPAC to prepare the interdiction plans called for in the 22 December plan.⁹⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff expectation proved correct. On the same day they forwarded their latest comments, the Secretary of Defense directed General Starbird to prepare a barrier in accordance with the 22 December plan. He did, however, request General Starbird to make the minor changes that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had requested. Underscoring the importance attached to the barrier project, the Deputy Secretary of Defense requested and the President approved on 13 January the designation of PRACTICE NINE “as being in the highest national priority category.” After nearly a year of planning and debate, the United States, in spite of objections by its highest uniformed military leaders, was fully committed to building an anti-infiltration barrier in South Vietnam and Laos.⁹¹

Logistics Issues, 1966

By the beginning of 1966, the United States had made much progress in establishing and expanding the logistics base to support both the additional forces sent to South Vietnam and the growing air campaign against North Vietnam. The problems that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had identified in early 1965 had either been solved or were well on the way to solution. In their stead, the accelerated tempo of the war raised additional problems during 1966. Many of these problems, although primarily theater or service level, required decisions and actions by DOD. While their own involvement and influence varied from problem to problem, the Joint Chiefs of Staff maintained an intense interest in all logistic matters relating to the war in Vietnam. They took every action possible within their authority to forestall logistic difficulties or, when problems arose, to reduce the adverse effects on military operations; and they devoted much attention to several critical problems.¹

The Construction Boss

Despite hurried planning, a lack of trained personnel, sometimes insufficient funds, and a scarcity of needed materials, the United States had made remarkable progress during 1965 in constructing its operating base in South Vietnam. US forces had improved and expanded the three existing jet-capable airfields at Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, and Da Nang and had built new ones at Chu Lai and Cam Ranh Bay. As 1966 began, another jet field was under construction at Phan Rang. Erection of cantonments and logistic facilities had proceeded at Da Nang, Chu Lai, Qui Nhon, Cam Ranh Bay, Phan Rang, and in the Saigon area. Progress in port and depot construction was slower in 1965. Additional facilities had been planned at Saigon and other ports, but by the end of the year only part of the Cam Ranh Bay project had been completed. Port congestion would continue to be

a major problem throughout 1966. In spite of all the work done, MACV at the beginning of 1966 had a construction backlog of 212 battalion months.²

The growth of the construction program in South Vietnam was largely unplanned and weakly coordinated. It began modestly in the late spring of 1965, but in later months expanded by leaps and bounds, exceeding all previous planning considerations. COMUSMACV charged his component commanders with responsibility for facilities construction, assigning the Army II, III, and IV Corps, the Navy I CTZ, and the Air Force airfield construction. The MACV Engineer Office under the J-4 was supposed to ensure proper coordination; but the Engineer, a colonel, lacked the rank and staff to do so. Many problems resulted. Construction agents competed for limited supplies of scarce materials, as well as for real estate, engineer units, port access, and transportation. There was no joint construction plan or agreed upon set of priorities. By late 1965, it was obvious that the United States needed more effective management of the overall construction program to assure optimum use of resources and to respond quickly to new requirements.³

The Secretary of Defense reviewed the construction situation during his visit to Vietnam in November 1965. His trip confirmed the view, previously urged upon him by his staff, that MACV needed a “construction czar,” separate from the J-4 directorate, to supervise all US construction in South Vietnam. At Secretary McNamara’s direction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff verified the requirement for a general/flag officer under COMUSMACV with “clearly defined authority and functions for planning and managing the MACV construction program.” This officer, whom the JCS entitled the “MACV Engineer” (subsequently named Assistant Chief of Staff for Construction), would supervise and direct all DOD construction commands and agencies in South Vietnam, both military and civilian, except for construction/engineer units organic to or assigned to major combat units. The MACV Engineer would determine present and future construction requirements for US, RVNAF, and Third Country forces and allocate tasks, manpower, and resources among the services. The Joint Chiefs presented their findings to the Secretary of Defense on 20 December 1965 and requested his approval of the MACV Engineer concept.⁴

COMUSMACV agreed with the need for improved coordination and supervision of the MACV construction program. However, General Westmoreland, initially supported by CINCPAC, who later changed his position, preferred to continue the existing arrangement under which the MACV J-4 managed the effort, assisted by an engineer officer. COMUSMACV also requested an expansion of his J-4 staff and control over all DOD funds allocated for construction in South Vietnam. He opposed a “construction czar” separate from the J-4 because construction could not be separated from other aspects of logistics. In addition, he was concerned that the “czar” would function as an independent agent of the Defense Department rather than a subordinate of his own.⁵

The Secretary of Defense decided in favor of the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposal. On 6 January 1966, Deputy Secretary Vance approved the establishment of an “engineer construction boss” under COMUSMACV. Mr. Vance specified that the construction boss had full authority to discharge the responsibilities placed upon him and that such

authority rested in him and not in the MACV J-4. On 15 February, the MACV Directorate of Construction went into operation, with Brigadier General (major general designee) Carroll H. Dunn, USA, as Director of Construction. Subsequently, General Westmoreland, with OSD agreement, placed the Construction Directorate under his J-4 and appointed Major General Dunn to head the J-4 directorate.⁶

Before April 1965, DOD programmed and funded construction in Vietnam through the standard line-item peacetime controls. As construction expanded rapidly after April, the Department authorized modified line-item controls, seeking to reduce some of the more restrictive provisions inherent in the peacetime system. Following approval of the MACV engineer construction boss in January 1966, the Secretary of Defense published new interim construction approval procedures for Vietnam. The new procedures restructured the FY 1965 supplemental, the FY 1966, and the FY 1966 supplemental programs into broad functional facility category groups and gave COMUSMACV control of the restructured programs within the approved dollar ceilings. Although these procedures were issued only as interim guidance to serve until the end of the current fiscal year, they apparently continued in effect throughout CY 1966.⁷

At a Honolulu meeting on 8 July, CINCPAC presented to the Secretary of Defense a status report on construction in South Vietnam. Secretary McNamara considered the program too large and too expensive. He requested that CINCPAC “take a hard look” at his requirements and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff review these requirements “most critically” before forwarding them to him.⁸

In accordance with the Defense Secretary’s direction, CINCPAC reviewed the construction program and prepared status reports and requirements for the Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Cam Ranh Bay, and Saigon complexes. After studying these reviews, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the requirements defined therein were consistent with the force levels approved in Program Three. Informed of the Joint Chiefs of Staff opinion, Secretary McNamara apparently found the requirements satisfactory. He ordered no retrenchments in the South Vietnam construction program.⁹

Airfield Construction

To accommodate expanding air operations, the United States needed additional jet-capable fields during 1966. The field that was under construction at Phan Rang as the year began became operational in March. In November 1965, the Secretary of Defense had authorized construction of still another jet airfield in South Vietnam; but US military authorities in theater and Washington took five months to agree on a site. Not until 27 April 1966 could the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend Hue/Phu Bai to the Secretary of Defense as the preferred location for the new field. The Joint Chiefs asked the Secretary to secure State Department concurrence with this site. Since Ambassador Lodge had objected to Hue/Phu Bai because of the political unrest in the area, the Joint

Chiefs proposed Tuy Hoa as an alternate location; although they, COMUSMACV, and CINCPAC all preferred Hue/Phu Bai.¹⁰

By mid-May, with the I Corps political crisis still going on, the State Department had not replied on the Hue/Phu Bai site. In order to get on with construction and avoid the problems of Hue/Phu Bai, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 May asked the Secretary of Defense to authorize construction of the field at Tuy Hoa using Air Force Turnkey procedures (construction by a civilian contractor). Deputy Secretary Vance approved the Joint Chiefs of Staff request on the following day and authorized the Secretary of the Air Force to contract for the Tuy Hoa field. The Air Force let the contract on 31 May. CINCPAC was able to deploy the first tactical fighter squadrons to Tuy Hoa in November 1966, although the field did not become fully operational until 1967.¹¹

Facilities and Ports

Construction of supporting facilities in South Vietnam proceeded at a satisfactory rate in 1966. By the end of the year, the United States had erected cantonments for 463,500 personnel. It had completed 10.4 million square feet of warehouses, 36.9 million square feet of open storage, and 5.5 million square feet of ammunition storage. Also finished by the end of the year were 26 hospitals (8,240 beds), 280,000 kilowatts of electrical generating capacity, and \$27.1 million worth of communications facilities.¹²

In 1965, the most serious hindrance to the development of a logistics base in South Vietnam had been the lack of adequate ports. The rapid buildup of men and equipment, coupled with extensive reliance on coastal shipping for resupply, had quickly overtaxed South Vietnam's limited port facilities. At the beginning of the US buildup, Saigon and Cam Ranh Bay were the only two deep-draft ports, plus Da Nang, where ships could discharge in the stream. During 1965, US authorities made extensive plans to develop existing ports and construct a number of new ones; but by the beginning of 1966, only the project at Cam Ranh Bay, providing two additional berths, had been completed. In 1966, however, the earlier plans began to bear fruit as a number of new port facilities became operational. At Da Nang, Chu Lai, Cam Ranh Bay, Phan Rang, Vung Ro, and Vung Tau, new piers, LST ramps, and channel dredging nearly tripled cargo handling capacity. Although the congestion was not eliminated by the end of 1966, the port situation had improved considerably.

The Saigon complex was South Vietnam's major port, and it had quickly become overloaded in 1965. COMUSMACV had formulated plans for improving the Saigon port, including construction of an augmenting facility, known as Newport, to handle military cargo. However, few of these facilities had been finished by the beginning of 1966. Besides inadequate facilities, the Saigon port suffered from poor handling procedures and a lack of coordination with shipping agencies in the United States. As a result of all these problems, vessels remained at anchor, fully loaded, for days or weeks, serving as floating storage until their cargoes could be off-loaded. Demurrage fees mounted and

vital materiel did not reach the front-line forces in a timely fashion. General Westmoreland viewed the Saigon port congestion and the resulting supply backlog as his most serious logistics problem in the coming year.

By February 1966, Saigon was showing substantial improvement. Some additional port facilities were completed, terminal service units arrived to assist in port clearing, and agencies in the United States instituted a policy of loading ships for single port discharge. As a result, only 9 vessels were waiting in port for off-loading in February as compared to 25 in October 1965. Throughout early 1966, COMUSMACV pressed South Vietnamese officials, including the civilian port director, to improve operating procedures, gradually producing beneficial changes. In July, by agreement with the South Vietnamese government, MACV assumed responsibility for discharge and clearance through the Saigon port of all AID cargo consigned for use in the counterinsurgency program. The military handling of this cargo benefited the commercial port by freeing South Vietnamese manpower and equipment for use on commercial cargo.¹³

These improvements, along with completion of the first facilities at Newport in October, partially alleviated the Saigon port situation. In December, however, Vietnamese dockworkers and stevedores went on strike over a labor dispute, and backlogs again built up. As the year ended, 29 ships with commercial cargoes were waiting to get into the Saigon port.

To eliminate the congestion, the United States considered a complete takeover of the port. At the Secretary of Defense's direction, COMUSMACV prepared a plan for control of the Saigon port by the US military. The plan, submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 5 January 1967, called for COMUSMACV to assume responsibility for all commercial water terminal operations within the Saigon port complex. Although COMUSMACV prepared the plan, he did not favor its implementation. General Westmoreland pointed out that the plan would require US personnel and equipment not available in-country or approved by the Secretary of Defense. He also feared that a US takeover of the civil sector of the port would have adverse political implications, causing people to lose confidence in the Saigon government. Ambassador Lodge shared COMUSMACV's political concern, and the United States pursued the matter no further.¹⁴

A Common Supply System

During the rapid 1965 buildup, US supply procedures evolved to meet immediate needs rather than as the result of an orderly plan. This evolutionary development brought many problems, in response to which arose the idea for a common supply system. This concept envisioned a single supply system for all United States and Third Country forces in place of the current arrangement under which each Service supplied its own contingent, often with duplication of effort.

During the summer of 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff studied the logistic support for operations in South Vietnam. On 19 October, they recommended to the Secretary of

Defense the establishment of a common supply system. The Joint Chiefs proposed to assign to the Department of the Army responsibility for development and implementation, in coordination with CINCPAC and the other Services, of a single supply system for all US, RVNAF, and Third Country forces in South Vietnam. Recognizing the need for a single supply system for common items, the Secretary of Defense on 9 November 1965 requested the Army to develop a time-phased plan for such a system. Secretary McNamara specified that funding for the system should be on a common-service (non-reimbursable) basis.¹⁵

The Army Chief of Staff prepared the required plan and submitted it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 14 January 1966. It provided for the development of supply requirements, programming, budgeting, funding, and provision of designated supplies through a “single integrated logistic system.” The US Army would operate the system in support of all US, South Vietnamese, and third country forces in Vietnam. As to the scope and range of items to be included in the system, the plan presented three alternatives. The first included 20,000 line items; the second had a potential of 1.4 million line items; and the third was the same as the second with the addition of approximately 2,000 Army-managed major end items. The plan called for implementation of the system in three phases: an initial phase to begin on 1 March 1966, covering subsistence, general supplies, special services material, and clothing (items currently handled by Headquarters Support Activity Saigon, a Navy organization) plus packaged POL products; an intermediate stage, beginning about 1 January 1967, with an expanded range and scope consistent with the capabilities and resources made available to the Army; and a possible final phase, to be implemented if the size of the operations required it, in which the Army would establish in South Vietnam a theater logistic organization with direct access to supply sources in the United States.¹⁶

On 4 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded the Army plan to the Secretary of Defense, recommending implementation of the initial phase. They also recommended that supplies included in the system be furnished on the basis of reimbursement at the departmental level. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary that the Army was developing detailed resource requirements for the three alternatives and that, upon receipt of this information, they would recommend further implementation of the common supply system.¹⁷

On 28 March, the Secretary of Defense approved implementation of the initial phase of the Army plan. He directed that the system be operated on a cross-service funding (reimbursement) basis; and he tasked the Department of the Army to develop, in coordination with the other Services, a cross-service funding procedure that would meet legal requirements without being unduly burdensome. The Secretary also directed that movement and other logistic services furnished by one US Service to another in South Vietnam should be on a common-service funding (without reimbursement) basis.¹⁸

Following this decision, the Army established and began operation of a common supply system in Vietnam. The Army furnished to US forces in the II, III, and IV CTZs support in the categories of subsistence, packaged petroleum products, and general

housekeeping supplies. The Army also supported third country forces as specified in appropriate country-to-country agreements. By summer, the Army was planning to extend the common supply system to I CTZ.¹⁹

CINCPAC opposed this extension. He believed that the current Navy-operated supply system was providing responsive support for the forces then in I CTZ. He saw no reason to change the arrangement, particularly since the Navy system was geared to support the Marines—the principal US force in the corps area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, considered that the benefits of extending the common supply system into I Corps outweighed the objections. Consequently, on 22 September, they directed CINCPAC to implement the initial phase of the common system in I CTZ with a target date of 1 January 1967. They did allow CINCPAC some leeway to adjust this date as necessary in order to insure uninterrupted supply support.²⁰

Also on 22 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense time-phasing and resource requirement annexes to the Army plan for the common supply system. After discussing the three alternatives presented in the annexes, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval of the first alternative. This alternative provided for an increase in the range of common-item support to a total of 25,000 items, beginning on 1 July 1967 with full implementation by 31 December of that year.²¹

Before the Secretary of Defense replied, he reviewed the Army's implementation of the current common supply system. He recognized that the Army was making progress in establishing stock control procedures but believed that these procedures were not sufficiently advanced to permit a large expansion of the system at that time. Consequently, on 12 December 1966, Secretary McNamara told the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the common supply system must remain limited for the immediate future even though its expansion was still a valid long-term goal. He restricted the system to its current coverage (subsistence, packaged POL products, and limited-range housekeeping materials) plus the addition of a full range of medical supplies. The Secretary also pushed back to 1 April 1967 the deadline for expansion of the common system into I CTZ, and the Joint Chiefs revised their instructions to CINCPAC accordingly. While thus delaying expansion of the scope of common supply, Secretary McNamara directed that planning continue for its "early extension." He added that he and the Secretaries of the Military Departments could work out the details between them without the direct involvement of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.²²

The Air Ammunition Shortage

During 1966, a critical shortage developed in Southeast Asia of air-to-ground munitions. This shortage adversely affected air operations in South Vietnam, Laos, and North Vietnam and required strong remedial measures by the Department of Defense. Although authorities in the theater seemed to have realized in late 1965 and early 1966 that various factors, particularly increased sortie rates and deployment of additional air

squadrons, were leading up to a shortage of air munitions, the emergency took Washington officials almost completely by surprise when it actually materialized in April 1966.

On 26 January, Admiral Sharp informed Secretary McNamara that increased requirements would probably cause shortages in air munitions during the coming year. He was considering measures to limit ARC LIGHT sorties and to improve target selection procedures. He believed, however, that if deliveries of programmed bomb production stayed on schedule, the problem would be eliminated by the beginning of 1967. By 1 March, the predicted shortages had developed. COMUSMACV reported that air munitions were becoming “critically short generally.” When Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance visited Saigon on 3 April, he learned that the air munitions shortage was indeed critical and that production could not meet requirements before early 1967. The commands were reducing bomb loads of strike aircraft and using substitute munitions. Secretary Vance was advised that only 73 percent of the required stocks of bombs and only 33 percent of the required stock of CBU-2 cluster munitions were available.²³

On 8 April, General Westmoreland described to Admiral Sharp and General Wheeler the seriousness of the munitions shortages and their effects on his operations. “The lack of USAF aircraft munitions in SEA,” he reported, “has reached the point where I consider it an emergency situation.” COMUSMACV said that the theater had taken all possible actions, including emergency airlift, to redistribute resources. Despite these actions, within the past four days, the command had been compelled to cancel or not schedule 233 strike sorties. The sorties that were flown were less effective because they used substitute weapons. The shortage was so acute that, when recent munitions shipments had been delayed, missions had been cancelled. “Your immediate intervention is requested,” General Westmoreland concluded.²⁴

General Westmoreland’s message caused considerable consternation in Washington. Secretary of Defense McNamara promptly informed COMUSMACV that he was “shocked by the evidence of maldistribution of air ordnance,” and that DOD would take immediate action to assure the needed supplies of munitions. The Secretary named Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L) Paul Ignatius to head up a high-level task force to analyze and solve the munitions problem. Mr. Ignatius was to meet at once in Hawaii with representatives of CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and the Services.²⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also took quick action. On 8 April, as a short-range measure to alleviate the immediate shortage, the Joint Chiefs authorized CINCPAC to divert and commit to operations by any of his components in Southeast Asia “appropriate air munitions resources in PACOM” regardless of ownership. They specifically authorized him as a temporary measure to take over reserves being held in support of US forces in Korea. With regard to the forthcoming Hawaii munitions conference, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that detailed requirements would be developed and matched against assets and production. They informed CINCPAC that “various options to cut pattern to cloth will be examined.” On this point, Secretary McNamara cautioned CINCPAC the next day that cutting pattern to cloth did not mean that he should plan to curtail necessary operations in anticipation of future munitions shortages.²⁶

Although Secretary McNamara had attributed the shortage of air munitions to maldistribution, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the problem was occasioned by four main factors: 1) inadequate production; 2) problems in the ammunition pipeline to Southeast Asia; 3) distribution within Southeast Asia; and 4) the sortie level in Southeast Asia. The shortage was not so much in gross tonnages of bombs, which on the surface seemed adequate, but in types of bombs and bomb and rocket components. In certain types of munitions, for example, a commander might have 1,000 bombs of which only one-third had all essential components while the remainder lacked parts such as tail cones, fuzes, or arming wires.

On 14 April, the Joint Chiefs delegated to CINCPAC full authority to assign non-nuclear air munitions, and adjust resources, among his component commanders, the allied contingents, and CINCSAC's B-52 forces. Further, the JCS directed him to: 1) establish base operating stock levels to be maintained by his component commanders and CINCSAC forces in PACOM; 2) establish consumption rates consistent with available munitions; and 3) adjust tasks and missions for component commanders and ARC LIGHT forces accordingly.²⁷

At the Hawaii air munitions conference on 11 and 12 April, the assembled officials encountered considerable delay in assembling valid production and asset data. This problem inhibited the allocation of munitions among the users. The conferees finally decided upon six courses of action: 1) development of realistic sortie plans, by month, weapon, and Service; 2) provision of operating stock levels; 3) increase of WESTPAC stocks by drawing down on CONUS stocks; 4) provision of better management for production of bomb components; 5) establishment of a realistic pipeline; and 6) acceleration of production. After the conference, the Secretary of Defense on 15 April released significant USN and USAF stocks in the United States and authorized priority shipment to Southeast Asia.²⁸

On his return from the Hawaii conference, Assistant Secretary Ignatius established a central Air Munitions Office, using key members of his own staff and experts from the Services, to develop, oversee, coordinate, and expedite measures to eliminate the air munitions shortages. This office concerned itself particularly with production priorities and distribution problems. In a further effort to alleviate ammunition shortages, the President, at the request of the Secretary of Defense, placed eight critical ammunition items in the "highest national priority category." The eight items included three bomb categories and the 2.75 rocket.²⁹

Analysis of the problem and the adoption of emergency measures did not immediately improve the situation. In April, the commands in Southeast Asia canceled or did not schedule hundreds of sorties because of lack of proper ordnance. They made extensive transfers of certain types of ammunition between Services and among various locations. They scheduled only the most lucrative and pressing targets for attack and put stringent measures into effect to conserve air ammunition. Despite the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorization of 8 April, CINCPAC on 22 April denied a CINCPACAF request to

withdraw war reserve munitions from Korea for use in Southeast Asia. He feared that such action would yield few benefits and might have adverse political effects.³⁰

On 24 April, CINCPAC submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff his plan for air munitions distribution and consumption during the remainder of 1966. It provided for transfer of CINCLANT, CONUS Navy, and CONUS Air Force stocks to CINCPAC as directed by the Secretary of Defense and included production information that was forecast as of that date. CINCPAC allocated, by area and Service, combat sorties for which air-to-ground munitions were required, based on the capability of squadrons either deployed or approved for deployment. By now, CINCPAC had been allocated all available air munitions from the United States, and the munitions were being moved to him in accord with his requests. His future plans would have to depend on production. At the 11–12 April Hawaii conference, CINCPAC had accepted as satisfactory for planning a loading factor of 1.66 tons of ordnance per sortie. However, owing to the shortages, it now appeared that he would have to use a somewhat lesser loading factor. CINCPAC noted that he had the choice of either light-loaded sorties or fewer sorties with full loads. He had decided not to reduce the number of sorties, but he would accept underloading.³¹

On 2 May, CINCPAC provided the Joint Chiefs of Staff his plan for tactical aircraft sortie requirements and capabilities in Southeast Asia for the period April–December 1966. After reviewing CINCPAC's 24 April and 2 May submissions, the Joint Chiefs on 10 May forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a capability plan for Southeast Asia. Covering the remainder of the year, the plan consisted of a combat sortie program, a supporting monthly air munitions expenditure plan, and an air munitions requirements and expenditure summary. The plan was designed to make the best possible use of available ammunition resources while maintaining an optimum sortie rate without resorting to underloading. With reference to the use of light-loaded sorties to keep up programmed sortie rates, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued an ambiguous opinion. They told CINCPAC on 10 May that he should require "full use of aircraft capabilities whenever such use will provide the optimum return for effort expended." Secretary McNamara approved the Joint Chiefs of Staff capability plan on 24 May as the sortie plan for the remainder of 1966.³²

On 23 June, to speed ammunition deliveries to South Vietnam, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L) requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Military Departments to reduce the current pipeline time for air munitions to Southeast Asia from 90 to 60 days during the period July through September. Both the Joint Chiefs and the Services took appropriate action to implement this request.³³

Despite the various actions taken in April, May, and June, the ammunition situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate until mid-year. In late June, the list of air ammunition items in short supply had grown to 13 (as compared with one in December 1965). It included nearly every type of conventional air ordnance, and the overall stockage levels in the Seventh Air Force³⁴ had fallen to 15 days—against a 45-day objective. When Secretary McNamara visited CINCPAC headquarters on 8 July, he learned that although "every productive action" was being taken, CINCPAC had not yet been able

fully to regulate and adjust the distribution of available air munitions. Of 44,000 tons of bombs scheduled for expenditure in June, only about 37,000 tons actually had been dropped. Although commanders possessed the correct gross tonnage, the right ordnance was not available to the operating squadrons in time to be used as planned.³⁵

From this point on, the situation began to improve. Accelerated production in CONUS and increased ammunition inventories in WESTPAC permitted overall stockage levels in the Seventh Air Force to reach 20 days by 15 July and 30 days by 15 August. By early September, the United States had over 130,000 tons of air munitions on hand in Southeast Asia, with an additional 114,000 tons in transit. Because consumption for July and August had not exceeded 45,000 tons per month, the United States had on hand a 90-day supply of air munitions. In addition, in each succeeding month the US produced more air munitions than it consumed.³⁶

By late 1966, the Southeast Asia ammunition supply had improved remarkably. In a review of air munitions distribution, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Secretary of Defense on 5 November that, although overall consumption in tons in Southeast Asia was still less than planned, consumption of preferred munitions items was at or near CINCPAC's requirements. The Chairman, however, did not consider that the situation justified any reduction in air munitions production at this time. General Wheeler noted that once CINCPAC's continuing consumption requirements had been satisfied, other theater and Service inventories that had been drawn down to meet the war's shortages would have to be reconstituted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had also instituted a number of actions to assure that the Southeast Asia air munitions inventory and the future flow did not exceed CINCPAC's requirements and his capacity to receive and store munitions. CINCPAC, the Joint Staff, and the Services, in conjunction with the Installation and Logistics Munitions Office, continued to monitor closely the figures for actual versus planned shipment and consumption. Conforming to Secretary of Defense guidance, the Military Departments programmed air munitions not required for the war zone to meet other world-wide shortages or to build up Service war reserve stocks.³⁷

Introducing the M-16 Rifle

In 1966, the United States first issued the M-16 (M16E1) rifle to its forces in Vietnam. The M-16 was an accurate, high-velocity automatic weapon. It weighed less than six pounds, was easy to maintain, functioned easily, and resisted the corrosive effects of the jungle climate. Although technical problems would develop with the rifle in field service,³⁸ the issuance of the M-16 made it possible to eliminate the M-1 and M-14 rifles, the M-1 and M-2 carbines, the Browning automatic rifle, and the submachine gun from the ground force inventories in South Vietnam.

At COMUSMACV's request, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 10 January approved the issue of M-16s to the forces in South Vietnam. Since the existing stock of the rifle was limited, a contract was let for production of an additional 100,000 M-16s during 1966.

At the same time, the Joint Chiefs approved expansion of production and funding to provide the necessary 5.56 mm ball ammunition used in the M-16. The Defense Department included an additional 123,000 M-16s with supporting ammunition in its FY 1966 Supplemental Appropriation request.³⁹

In August 1966, COMUSMACV issued the first M-16s to the RVNAF and third country forces in South Vietnam. He allotted the RVNAF, ROKFV, and PHILCAG each 170 M-16s for training, and in September he issued 200 to the Australians and 20 to the New Zealand contingent, plus 1,410 additional M-16s to the RVNAF, ROKFV, and PHILCAG. In the US forces, replacement of the M-14 with the M-16 slowed down in the fall of 1966 owing to difficulties in production of 5.56 mm ball ammunition. This difficulty would be overcome in early 1967, when approximately 100 million rounds per month were expected to be available.⁴⁰

Transfer of MAP and AID Responsibilities

During 1966, the Department of Defense assumed responsibility for a number of functions in South Vietnam which had formerly been under other programs or agencies. The most significant of these was the support of the RVNAF and third country forces. Although the commitment of US ground troops shifted American attention to combat operations, MAP support for the South Vietnamese forces continued. As operations had expanded during 1965, so did RVNAF strengths and the accompanying MAP funding. In addition, the Military Assistance Program also supported the growing third country forces in South Vietnam. As a result, the FY 1965 MAP for South Vietnam grew from an originally planned \$214.9 million to \$372.5 million, and the planned FY 1966 MAP expanded in proportion.⁴¹

In December 1965, the Secretary of Defense decided that the time had come to transfer funding for support of the South Vietnamese and the allies from the MAP to the budgets of the Military Departments. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, in collaboration with the appropriate Assistant Secretaries of Defense, the Services, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV, developed a concept to accomplish this transfer. Submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 3 March 1966, the concept assumed that the unexpended balance of MAP FY 1966 funds (as of 31 March 1966) would be transferred to the Military Departments. The Services then would “plan, program, budget, and fund” for support of the RVNAF and third country allies.⁴²

The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the JCS concept on 25 March (revising this approval on 16 April), and on the same day the President signed the FY 1966 Supplemental Authorizations and Appropriations Act. Effective with the signing of this act, the Services assumed responsibility for the former MAP support effort in South Vietnam. It was not possible, however, to adjust the complex MAP administrative machinery so arbitrarily. The Services took the next year and a half to develop formal procedures to carry out this new responsibility.⁴³

On 30 November, the Secretary of Defense assigned to various DOD elements responsibility for certain programs in South Vietnam hitherto performed by the Agency for International Development. These programs included measures to improve port operations, civic action programs, and railway sabotage repair; the conduct of a cadastral survey of An Giang Province; commodity support for the South Vietnamese police; highway maintenance; refugee assistance; air traffic control; electrification; military affairs in revolutionary development; and Vietnam television. The DOD assumption of responsibility was retroactive to 1 July 1966. In cases where AID had incurred costs since 1 July, the DOD would reimburse AID at the local (Vietnam) level.⁴⁴

By the end of 1966, the United States had greatly expanded its logistics base in South Vietnam to meet the vastly increased requirements. This base would require further development and refinement in the next 18 months to meet further increases in US forces, but this expansion would not be of the scale of 1965 and 1966. The Joint Chiefs of Staff watched logistics developments closely and participated in resolving many problems. They had a minimal role in other cases, however—such as efforts to reopen South Vietnam's land lines of communication and the Services' establishment of systems for rapid delivery of critical supply items. At the end of 1966, certain problems still needed resolution. These included additional port construction, the alleviation of port congestion, and the securing and opening of roads and railroads for land movement of men and supplies. These matters would be pursued in the coming months.

ROLLING THUNDER, July 1966–January 1967

After repeated argument and recommendation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Johnson administration had granted authority to attack the Hanoi and Haiphong POL facilities. The Joint Chiefs of Staff welcomed this expanded authority, hoping that it would lead to further relaxation of the curbs on ROLLING THUNDER. But the bombing of targets close to two enemy population centers evoked loud protests and charges of escalation, not only from the communists but also from neutrals and a growing number of American opponents of the war. These outcries disquieted some of the President's advisers. As a result, during the next several months the administration delayed or denied increased authority for air operations against North Vietnam. Reinforcing the tendency to inhibit ROLLING THUNDER during this period, certain authoritative assessments of the bombing's impact on North Vietnam deprecated its effectiveness and value.

Attacking the POL—RT 51

ROLLING THUNDER 51, which became effective on 6 July 1966 with no conclusion date set, called for a “concentrated effort” to destroy North Vietnam's POL systems, including dispersed facilities. The program assigned four bridges, three of them within the Hanoi circle, as fixed targets. It expanded the armed reconnaissance area to include all of North Vietnam except a 25 nm buffer zone along the Chinese border and the sanctuaries around Hanoi and Haiphong. CINCPAC's forces could strike all JCS targets previously assigned in ROLLING THUNDER packages except locks, dams, two Army barracks, and the POL storage facilities at Hanoi and Haiphong. IRON HAND air defense suppression operations were authorized throughout the armed reconnaissance area without photographic confirmation. Separately, the Joint Chiefs of Staff

authorized Admiral Sharp to fly BLUE TREE reconnaissance over all North Vietnam except for a buffer zone of 20 nm from the Chinese border.¹

The POL campaign started slowly. After seeing CINCPAC's early reports of RT 51 strikes, General Wheeler expressed concern to Admiral Sharp that so few POL targets had been bombed. Daily reports sent to the White House and the Secretary of Defense had shown little progress in reducing enemy facilities. General Wheeler feared that higher authority might order a specific daily level of effort against POL. "Such an order," he advised CINCPAC, "would be regrettable." The Chairman suggested that CINCPAC step up the POL campaign and submit as soon as possible a "POL strangulation" plan.²

Admiral Sharp assured the Chairman that a rise in POL sorties would be apparent very shortly. He had been concentrating on cutting off the flow of additional petroleum products into North Vietnam, believing that he could dry up the supply faster this way than by using all his efforts against storage. His planes had increased their attacks on the northeast rail lines and roads and also had destroyed much coastal shipping believed to be moving POL. (A true cutoff of POL imports was impossible because throughout the campaign Haiphong and the other ports where Soviet and foreign tankers unloaded were exempt from bombing and mining.)³

CINCPAC's POL strangulation plan, forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late July, envisioned four interrelated actions: 1) reduce/limit POL importation; 2) destroy fixed POL targets; 3) destroy transitory POL targets; and 4) conduct a POL reconnaissance program. Reduction of imports required attacks on offshore loading facilities at ports, particularly around Haiphong and at Hon Gai and Cam Pha, attacks on coastal and channel shipping, and interdiction of the northeast and northwest rail lines to China. Bombing of fixed POL targets would reduce their residual capacity. Transitory targets would include boats, trains, trucks, and temporary storage areas.

On 24 August, General Wheeler presented Secretary McNamara with a progress report showing a great increase in attacks against fixed POL targets. The report stated that RT 51 had averaged over 2,400 sorties per week. Of these, 54 percent had gone into Route Package 1 near the DMZ to isolate the battlefield. These attacks had included POL as a matter of course. The remaining sorties had been distributed among other areas of North Vietnam, with POL targets receiving the highest priority. The northeast Route Packages, which had the greatest residual storage capacity, had been hit by an average of 246 sorties per week despite bad weather in that area. In summary, "CINCPAC is applying his full weight of effort against ... NVN, with emphasis on isolating the battlefield in the south and attacking the over-all ... POL system, including distribution." About 66,000 metric tons of residual storage capacity remained in all categories of POL targets, and 17,000 metric tons of this capacity had not been authorized for attack. "We are chipping away at the POL storage capacity," the report concluded, "but based on estimated consumption, at present we are probably destroying only the surplus storage capacity."⁴

RT 52 Proposals

On 8 August, Admiral Sharp recommended an expanded program to follow RT 51. He asked for strikes against POL facilities at Phuc Yen and Kep, the locations of more than one-third of the residual POL in JCS targeted storage areas. CINCPAC also recommended bombing two locks, dredges in the Haiphong area, the Hon Gai port railroad shops, and the Haiphong port warehouses. On 18 August, the Chairman directed the Joint Staff to develop a new package, RT 52, and that the package include the appropriate targets from the CINCPAC proposal.⁵

The resultant Joint Staff proposal called for a far-reaching program of strikes against major targets, combined with a reduction of sanctuaries in North Vietnam (to a 10 nm racetrack pattern around Hanoi-Phuc Yen, a 4 nm circle around Haiphong, and a 30/25 nm wide buffer on the Chinese border). Additional features would make RT 52 the most effective ROLLING THUNDER package to date. These included 19 fixed targets, all of high value and most clustered around Hanoi and Haiphong. The Joint Staff proposed for attack areas of the port and thermal power plants at Haiphong and portions of the Thai Nguyen steel plant, as well as ports, locks, storage areas, and important depots. On 19 August, the Joint Chiefs approved the Joint Staff's RT 52 proposal; they presented it to the Secretary of Defense three days later. Secretary McNamara directed that the plan be held in abeyance for the time being. It remained under study and discussion for nearly three months.⁶

ROLLING THUNDER Disparaged

The delay in deciding on RT 52 reflected in good measure Secretary McNamara's growing doubts about the value of the ROLLING THUNDER campaign, doubts reinforced during the summer by two authoritative studies. Early in the summer of 1966, the Secretary of Defense had asked the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) to assess the effects of bomb damage on North Vietnam. This assessment, prepared by the JASON Summer Study Group,⁷ reached the Secretary on 30 August. The group's consensus was that ROLLING THUNDER was ineffective and that it would remain ineffective even if air operations against North Vietnam were expanded. The Summer Study Group told the Secretary that

Under these circumstances, we as a group have grave doubts about the usefulness of continuing and expanding ROLLING THUNDER as one of the military instruments for speedier termination of the war in the South. It does not appear to be a productive way to spend our human and material resources, at least now that the political and military situations in the South are more stable and NVN has learned how to make ROLLING THUNDER costlier to us and less effective.⁸

In the following month, a CIA/DIA appraisal reinforced this pessimistic assessment. The intelligence agencies stated that, although ROLLING THUNDER pilots by 12 September had flown more than 73,000 armed reconnaissance and fixed target sorties against North Vietnam, they had achieved little in reducing the enemy's will and capability to support the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos. CIA/DIA officials reported that 78 percent of the JCS targeted POL storage capacity had been destroyed and that Haiphong POL capacity had been reduced by 90 percent. Nevertheless, replenishment by Soviet tankers had prevented North Vietnam from running out of petroleum products. "No evidence of any shortages of POL in North Vietnam had been noted," the report stated, "and it must be assumed that stocks on hand and recent imports have been adequate to sustain necessary operations."

Although the United States had stepped up strikes against the North's lines of communication, the intelligence analysts saw no evidence that the enemy was encountering any serious problems in moving supplies to or within North Vietnam. With Chinese Communist engineering help⁹ and the diversion of a large labor force, North Vietnam had maintained its transport capacity at the level required to meet its essential economic needs and to continue its logistic support of the wars in South Vietnam and Laos. Only two rail lines, one connecting Hanoi with China and another running south from Hanoi to Vinh, were known positively to be interdicted. North Vietnam's other three major rail lines were believed "operable for service." In spite of the increased intensity of RT 51, the CIA/DIA report asserted, "Hanoi retains the capability to continue support of activities in South Vietnam and Laos even at increased combat levels and force structure." According to the CIA/DIA report, ROLLING THUNDER had caused about \$125 million in damage to North Vietnam's economy—damage largely offset by Communist Bloc aid to Hanoi. Hence, the essential economic activities in North Vietnam continued. The CIA and DIA found little evidence that US air strikes had weakened to any degree the North Vietnamese people's morale.¹⁰

By 30 September, US planes had bombed many, but by no means all, the North Vietnamese targets selected by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Of eleven significant airfields, only four had been struck. The remaining fields included the jet-capable bases at Hanoi/Gia Lam, Phuc Yen, Haiphong/Cat Bi, and Kep. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had targeted sixty-one bridges as most important to North Vietnam's transportation system. More than half of these had been totally destroyed, but the enemy had replaced most of them with bypasses or pontoon bridges. Fourteen of eighteen ammunition storage depots had been hit, destroying almost 75 percent of the North's storage capacity. Of the six major ports capable of handling maritime traffic, US forces had attacked only four, with negligible results. The ports at Hanoi (Red River) and Haiphong remained untouched. The Joint Chiefs had targeted 20 thermal power plants, of which 11, including those at Hanoi and Haiphong, had never been bombed. Of those struck, however, seven had been put out of service.¹¹

ROLLING THUNDER planners and responsible commanders shaped their operations under a constant injunction to minimize collateral damage—killing civilians

and damaging civilian installations. The enemy realized this and took full advantage. CINCPAC reported in late October that North Vietnam was using towns and villages to store supplies and conceal SAM installations and as way stops for vehicle traffic. Admiral Sharp had to reply frequently to queries from higher authority as to the reasons for collateral damage. Responding to one such inquiry, he pointed out that the enemy had concealed a rail spur by running it from adjacent yards down a town street. US pilots had bombed the spur, which was loaded with boxcars. "It is apparent in this instance," said Admiral Sharp, "that the exact letter of the restriction against striking targets in populated areas was not followed." Nevertheless, CINCPAC declared, "in my opinion, the pilots made the correct decision. We are at war and some civilians are bound to get hurt. This was a valuable military target and should have been hit.... Every effort will be made in all attacks to minimize civilian casualties but we cannot let every populated area be a sanctuary for the enemy." Whatever the military merits of the admiral's view, reports of civilian casualties and damage in North Vietnam would elicit an international outcry and lead to further restrictions on ROLLING THUNDER.¹²

Concern over US Air Losses

While US policymakers were concerned about North Vietnamese civilian casualties, as 1966 wore on they became even more disturbed by the air losses the US was suffering to inflict a questionable amount of damage on the enemy. These losses had grown as air operations expanded in the northeast quadrant. Enemy antiaircraft fire brought down the greatest number of planes, but the SAMs were also taking their toll. SAM firings had begun to increase in July 1966 concurrent with the attacks on the POL system. By late August, US forces had identified a total of 122 antiaircraft missile sites. Since the first SAM firing in July 1965, the enemy had launched 662 missiles, downing 28 US planes. More dangerous than the missiles themselves was the fact that US pilots, operating over SAM threat areas, had to fly at altitudes below the missile envelope, increasing their exposure to enemy antiaircraft fire. Clearly, the SAM threat was a substantial factor in overall US aircraft losses, apart from those suffered from actual SAM hits.¹³

General Wheeler wanted to be sure that the United States was doing everything possible within the current rules to keep losses down. Up to this point, the increase in enemy air defense capabilities had been matched by improved American tactics and materiel. The Chairman foresaw that, with additional training and materiel improvements, North Vietnamese defenses might outstrip US evasion and deception capabilities. He told Admiral Sharp on 15 September that it would be "most useful ... to have your thinking re characteristics and potential of a strike and EW programs directed against selected elements of enemy assets" that caused US air losses over North Vietnam. General Wheeler asked also for a current review of related factors which would be "particularly timely if our loss rate should increase significantly and generate pressure from various quarters for immediate and ill-conceived response."¹⁴

In his reply to the Chairman, Admiral Sharp confirmed that the enemy had integrated his SAMs, MIGs, and anti-aircraft guns into a coordinated and dangerous defensive system. The SA-2 was forcing aircraft into lethal ground-fire range. US pilots protected themselves from the missiles principally by visually sighting them and taking immediate evasive action. In doing so, they occasionally overlooked MIGs attacking from above and behind. Because of this, several planes had recently been lost to MIGs, and others had been forced to jettison bombs to avoid the enemy fighters. “The key to countering the threat of these three integrated systems,” Admiral Sharp said, “is, of course, defeat of the SA-2.” If this could not be done for technical or other reasons, the United States soon might have to destroy the MIG bases. “We should start now to condition ourselves to this eventuality.” Since all three elements of the North Vietnamese system were imported, the United States must determine how they were being brought in and where they were stored. Then attacks on the storage facilities should have top priority.

The United States was suffering its heaviest losses north of Hanoi in trying to interdict roads and railways in the northeast quadrant. “We need to broaden the pattern of our air operations,” said CINCPAC. “We should decrease the emphasis on keeping the roads and railroads . . . north of Hanoi interdicted and strike targets that are more vulnerable and at the same time very valuable to the war-making capability of the enemy.” These targets included the Thai Nguyen steel plant and the thermal power plants and material stockpiled on wharves, in warehouses, at railheads, and in the port areas. “These are lucrative targets,” Admiral Sharp asserted, “whose value is commensurate with the risk involved.”

The PACOM commander pointed out that the enemy, when he applied his resources fully, was able to repair roads and railways rapidly. The POL campaign had been “attritive” but few worthwhile targets remained. The United States should reorient its air strikes to destroy the enemy’s materiel or his means of producing that materiel. With reference to the enemy’s SAMs, CINCPAC assured the Chairman that his forces were constantly looking for new countermeasures and would continue to do so within their current weaponry and know-how. He did not, however, expect any major improvement in the current situation. A change in the target pattern was the only way to get immediate improvement.¹⁵

General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with his recommendations. The Chairman assured CINCPAC that he was continuing to press for authorization to strike the proposed types of targets in the new ROLLING THUNDER package, RT 52, then under discussion.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Secretary of Defense had developed suggestions for at least changing the pattern of US air losses. In December 1965, OSD statisticians had prepared estimates of future aircraft losses based on limited experience with ROLLING THUNDER. On 17 September 1966, the Secretary furnished the Joint Chiefs of Staff with statistics, based on more recent experience, on monthly attack sorties showing the losses which his statisticians had now predicted for each Service in North Vietnam and Laos. These new numbers showed that US Navy air losses would almost double

those forecast in December 1965, but that the US Air Force would lose fewer aircraft than had been estimated.

The United States had based aircraft production schedules for FY 66/67 on the loss rates shown in the December 1965 estimates. If USN losses exceeded those estimates, the Secretary noted, there would be a "substantial strain in Navy aircraft resources, especially fighters." Secretary McNamara therefore suggested that the Chairman investigate ways of reducing the Navy's aircraft casualties. Possibly, Navy sorties could be shifted from North Vietnam, a dangerous operating area, to Laos, which was less dangerous, or to South Vietnam, which was safer yet. "Compensating increases by the Air Force, if required," the Secretary stated, "would increase Air Forces losses only slightly above the December Plan, and these losses could be more easily absorbed in the larger Air Force force structure." Mr. McNamara asked the Chairman to review air operations to determine the number of probable attack and nonattack sorties in North Vietnam and Laos and possible actions to reduce Navy air losses.¹⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were unable to verify the Defense Secretary's statistics but did not consider them completely reliable. For purposes of their review, they used data based on experience from July 1965 through August 1966. This data showed that shifting USN and USAF attack sortie responsibilities would decrease Navy losses but at the same time increase those of the Air Force. Overall losses would increase slightly since the USAF had a higher loss rate than the USN.¹⁸

On October 9, the Joint Chiefs of Staff furnished the Secretary with the review that he had requested. They explained that accelerated air operations and increased enemy air defenses had caused variations from the loss rates OSD had projected in December 1965. They considered "inadvisable at this time" the exchange of sorties between the Air Force and the Navy that the Secretary had proposed. Such exchange would result in significant operational difficulties. Current restrictions on operations and targeting in northern North Vietnam, they informed the Secretary, forced US aircraft to operate in ways that contributed directly to increased losses. "The limited geographical area and the paucity of targets authorized for strike tend to result in operations by the strike forces which can be predicted by the enemy, and to permit the enemy to concentrate his defenses."

The Joint Chiefs informed the Secretary that a preferable method of reducing both USN and USAF losses would be to broaden the pattern of air operations in North Vietnam as recommended in RT 52. They pointed out that continued interdiction had yielded relatively little return for the weight of effort, particularly north of Hanoi. The United States had taken heavy aircraft losses in cutting the northeast rail lines and other communication routes without commensurate return in damage to the enemy. "By striking targets that are more vulnerable and of greater value to the warmaking capability of the enemy and by reducing geographic restrictions, better results can be obtained with significantly fewer sorties and less attrition," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said. Rather than shift sorties to redistribute aircraft losses between Services, the United States should expand its air operations and targeting patterns. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff and PACOM

commanders at all levels,” they concluded, “are concerned with aircraft losses and are taking appropriate action to minimize loss of US lives and aircraft.” The Secretary of Defense made no formal reply to this study.¹⁹

On 29 September, the Chairman informed CINCPAC that a recent study had shown that the set pattern of US air operations was a major factor in aircraft losses. The two key elements of this pattern were the target systems and the sortie rate. With regard to the latter, the Chairman pointed out that the sortie requirement for CINCPAC’s area had been validated and logistic plans had been made to support that rate. General Wheeler wanted Admiral Sharp to know, however, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not expect him to fly all authorized sorties just to meet the quota and would try to protect him from any pressure to do so. CINCPAC had already asked his component commanders to reduce, insofar as feasible, the risk to air crews. The Chairman asked him also to inform his commanders that there was no “sortie race” in Southeast Asia and to urge them to use ingenuity in overcoming the set pattern into which air operations had fallen. These measures, hopefully, would help reduce air losses.²⁰

Admiral Sharp denied that his pilots or commanders were in a “sortie race.” “What this air campaign needs more than anything else,” he told General Wheeler on 20 October, “is permission to strike some good targets, of which there are plenty; as you well know.” If his pilots had such targets, they would produce maximum destruction with minimum sorties. He concluded that his fliers “are performing superbly with one hand tied behind their back.... The only continuing complaint that I have heard ... concerns the restrictions imposed and their firm belief that air power is not being used at its full effectiveness. In these thoughts I concur.”²¹

Secretary McNamara Proposes to Level Off

In mid-October, General Wheeler received from Secretary McNamara a wide-ranging memorandum on war policy which the Secretary intended to give to the President. He asked for the Joint Chiefs of Staff views but stated that he did not wish to change his expressions of opinion. General Wheeler called the Joint Chiefs of Staff together that same day to consider the memorandum. The results of the Chiefs’ deliberations revealed a deep cleavage between their views and those of Secretary McNamara on the air campaign.²²

In his memorandum, Secretary McNamara stated flatly that, in spite of a sortie rate that had now reached 12,000 per month, ROLLING THUNDER had not “significantly affected infiltration or cracked the morale of Hanoi.” Interdiction of roads and railways and destruction of POL distribution and storage facilities had not crippled the flow to South Vietnam of essential supplies. “Furthermore, ... to bomb the North sufficiently to make a radical impact upon Hanoi’s political, economic and social structure would require an effort which we could make but which would not be stomached either by our own people or by world opinion; and it would involve a serious risk of drawing us into

open war with China.” ROLLING THUNDER had forced North Vietnam to assign some 300,000 people to maintain its lines of communication; but now that the labor had been allocated, changes in US sortie levels would not materially increase the cost to the enemy of keeping supplies moving. On the other hand, each additional 1,000 sorties over North Vietnam would cost the United States an average of four men and \$20 million for no commensurate return. In the light of these facts, Secretary McNamara recommended to the President “as a minimum, against increasing the level of bombing of North Vietnam and against increasing the intensity of operations by changing the areas or kinds of targets struck.” The United States should continue bombing at its existing level, if only as a potential diplomatic bargaining counter “to get talks started (or to trade off in talks).”²³

Addressing the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the Secretary’s paper, General Wheeler noted that Mr. McNamara had appended extracts from current intelligence analyses showing the essential fruitlessness of ROLLING THUNDER. Much of this analysis was based on the estimated replacement cost of military supplies, facilities, and lines of communication that had been destroyed in North Vietnam. General Wheeler had already told the Secretary that he did not agree that the effect of this destruction could be measured by how many dollars it would take to replace these items.²⁴

At their meeting on 14 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared a detailed memorandum for the Secretary expressing their disagreement with some of the advice he apparently intended to give the President. Regarding ROLLING THUNDER, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told Mr. McNamara that the restricted air campaign had destroyed substantial quantities of military supplies and supporting facilities. The bombing had inflicted major damage on lines of communication and had forced North Vietnam to divert at least 300,000 people from agriculture and industry to repair and maintenance jobs. As evidence of the bombing’s real effect on North Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cited the demands and outcries of communists and leftist sympathizers that the bombing be halted. The Secretary apparently intended to advise the President not to increase the level of bombing effort and not to modify the areas or targets subject to air attack. The Joint Chiefs of Staff objected that the air campaign was an integral and indispensable part of the overall war effort. “To be effective,” they said, “the air campaign should be conducted with only those minimum constraints necessary to avoid indiscriminate killing of the population.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recalled that in November 1964 they had recommended a “sharp knock” on North Vietnam’s military assets and war supporting facilities rather than the campaign of slowly increasing pressure that was adopted. Whatever the political merits of the latter course, the Joint Chiefs argued, the United States had deprived itself of the military effects of an early weight of effort and shock and had given the enemy time to adjust to the slow quantitative and qualitative increases in pressure. Nevertheless, it was still not too late to gain some military benefit from a more effective and extensive use of US air and naval superiority. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary approval of RT 52 as “a step toward meeting the requirement for improved target systems.” They also proposed the use of naval surface forces to interdict North

Vietnamese coastal waterborne traffic and lines of communication and to attack other coastal targets such as radar and anti-aircraft sites. In conclusion, the Joint Chiefs asked the Secretary to present their views to the President.²⁵

General Wheeler attended a National Security Council meeting on 15 October. Just prior to this meeting, he talked with the President in company with the Vice President, Secretary McNamara, and Deputy Secretary Vance about the issues in Mr. McNamara's memorandum. President Johnson seemed receptive to striking a "few targets of greater worth" in North Vietnam—specifically the steel plant, a cement plant, and some thermal power plants—despite advice he had received from "some quarters" to forego expanding the target system or increasing the weight of effort. The President was, however, opposed to reducing the sanctuaries around Hanoi and Haiphong. After the NSC session, which focused on President Johnson's forthcoming meeting with allied heads of state at Manila, Secretary McNamara and the Chairman concluded that neither of them would attend the Manila conference. The Chairman then told Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, who would be at Manila, to be prepared to discuss the air campaign with the President "in a broad way." "Since we are committed to a program of increasing pressures," General Wheeler observed, "we should continue to increase pressures rather than staying on a level or decreasing effort."²⁶

Countering the SAM Threat

By the end of October 1966, the North Vietnamese had fired 890 SAMs at US aircraft and the missiles had brought down 32 planes. By this time, US losses to ground fire—many indirect results of the missile threat—totaled 298 attack and reconnaissance aircraft and 78 support planes (SAR, ECM, etc.). The significant increase in SAM firings since July 1966 indicated that the enemy had a considerable stockpile of missiles and necessary support equipment. Because of the continuing concern over the SAM threat, CINCPAC convened a high-level conference at his headquarters in late October to devise better methods of countering the weapon. Experts from the Services, CIA, DOD, CINCSAC, MACV, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff attended this meeting.²⁷

The experts at the conference considered the SAM problem in the context of the overall threat, including automatic weapons, anti-aircraft guns, enemy aircraft, and all related aspects. They concluded that North Vietnam possessed a highly effective air defense system, a major part of which was made up of 28 to 32 SA-2 battalions. Most of these units were concentrated in northern North Vietnam. This system could expand to a possible maximum of 40 battalions, the limiting factor being trained personnel rather than equipment. The Soviet Union was supporting the system with a virtually unimpeded supply of weapons and equipment and had announced its intention to furnish even more sophisticated systems, possibly the SA-3.

Although the United States had not been very successful in destroying SAM sites, US countermeasures and techniques had prevented the enemy's missile system from

shooting down large numbers of aircraft. Currently, CINCPAC was diverting strike forces from other missions to attack occupied SAM sites immediately upon their discovery. This was necessary because sites became “fleeting” targets if not bombed at once. Because of this mobility and enemy skill at camouflage, precise target acquisition by photo reconnaissance was very difficult and would become more so as the enemy improved his techniques.

The conference experts pointed out that SAM sites were rapidly becoming equal in importance to any prime targets in North Vietnam. They concluded, however, that an aggressive campaign against the entire SAM system was not “feasible at this time,” owing to the shortage of planes and proper munitions, difficulty in locating sites, and the mobility of the system. They recommended instead that, if they could be precisely located, the United States should attack the control centers that coordinated the system and designate missile storage and equipment areas as high priority targets for ROLLING THUNDER. The anti-aircraft artillery and SAMs were closely related in the North Vietnamese air defense system, but the number of guns and their concealment made any air campaign to destroy them impractical. For the same reason, the air defense experts rejected as “counter productive” the concept of destroying the entire radar network supporting both SAMs and anti-aircraft guns. As to the other element of the system, the MIGs, a major effort against them would be “unrewarding in terms of reduction of the SAM threat.” The missiles would still deny US strike pilots freedom of action at altitudes above the flak envelope.

The experts pointed out that the most heavily defended areas in North Vietnam were Route Packages 6A and 6B (Hanoi/Haiphong), the northeast quadrant. They recommended that the United States consider “maintaining only significant presence in these areas until we have targets approved that warrant the risk presently involved.” Currently, the US air forces relied on highly sophisticated and effective ECM equipment to thwart the SAM threat. Not all of the planes in the ROLLING THUNDER inventory had this equipment, however, since some of the gear was scarce. The study group noted the Soviet intention to improve North Vietnam’s missile defenses. They suggested that the Soviets might be deterred in this if the United States matched any such improvement by upgrading its own ECM and anti-SAM capability in the theater. In addition, the United States might deter the Soviets by appeals to world opinion branding such a move an escalation of the war, and by making it “hard policy” not to recognize any sanctuary in North Vietnam in attacking improved SAM systems.

The conference report listed recommendations for meeting the SAM threat in the short term. These dealt mainly with policies to be followed in the field of ECM, including installation and procurement of equipment, and the techniques, weapons, and strategies for operations against the system. Among these recommendations, the experts urged that approval be granted for destruction of the North Vietnamese port facilities through which SAMs and their supporting equipment were being imported.²⁸

On 19 November, Admiral Sharp selected some of the recommendations of the conference report and forwarded them to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, urging that they be

given special attention and emphasis. Three days later, he forwarded the entire report with the full recommendations. On 29 November, the Joint Chiefs informed CINCPAC that they concurred in his selected recommendations and were taking those actions that were possible to support them.²⁹

RT 52 Approved and Aborted

On 8 November, following the President's return from Manila, the Chairman renewed his efforts to gain approval of RT 52. In a memorandum to the Secretary, urging him to take the matter up with the President, General Wheeler stated:

the Joint Chiefs of Staff are convinced that we should increase military pressures on North Vietnam. They believe that the military actions designed to reduce still further the capabilities of the North Vietnamese to receive help from out-of-country, to move men and materiel in-country and from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, and to reduce in-country war-supporting facilities and supplies are necessary and feasible—militarily, politically, and psychologically.

The Chairman then explained the RT 52 package in detail, with justifications for each element. He proposed to reduce the restricted areas around Hanoi and Haiphong, to a 10-nm diameter race track pattern around Hanoi/Phuc Yen and a 4-nm circle around Haiphong, thereby freeing for attack numerous “major targets of military worth.” Proposed fixed targets included three SAM support facilities, POL facilities at Ha Gai and Can Thon, selected portions of the Thai Nguyen steel plant and the Haiphong cement plant, two thermal power plants at Haiphong, four waterway locks, selected areas of the Cam Pha and Haiphong ports, and a railway yard and truck park close to Hanoi. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended that naval surface craft be allowed to interdict coastal shipping in the area between 17 degrees 30 minutes North and 20 degrees North latitude.³⁰

Secretary McNamara forwarded the Chairman's memorandum to President Johnson, along with his own comments and recommendations. He based his recommendations, he said, “on my belief that we should limit our attacks to military targets, and within the category of military targets, attack only those which can be successfully destroyed without substantial civilian casualties and the destruction of which will more than offset our probable strike losses.” On these grounds, of the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed RT 52 targets, the Secretary endorsed only the SAM support facilities, the two POL facilities, one bridge, and the Van Dien vehicle depot. He totally rejected proposals to reduce the Hanoi and Haiphong restricted areas. He was willing to authorize naval interdiction off the North Vietnamese coast, but only up to 18 degrees North. Mr. McNamara declared that the Secretary of State concurred in his recommendations.³¹

On this occasion, President Johnson favored his military over his civilian advisers. On 11 November, he approved RT 52 largely as the Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed it. CINCPAC was authorized to strike all of the recommended fixed targets, but with

limiting instructions. He was to bomb the Thai Nguyen steel plant and the Haiphong cement and power plants before 18 November, weather and operational factors permitting. If he did not strike these targets by the deadline date, he would have to secure JCS clearance again before attacking them. Officials were concerned that attacks on the Van Dien vehicle depot, near Hanoi, might cause excessive civilian casualties. Therefore, CINCPAC was told to take extreme care and extraordinary precautions to insure accuracy by his pilots. He received authority to launch a total of 13,200 attack sorties per month against North Vietnam and Laos, interchanging sorties as necessary. Restrikes of Hanoi and Haiphong POL would require specific authorization. The President raised the area of naval interdiction to 18 degrees North, as McNamara had recommended, rather than 20 degrees North as the Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed.³²

The administration added the proviso on striking the four targets before 18 November for political reasons. The United Kingdom (UK) Foreign Minister, George Brown, was to visit Moscow about 20 November, and the administration had judged it undesirable to strike these “politically sensitive” targets in the few days just preceding his arrival in the Soviet capital. The Chairman assured CINCPAC, however, that this did not mean that come “hell or high water” he had to bomb the targets before 18 November. After Mr. Brown left Moscow, there would be no difficulty in getting the targets reinstated.³³

Within a few hours after sending these instructions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to defer altogether strikes on the Thai Nguyen steel plant and the Haiphong targets. General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that this change also stemmed from the visit of the UK Foreign Minister to Moscow and the political sensitivity of the UK/Soviet Co-Chairmanship of the Geneva Conference. The Chairman had been assured, however, that when Mr. Brown left Moscow, about 25 November, clearance to strike these targets would be forthcoming. General Wheeler also asked CINCPAC to keep his public affairs staff from depicting RT 52 as an escalation of ROLLING THUNDER. “As you know,” he concluded,

both domestically and internationally, any time we undertake a slightly different or increased initiative, it is characterized by those opposing US policy as “escalatory.” As you know “escalatory” has become a dirty word; and such charges, true or false, impose further inhibitions here against moving ahead to win this war.³⁴

Political maneuvering over RT 52 continued. On 21 November, the Chairman informed CINCPAC that he had been “approached by the White House” with the suggestion that, as soon as weather permitted, CINCPAC should strike all targets authorized under RT 52 in the shortest possible time, “presumably one day.” The White House had proposed this measure as another means of minimizing the effects of ROLLING THUNDER during Mr. Brown’s visit to Moscow. He had demurred at this suggestion, said General Wheeler, and pointed out that such a concentration of aircraft at one time would present too valuable a target to the MIGs and SAMs. By 9 December, Mr. Brown had come and gone from Moscow, but the four politically sensitive targets were still

being kept inviolate. On that date, General Wheeler raised the question with the President. Because of “certain political problems,” the President refused to approve strikes on these targets. (At this time, the administration was exploring a secret Polish-Italian initiative for negotiations that the US codenamed MARIGOLD.) President Johnson told the Chairman that he would take the matter up with him in the following week.³⁵

Early in December, the President permitted CINCPAC to begin RT 52 attacks near Hanoi, with political results that hamstrung the air campaign. On 13–14 December, US planes bombed the Yen Vien railroad classification yard and the Van Dien vehicle depot, both very close to the North Vietnamese capital. The strikes set off an international uproar, sparking charges that the United States had deliberately bombed a thickly populated part of Hanoi and had killed many civilians. Both targets had been struck earlier, on 2 and 4 December respectively, but the strikes during the second week of December brought a storm of protest. They also effectively ended the MARIGOLD initiative.³⁶

Eyewitness reports of the bombing by western travelers in North Vietnam confirmed Hanoi’s allegations that the American bombers had undoubtedly damaged civilian areas. The United States first declined to comment on the charges, then reluctantly admitted that collateral damage had occurred but had not been intentional, an awkward response that failed to mollify the critics. The noncommunist observers seemed to agree that the United States had struck valid targets and had not deliberately aimed at nearby civilian elements. On the other hand, Soviet and Chinese news reports charged that deliberate bombing had killed many civilians, damaged embassy buildings (including that of Poland), and destroyed homes of people in the target area.

Because weather and operational factors precluded accurate battle damage assessment (BDA), the United States had difficulty assembling full information on what had actually happened near the two targets. Observers on the scene reported that damage inside Hanoi itself was concentrated around the western edge of the Red River Bridge. Just how damage to the civilian structures in the area had been caused could not be established, but it was possible that falling enemy anti-aircraft shells and SAMs had done most of the harm charged against US pilots. During the attacks on Yen Vien and Van Dien, the enemy had fired at least 125 SAMs against US planes, and it was likely that at least some of the missiles had fallen into the city or its suburbs. In addition, the intense anti-aircraft fire also could have created considerable debris. Adding to the United States’ embarrassment, CINCPAC learned on 21 December that its planes attacking the Yen Vien railroad yard had inadvertently struck another target two and one-half miles southwest on the same rail line. The general layout of the targets was very similar, and scattered cloud cover and intense air defense activity in the area had contributed to this error.³⁷

Responding to the intensity of the protests, apart from the question of their validity, the President directed that the rail yard and the truck park not be struck again. On 15 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to suspend attacks on the two targets until further notice. On 16 December, CINCPAC asked permission to attack a number of cargo transshipment barges operating from ship-to-shore and from ship-to-barge, about six miles within the Chinese buffer zone. Because the US policy was to

avoid confrontation with Communist China and because the “Washington climate” was not right at the moment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff denied his request.³⁸

On 23 December, trying vainly to keep MARIGOLD alive, President Johnson directed that no attacks be conducted against targets within 10 nm of the center of Hanoi and that strike aircraft avoid transiting the Hanoi area. This did not limit reconnaissance operations. The President imposed this restriction in hopes that if the United States halted its bombing close to Hanoi for an indefinite period, North Vietnam might agree to begin talking about negotiations. In a telephone call to the President, Secretary McNamara reported that both he and General Wheeler agreed to this action. The Joint Chiefs of Staff warned CINCPAC to communicate this new restriction only to those who must know and to keep newsmen from learning of it. CINCPAC was not told the real reason for the prohibition and naturally assumed that it stemmed from the loud outcries made by the enemy in newspapers and elsewhere.³⁹

The new restriction did not save MARIGOLD, and it brought a strong but futile objection from Admiral Sharp. He protested that the United States had just started to put some real pressure on the enemy, and that the strikes against the rail yard and vehicle depot had hit him hard. “Then,” he said, “Hanoi complains that we have killed a few civilians, hoping that they would get a favorable reaction. And they did, more than they could have hoped for.”

By its success in establishing a 10 nm strike-free area around Hanoi, CINCPAC said, North Vietnam would be encouraged to continue its aggression, hoping to outlast the United States. Facing nearly 400,000 US fighting men in South Vietnam, Hanoi must realize that it could not force a military victory, but it could carry on a protracted guerrilla war, terrorizing and killing the people as well as inflicting American casualties. “This kind of war can go on for a long time,” Sharp asserted, “if we let them get away with it.” The admiral believed that the United States needed to conclude the war as soon as possible because the American people’s patience would not last forever. “The American people can become aroused either for or against this war. At the moment, with no end in sight, they are more apt to become aroused against it.” One way to prevent this result was to keep up the bombing of North Vietnam. If some civilians were killed in the course of the air strikes, that was regrettable but necessary. Admiral Sharp emphasized that “we need to get hard-headed about it. That is the only kind of action that these tough Communists will respect. That is the way to get the war over soonest.” In conclusion, CINCPAC called again for authority to hit all the targets originally included in RT 52. “And then when Hanoi screams in anguish, we should hit them again.”⁴⁰

ROLLING THUNDER Is Weakened

In accord with instructions for the Christmas and New Year truces, CINCPAC suspended all air attacks against North Vietnam. The truce periods ran from 0700 on 24 December to 0700 on 26 December and from 0700 on 31 December to 0200 on 2 January

1967. Coincidentally, during this period the civilian casualty issue flared up again in the United States, fueled by American correspondent Harrison Salisbury's reports in the *New York Times* of devastation he had seen or been told of during a trip to North Vietnam.⁴¹

Planning for ROLLING THUNDER, nevertheless, went on. In spite of Admiral Sharp's protestations, with which he sympathized, General Wheeler, in issuing guidance to the Joint Staff for RT 53, directed a "middle-of-the-road" approach. In this he was merely being realistic. The ongoing furor over civilian casualties that had erupted in mid-December, followed by strong political reaction in the United States, and the impact of the negotiation initiatives, made it highly unlikely that the President would approve a strong ROLLING THUNDER program. The Chairman was also concerned that the administration, for political reasons, might halt the air campaign in the northern and most valuable target areas of North Vietnam, RPs 5, 6A, and 6B.⁴²

Following this guidance, the Joint Staff developed a program which was presented to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for consideration on 4 January 1967. The Joint Staff recommended for strike 18 JCS numbered targets (3 barracks, 4 ammunition depots, 1 storage area, 2 supply depots, 6 thermal power plants, 1 cement plant, and elements of a steel complex). These strikes, if carried out, were predicted to cause a total of 121 civilian casualties.⁴³

The final RT 53 program, approved by the President for execution beginning on 24 January, was a watered-down version of an already mild proposal. It authorized strikes on only nine targets, all of them, from the viewpoint of US military leaders, of low value and innocuous. The targets comprised barracks, storage, and depot facilities for ammunition and other supplies. RT 53 formally recognized the Hanoi prohibited area as a circle 10 nm from the center of the city, while the restricted areas were within 30 nm of Hanoi and within 10 nm of the center of Haiphong. Within these restricted areas, a few lines of communication and some dispersed POL and SAM support areas could be bombed.⁴⁴

Operation SEA DRAGON

Adding to the pressure against North Vietnam, in 1966 the United States began a program of naval gunfire against certain types of targets as an adjunct of the air campaign. On 5 May 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended that US warships bombard the Ile du Tigre as part of ROLLING THUNDER. At that time, the Secretary of Defense approved the recommendation in principle, saying that it would be considered for inclusion in ROLLING THUNDER at a later date. The Joint Chiefs included the bombardment proposal in a number of subsequent ROLLING THUNDER draft planning messages, but the Secretary of Defense invariably disapproved it.⁴⁵

On three occasions in early 1966, US Navy destroyers engaged North Vietnamese shore batteries during search and rescue operations. None of the incidents provoked any adverse political reactions. On 1 May, CINCPAC asked to augment ROLLING THUNDER with naval gunfire, particularly during bad weather. He named specific targets for

bombardment, mainly around Vinh, a major transit point on the route to the Ho Chi Minh Trail and close to the coast. He cited among the advantages: 1) targets heavily defended by antiaircraft would be vulnerable to naval artillery; 2) naval gunfire could deliver large amounts of ordnance accurately, with low collateral risk to nonmilitary targets; 3) naval gunfire was effective during bad weather and darkness; and 4) it was economical compared to air attack costs. Although he expected the enemy to retaliate against attacking ships, CINCPAC was confident that the vessels could protect themselves, making the risk militarily acceptable.⁴⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with CINCPAC's reasoning. On 13 May, they proposed to Secretary McNamara that US warships be allowed to fire against suitable targets ashore and in the coastal waters of North Vietnam between 17 and 20 degrees North latitude (that is, in the southern half of the country). Targets would include radar sites, SAM sites, antiaircraft sites, and lines of communication. In the Joint Chiefs of Staff view, such use of naval gunfire would augment the air campaign and do much to thwart enemy air defenses. The vessels required to carry out this program were already in the Tonkin Gulf, operating in support of aircraft carriers. The Joint Chiefs pointed out that the United States was already using naval gunfire extensively against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. There would be political problems, but they were not very significant in relation to the military and other advantages to be derived.⁴⁷

The Secretary of Defense did not reply to this recommendation for several months. During that time, because of US pressures against the Ho Chi Minh Trail and because of monsoon rains, the enemy made increasing use of the coastal routes through southern North Vietnam and through the DMZ. In late July and early August, CINCPAC and COMUSMACV made additional requests for permission to strike vulnerable routes and other targets with naval gunfire. These included logistic targets in the Vinh complex, ferries, a highway segment, and watercraft used to deliver supplies to the DMZ.⁴⁸

The Chairman, concerned that no action had been taken on Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations for use of naval gunfire, personally raised the question with Mr. McNamara. On 7 September, he recommended that the Secretary take favorable action on the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposals to bombard North Vietnamese coastal targets. He apparently received no direct reply. On 13 September, General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that higher authority had disapproved a request, associated with an ARC LIGHT strike recommendation, to use naval gunfire along the coast just above the DMZ. The Chairman told CINCPAC at that time, however, "I believe that favorable consideration for naval gunfire support along the southern coast of NVN in support of our combat operations can be obtained if CINCPAC and COMUSMACV can limit the area of operation or further specify the targets to be engaged."⁴⁹

CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff finally gained some of what they wanted. On 14 October, the Chairman informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that their recommendations of 13 May on naval gunfire had been approved in part. Naval gunfire interdiction of coastal North Vietnamese military and logistic waterborne traffic south of 17 degrees 30 minutes was authorized. Naval bombardment of shore targets was prohibited, however,

except in self-defense. These operations, conducted under the nickname SEA DRAGON, began on 25 October, with two US destroyers assigned to gunfire missions. On 29 October, CINCPAC specifically authorized SEA DRAGON forces to fire upon logistic craft when beached or moored.⁵⁰

In connection with RT 52, on 11 November, the President raised the limit for naval gunfire operations against waterborne military traffic to 18 degrees North. On 24 November, CINCPAC asked “as a matter of urgency” for authority to use artillery and naval gunfire against clearly defined military activity in North Vietnam north of the line of demarcation in the DMZ. The enemy had placed extensive antiaircraft sites and fortifications within the DMZ and extending approximately seven kilometers farther north. He could emplace additional artillery just north of the DMZ, enabling him to fire on friendly forces south of the zone. On 11 November, four friendly aircraft had been shot down in that area. Because current rules allowed artillery and naval gunfire into the DMZ only south of the demarcation line, the enemy had built up his guns and fortifications without fear of attack. Obviously aware of the self-imposed restriction, he was taking advantage of it, under cover of bad weather, to develop positions north of the demarcation line. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, as “militarily prudent,” the authorization of both artillery and naval gunfire into the DMZ north of the line of demarcation, as CINCPAC and COMUSMACV had prescribed.⁵¹

On 10 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC that his request to use artillery and naval gunfire in North Vietnamese territory had been “not favorably considered at this time.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff did inform CINCPAC, however, that he could employ artillery against weapons firing on friendly forces from positions north of the demarcation line.⁵²

On 7 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again asked the Secretary of Defense for an answer to their 13 May request. At the same time, they reaffirmed their belief that naval bombardment of suitable targets ashore and in North Vietnam’s coastal waters between 17 and 20 degrees North latitude would augment and increase the effectiveness of the current interdiction campaign, with moderate and acceptable risk to ships. They argued that the limited operations already carried out had contributed materially to reducing enemy military and logistic waterborne traffic along the southern coast of North Vietnam.⁵³

The evidence gave support to the Joint Chiefs of Staff argument. During operations from 25 October to the end of December 1966, SEA DRAGON, employing only two destroyers on station, virtually stopped the enemy’s coastal maritime traffic between the 17th and 18th parallels. These destroyers had sunk 382 waterborne logistic craft and damaged 325 others, destroyed five shore batteries and damaged two more, and had destroyed two radar sites and damaged two. These operations, plus continued OPLAN 34A raids, evidently caused the North Vietnamese some concern. They committed additional artillery battalions and organized small-boat militia units for coast defense.⁵⁴

But the wider authority the Joint Chiefs had sought on 13 May had not been granted by the end of the year. In their proposals for RT 53, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again

asked permission for naval gunfire missions against the North Vietnamese coast up to 20 degrees North latitude. The final authority for RT 53 on 24 January 1967 raised the northern limit only to the 19th parallel.⁵⁵

ROLLING THUNDER, 1966—A Recapitulation and Appraisal

The strong pressures to reduce the scope and effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER came at a time when the program's effectiveness, its cost, and the general wisdom of conducting it were also in doubt. Therefore, in connection with RT 53, General Wheeler asked the Joint Staff to furnish him appraisals of the results thus far achieved in the air campaign, the effectiveness of the enemy's air defenses, the costs of the campaign to the United States, and the number of civilian casualties.

The Joint Staff furnished its estimates to General Wheeler on 3 January 1967. During 1966, the staff reported, US planes had flown 81,000 attack sorties and 48,000 combat support sorties against North Vietnam. Since the beginning of ROLLING THUNDER, armed reconnaissance against North Vietnam was estimated to have destroyed or damaged 9,260 trucks, 13,400 waterborne logistic craft, and nearly 2,500 pieces of railroad rolling stock, including 31 locomotives.

According to Joint Staff estimates, through November 1966 ROLLING THUNDER had inflicted measurable losses on North Vietnam amounting to \$184 million, \$116 million in economic costs and \$68 million in military equipment and facilities. In addition, the enemy had suffered additional losses that could not be measured in dollar value but were very real: increased defense costs, loss of production, lower labor productivity, and man hours lost from civil defense actions. About 20 percent of North Vietnam's military forces were directly tied up in defending against ROLLING THUNDER, and about 300,000 civilians had been diverted to repair, reconstruction, and dispersal programs. Over 80 percent of the targeted POL in North Vietnam had been destroyed. Destruction of facilities at Haiphong had more than doubled unloading time for tankers. US air strikes had forced the enemy to disperse his facilities and had thus made it more difficult for him to conduct military logistics and maintenance activities. The enemy had incurred great expense and made major efforts to mount his modern air defenses. He had lost one-third of his total gunboat fleet.

On the other hand, ROLLING THUNDER had not substantially reduced the capacity of North Vietnam's fixed military establishment. In terms of national capacity, no major military target system—barracks, airfields, SAM sites, naval bases, radar, or supply depots—had suffered as much as 25 percent damage. The enemy retained the capability to support the present level of activity in North and South Vietnam. The Joint Staff attributed this situation to the fact that most of the major military facilities were in "sanctuary" areas. The same bombing restrictions had limited ROLLING THUNDER's impact on critical sectors of the economy, and the damage sustained had not yet reached

unacceptably high levels. The cost of bomb damage had been broadly distributed throughout the economy and, more important, foreign aid had more than compensated for bombing losses.

Turning to enemy air defenses, the Joint Staff noted that North Vietnam had between 115 and 120 MIG aircraft, 15 of which were MIG 21s. Since March 1966, the JCS had not sought authority to eliminate the MIG threat by attacks on North Vietnamese airfields. In the meantime, attacks, and the threat of attacks, by MIGs had continued increasingly to hamper ROLLING THUNDER. During the month of December alone, 17 engagements had taken place between US aircraft and communist MIGs; and the enemy interceptors had compelled 44 US aircraft to jettison approximately 91 tons of ordnance. Recently, MIG pilots had been demonstrating increased capability and were now using air-to-air missiles against US planes.⁵⁶ The Chairman was also informed that North Korean pilots were flying MIGs, thereby improving the enemy's combat potential. Nevertheless, the United States still had the combat edge. Between 3 April 1965 and 2 January 1967, the United States lost a total of 13 planes to enemy aircraft as opposed to 34 communist planes claimed by American pilots.

The majority of US air losses, which amounted by 24 December 1966 to 171 aircraft shot down and 450 damaged,⁵⁷ came from the North's 6,900 antiaircraft weapons. These weapons ranged from automatic rifles and heavy machine guns to 100 mm artillery. The enemy had deployed from 25 to 30 battalions of SAMs throughout the country and had established a sophisticated and effective air-warning and ground control intercept capability to support his weapons.

The Joint Staff also provided the Chairman with evidence indicating that the enemy was feeling the effects of ROLLING THUNDER, particularly in South Vietnam. The rate of the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese buildup in the South had dropped substantially, with a net strength increase of 25,300 during 1966 as opposed to a net gain of 110,600 during 1965. Viet Cong population and area control also had declined. In March 1965, the Viet Cong had controlled 26 percent of South Vietnam's population and 60 percent of its land area. In November 1966, according to US estimates, the Viet Cong controlled only 17.5 percent of the population and 48 percent of the area.

As for charges that ROLLING THUNDER cost too much in terms of dollars, the Joint Staff pointed out that during 1966 the cost of inflicting one dollar's worth of damage on North Vietnam had been \$9.50. However, the staff claimed, comparing the Gross National Products of the two countries (\$630 billion for the US and \$1.5 billion for North Vietnam), the US equivalent cost was really two cents for destruction of a dollar's worth of North Vietnamese capability.

With respect to the furor raised "by elements of the foreign and domestic press" over "alleged" North Vietnamese civilian casualties, the Joint Staff declared that the critics espoused the false premise that the United States was attacking the North's civilian population as one of its military objectives. This derogated the very real and costly efforts the United States had made, to the point of further inhibiting the effectiveness of its air actions, to avoid harming civilians, agriculture, and the economy of North Vietnam.

By way of perspective, the Joint Staff pointed out that from 1 January to 25 November 1966, the Viet Cong had killed, wounded, or kidnapped 11,387 civilians in South Vietnam. During that same period, ROLLING THUNDER strikes, according to estimates based on CIA factors, had inflicted about 14,600 civilian casualties in North Vietnam.⁵⁸

Early in 1967, General Wheeler addressed the National Security Council on the air campaign against North Vietnam. He pointed out that Hanoi had organized a propaganda campaign, domestic and foreign, designed to force the United States to stop bombing the North without conditions. This fact, he said, plus other statistics and judgments available, made it clear that ROLLING THUNDER was hurting North Vietnam and making it pay a substantial price for its aggression in South Vietnam. Obviously, Hanoi wanted the air attacks stopped so that the people now repairing and keeping up lines of communication, air defense, and coastal defense could be freed for other employment. If air attacks were halted, North Vietnam would be able to move men and supplies with impunity in a sanctuary. The net result would be that the US/FWMAF and RVNAF would have to face larger bodies of better supplied and supported enemy troops and suffer heavier casualties.

“I believe that the air campaign against North Vietnam is one of two blue chips available to President Johnson to be used in negotiations,” General Wheeler told the NSC, “the other being the presence and aggressive use of US ground troops in South Vietnam. It is my judgment that our air campaign is an integral and indispensable component of our over-all operations in Southeast Asia.”⁵⁹

Efforts toward Negotiation

Even as bombs fell on North Vietnam, President Johnson persisted in his efforts to reach a negotiated solution to the Vietnam War, or at the very least to get talks started about a solution. Neither side changed its position substantially during 1966, although official spokesmen constantly restated those positions. The public exchanges became weapons in a propaganda battle for world opinion. Underlying the propaganda aspect, however, the United States made a serious effort to convey to the other side the sincerity of its interest in a settlement and to convince the enemy of the desirability of negotiation. At the same time, the United States had to avoid implying any prior concessions that could limit its negotiating flexibility if talks developed. Therefore, US officials prepared their statements with great precision to make as clear as possible their exact position on such matters as a bombing halt or withdrawal of forces. At the same time, in a continuing effort to determine the enemy's intentions, American officials weighed every official communist statement with extreme care, searching for subtleties in meaning and possible changes in emphasis that might signal a relaxation or shift in position.

Aside from public exchanges in speeches, interviews, communiqués, and published correspondence, the United States made secret efforts to establish fruitful contacts with North Vietnam. Most of these efforts were pursued through various initiatives sponsored by third countries during 1966. Occasionally these produced a slight positive reaction from the communist side, giving rise to some hope of finally bringing the problem to the conference table. More often, however, the initiatives elicited little or no evidence that the enemy intended to change his stand. The initiatives also foundered on the fact that the United States sought more from negotiations than a face-saving way to give up South Vietnam. At minimum, US officials insisted on the continued existence of South Vietnam as a nation under a noncommunist government of some kind.

Apparently, the military successes of United States, South Vietnamese, and allied forces in the last quarter of 1965 caused the communists to modify their strategy. At conferences in December 1965, Hanoi's leaders reportedly developed a new politico-military strategy for conducting the war and for dealing with its international aspects.

Militarily, the enemy would maintain a continuous threat by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam, avoiding combat except under favorable conditions and then fighting only for limited objectives. The enemy would carry on a prolonged war of attrition. His objective would be to wear down and to convince the United States that it could not win militarily and must eventually settle on terms favorable to Hanoi. For the enemy, the war would have no specific timetable, negotiations would be avoided unless they could be conducted from a position of significant military success, and efforts would be made to limit the risks of an expanded war throughout Southeast Asia.¹

Understandably then, the President's peace offensive and the continuing United States efforts to achieve an acceptable political settlement of the war were ineffective throughout 1966. The President continued his diplomatic efforts, however, seeking to mollify the growing opposition to the war at home and abroad. At home, US policy remained under attack by political and religious leaders, by important segments of the press and other news media, and by a large variety of vociferous quasi-official and private organizations. Some of these critics claimed that the war was a strategic error and a waste of American resources; others cast the United States in the role of an aggressor in Vietnam and contended that the administration was not seriously trying to bring about a peaceful settlement. President Johnson was particularly sensitive to and increasingly concerned by Congressional opposition to US policy toward Vietnam and by public opinion polls that indicated declining public support for the administration and the war. Overseas, officials of friendly and neutral nations were at best lukewarm in their support of the American effort in Vietnam and at worst publicly opposed to it. Notably, UN Secretary General U Thant, President Charles de Gaulle of France, and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India were generally unsympathetic to the US position. They made proposals and launched diplomatic initiatives that the US administration considered inimical to its goals.²

Conditions for Negotiations

The United States continued to express its willingness to negotiate and attempted to persuade its Saigon ally to accept negotiations. During their February 1966 meeting at Honolulu, President Johnson and General Thieu and Air Vice Marshal Ky declared in a joint statement that they regretted "the total absence of a present interest in peace on the part of the Government of North Vietnam" and pledged themselves to continue diplomatic efforts for peace. In a separate Declaration of Honolulu, the United States pledged to support free elections in South Vietnam and to give full support to social reforms. In addition,

The US Government and the Government of Vietnam will continue in the future, as they have in the past, to press the quest for a peaceful settlement in every forum.... The peace offensive of the US Government and the Government of Vietnam will continue until peace is secured.

In a press conference in Honolulu, however, General Thieu and Marshal Ky declared that they could not negotiate with or recognize the National Liberation Front and showed little enthusiasm for negotiations with North Vietnam.³

In late 1965, communist leaders had indicated that, before Hanoi would agree even to talk about ways of ending the fighting, the United States must halt all of its bombing of North Vietnam. On 24 January 1966, Ho Chi Minh sent letters to the governments of various nations, including Great Britain, France, Canada, and the communist countries, in which he laid down Hanoi's conditions for peace. He reiterated the four-point program he had first enunciated in April 1965, emphasizing that before negotiations could begin, the United States must withdraw all its troops from South Vietnam, agree to talk with the NLF, and unconditionally end the bombing of North Vietnam.⁴

An end to the bombing became the central theme of efforts to bring about talks between the United States and Saigon and the other side. A bombing halt was proposed with increasing frequency, especially by UN Secretary General U Thant. Even US officials began to speak of the bombing as a negotiable matter, under certain conditions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, opposed a cessation of attacks on North Vietnam in exchange merely for the other side's agreement to negotiate. Throughout 1966, they continued to insist that the United States should concentrate on forcing the communists to cease their aggression, rather than trying to persuade them to talk about it.

In late January, the Chairman told a Senate committee that it would be both a military and a political mistake to agree to end the bombing as a condition for peace talks. Militarily, it would allow the enemy to bring more pressure than ever to bear on the Saigon government. Politically, it would relieve the pressure on Hanoi to negotiate. General Wheeler said that the United States held three military "blue chips" with which to bargain. These were the bombing of the North, the deployment of US/FWMAF in the South, and the withdrawal, under appropriate circumstances, of those forces. "If you permanently stop bombing North Vietnam," General Wheeler told the Senators, "in effect you throw one of your blue chips for negotiation over your shoulder."⁵

On 18 February, Secretary of State Rusk delineated before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the United States position on Hanoi's four conditions for peace. On the first point, elimination of the US military presence in South Vietnam, the Secretary stated that the United States was prepared to withdraw its troops and dismantle its bases "once there is compliance with the [Geneva] accords by all parties." The United States could also agree with Hanoi's second point, relating to the clauses of the Geneva agreements that forbade Vietnam from making foreign alliances and hosting foreign military bases, again provided that all sides abided by the accords. Hanoi's fourth point called for peaceful reunification to be settled by the Vietnamese people without foreign intervention. Secretary Rusk found this acceptable if it were "clearly understood that conditions must first be created both in the North and South that will make it possible for truly free elections to be held."

Hanoi's third point was the sticking point, which the Secretary of State considered the "core of the Communist position." This point provided that "the internal affairs of South

Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves in accordance with the program of the National Liberation Front.” This really meant, Secretary Rusk said, that before the communists would “even condescend” to negotiate, the Saigon government must be overthrown; the NLF, “the creature and agent of Hanoi,” must become the sole bargaining representative of the South Vietnamese people; and a South Vietnamese coalition government must be formed from which members of the current Saigon regime would be excluded. Since these conditions were opposed to the principles behind the US commitment to South Vietnam, the Secretary’s testimony clearly implied that the United States must reject them. Secretary Rusk did not address the question of a bombing halt.⁶

The Secretary of State spoke on the last day of special hearings on the war in Vietnam by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and he did not convince all of his audience. In particular, Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Committee, continued to be critical of the United States policy in Vietnam. While not yet positive the administration’s current course was wrong, Senator Fulbright recorded grave reservations. After these hearings—and possibly because of them—the trend of Congressional speeches and public opinion polls decidedly favored moderation and negotiation. On 19 February, Senator Robert Kennedy, in what the *New York Times* termed a “dramatic policy break” with the administration, suggested that NLF participation in the South Vietnamese government lay “at the heart” of any negotiated settlement. Ten days later, Senator Wayne Morse introduced legislation to annul the Tonkin Gulf resolution. It was defeated by a vote of 92-5. During the debate, however, Senator Fulbright strongly pleaded for “accommodation” rather than expanded military action. As a solution to the conflict, he proposed that the United States and China agree to neutralize Southeast Asia. In the ensuing months, the Buddhist uprising in I Corps brought forth additional calls for a policy reappraisal by Congress and the news media along with an administration slip in the public opinion polls. Throughout the year, a majority of Americans polled continued to support US engagement in Vietnam, and many of those who disapproved of administration policy favored intensification, not reduction, of military action. Nevertheless, the trends worried the President and his advisers and impelled a continuing search for a negotiated settlement.⁷

Proposals and Counter Proposals

Throughout 1966, the Johnson administration worked hard to convince the world of its sincerity in seeking peace. The President appointed W. Averell Harriman “ambassador for peace” and sent him travelling around the world in search of openings for negotiations. He found none. During the first half of the year, the administration focused its diplomatic attention on an effort by Canadian officials to set up a negotiating channel to Hanoi. The indirect exchanges centered on the question of a halt to US bombing of North Vietnam and produced little beyond some clarification of positions. American officials indicated that they were willing to stop the raids in return for some reciprocal military de-escalation by the other side. The North Vietnamese, however, restated their demand for an unconditional

bombing cessation as a prerequisite for negotiations. The ROLLING THUNDER attacks on POL facilities in June and July effectively closed down this channel.⁸

Early in September, a demarche by French President Charles de Gaulle elicited new official statements of the United States position. During a visit to Cambodia from 30 August to 2 September, President de Gaulle talked with North Vietnamese representatives. On 1 September, in a major speech on Vietnam, he castigated US policy and called for the United States to pledge withdrawal of its forces from Vietnam within a fixed period of time as a prelude to genuine international negotiations. In a joint communiqué with Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk, President de Gaulle also demanded an end to the war in Vietnam, the withdrawal of all foreign troops, and the cessation of "all intervention."⁹

Replying to President de Gaulle's statements, in a speech on September 5, President Johnson said that American troops would "come home" and their bases in Vietnam would be turned over for constructive peacetime purposes as soon as the "vicious aggression" stopped. He declared, "If anyone will show me the time schedule when aggression and infiltration and might-makes-right will be halted, then I, as President of this country, will lay on the table the schedule for the withdrawal of all our forces from Vietnam." On the same day, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Arthur Goldberg, said that the United States would go "anywhere . . . where an honorable settlement can be negotiated." He added, "Our sole aim is to help secure for the people of South Vietnam the right to determine their own future free of external interference. When that aim is accomplished, we are prepared to withdraw our troops."¹⁰

In a speech to the United Nations on 22 September, Ambassador Goldberg reaffirmed that the United States was ready to negotiate without prior conditions. The United States was willing to discuss Hanoi's four points, "together with any points which other parties may wish to raise." In order to remove any obstacle to negotiations, the United States was prepared to cease all bombing of North Vietnam the moment it was assured, privately or otherwise, that the other side would answer promptly by "a corresponding and appropriate de-escalation." The United States stood ready to withdraw its forces "as others withdraw theirs" under effective supervision. As to the place of the Viet Cong in any peace talks, Ambassador Goldberg said on behalf of the President that this was not an insurmountable problem. He concluded by saying that the US position was not inflexible. In the next month, both he and President Johnson followed this same line in several other major speeches. On 24 September, however, both North Vietnam and Communist China categorically rejected the United States position.¹¹

The Manila Conference

Throughout the summer, suggestions had circulated for an Asian conference to deal with Vietnam. These discussions culminated in October in an Asian "summit conference" cosponsored by the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. On 27 September, President Johnson accepted an invitation to attend; and the conference took

place on 24–25 October in Manila. The leaders of seven nations participated in the talks: South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, South Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States—all nations fighting as allies in South Vietnam. As stated by Philippines President Fernando Marcos, the purpose of the conference was to review the military situation in South Vietnam, emphasize the non-military and pacification programs of the South Vietnamese government, and review “the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.”¹²

The Manila conference produced a joint communiqué on South Vietnam, a “Declaration on Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific,” and a “Declaration on Goals of Freedom.” In the joint communiqué on South Vietnam, the United States and its six allies pledged to continue the fight as long as necessary and with enough power to meet any communist challenge, while at the same time seeking a “just peace” through negotiations or reciprocal actions by each side to reduce the violence. The allies declared that they would withdraw forces from South Vietnam “after close consultation, as the other side withdraws its forces to the north, ceases infiltration, and the level of violence thus subsides. Those forces will be withdrawn as soon as possible and not later than six months after the above conditions have been fulfilled.”

In the “Declaration on Goals of Freedom,” the seven nations affirmed “our unity, our resolve, and our purpose in seeking together the goals of freedom in Vietnam and in the Asian and the Pacific areas.” The goals were: 1) to be free from aggression; 2) to conquer hunger, illiteracy, and disease; 3) to build a region of security, order, and progress; and 4) to seek reconciliation and peace throughout Asia and the Pacific. The allies spelled out these goals in more detail in the conference’s third document, the “Declaration on Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific.”¹³

Reaction to these pronouncements from the other side was predictable and swift. North Vietnam and Communist China immediately denounced the “so-called proposal for the removal of forces” from Vietnam as “out-and-out blackmail and shameless humbug.” They charged that the Manila proposals amounted to “asking the Vietnamese people to surrender to the US aggressors outright.”¹⁴

During October and November, US officials frequently repeated their conditions for peace in Vietnam. Before going to Manila, the President had said:

we are ready to stop the bombing of North Vietnam; we are ready to produce a schedule for the withdrawal of our troops—whenever the other side tells us what it is prepared to do to move toward peace in Vietnam and to reciprocate the actions and the decisions that we take.

... And we do not seek the unconditional surrender of those who oppose us in Vietnam, nor to destroy or change any system of government, nor to deprive any people of what is rightfully theirs. When a decision is made by the other side to seek its goals through peaceful means—not through terror, not through violence—we shall be the first to meet at the conference table.

President Johnson and others constantly made the point that the United States was more than willing to take steps toward peace, specifically by ending the bombing of North

Vietnam, but only if the enemy showed some willingness to give something in return. They did not specify the condition for a bombing halt, but it was generally understood to be a cessation or diminution of infiltration from the North, or some tangible reduction in violence in the ground war in South Vietnam. Further softening the administration position, Ambassador Goldberg on 25 October declared that the United States “is willing to take the first step toward de-escalation of the war by ordering a prior end to all bombing of North Vietnam the moment we are assured that there would be a response toward peace from North Vietnam.” On his return from Asia on 4 November, President Johnson told a White House news conference, “If they want us to stop bombing, we ought to see what they are willing to stop. We will be glad to carefully consider anyone’s proposals that represent two-way streets. We don’t want to talk about just half of it, though.”¹⁵

By November, the positions of both sides were clear. The United States would stop bombing North Vietnam as a condition for peace negotiations if North Vietnam would take some reciprocal action. Hanoi insisted on an unconditional end to the bombing before peace talks could begin. These positions had remained unchanged for some time, and there did not seem to be much hope for accommodation in the near future.

During 1966, public opinion, both at home and abroad, had undoubtedly influenced the US Government’s almost constant efforts to bring about negotiations. Support for the President’s Vietnam policy had fallen significantly as the year progressed. War weariness and increasing impatience at home were becoming one of President Johnson’s chief problems. Although divided as to means, pro-escalation “hawks” and anti-escalation “doves” agreed upon the end—a quick and satisfactory solution to the war. “Hawks” were apparently in the ascendency; most Congressmen newly elected in 1966 declared themselves in favor of the escalations required to “win.” However, public opinion polls also recorded substantial support for *any* action, either escalation or the reverse, that promised to be decisive. For example, the Harris poll indicated that public confidence in the administration’s war policies rose to 49 percent in October, following the Manila Conference; by December, confidence had declined to 42 percent. The President’s problem, then, was plain. He must either gain an acceptable peace in the near future or face a further erosion of public confidence and support.¹⁶

The JCS Perspective on Negotiations

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff took no direct part in the 1966 peace feelers, they dealt with military issues related to a possible settlement and expressed strong views on what terms the United States should seek. During the summer, for example, in connection with a proposed Asian-sponsored peace conference, the Chairman recognized that the US government would need a position on control mechanisms to ensure observance of any agreement that was reached. Therefore, on 11 August 1966, he directed a Joint Staff study of the following issues: 1) the mission of an Asian Control Commission; 2) the membership desired; 3) a comparative analysis of the strengths and

weaknesses of the proposed commission and the existing ICC; 4) organization, manning, equipment, deployment, and employment of an Asian commission; and 5) special problems posed by Japanese membership, especially Japanese constitutional questions and the impact on Japan's role in Asian security.¹⁷

On 10 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent the study to the Secretary of Defense along with a memorandum. In the memorandum, the Joint Chiefs recommended formation of an interdepartmental study group to develop principles and guidelines for an effective inspection and verification system. The Secretary of Defense forwarded the Joint Chiefs of Staff views to the Secretary of State on 11 November. Secretary Rusk declared that the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposal was "timely and sound." He offered to appoint a chairman for such a group and to designate several representatives to serve as members. When subsequently formed, this group included officials from the Departments of State and Defense and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, under the chairmanship of the State Department. In September 1967, it produced and circulated a study on international supervision of a cessation of hostilities in Vietnam.¹⁸

On the larger question of the relation between a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam and negotiations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed their views on 14 October, in their response to Secretary McNamara's draft policy memorandum for the President. In his memorandum, the Secretary of Defense advised the President that the United States could use a cessation of ROLLING THUNDER as a "carrot to induce negotiations." On this point, the Joint Chiefs disagreed with the Defense Secretary. They declared,

Our experiences with pauses in bombing and resumption have not been happy ones. Additionally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the likelihood of the war being settled by negotiations is small; and that, far from inducing negotiations, another bombing pause will be regarded by North Vietnamese leaders, and our Allies, as renewed evidence of lack of US determination to press the war to a successful conclusion. The bombing campaign is one of the two trump cards in the hands of the President (the other being the presence of US troops in SVN). It should not be given up without an end to the NVN aggression in SVN.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that the war, in their view, was at the stage where decisions over the next 60 days might determine the outcome. Therefore, they would give their "unequivocal" views on the search for peace:

The frequent, broadly-based public offers made by the President to settle the war by peaceful means on a generous basis, which would take from NVN nothing it now has, have been admirable. Certainly no one—American or foreign—except those who are determined not to be convinced, can doubt the sincerity, the generosity, the altruism of US actions and objectives. In the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the time has come when further overt actions and offers on our part are not only nonproductive, they are counterproductive. A logical case can be made that the American people, our Allies, and our

enemies alike are increasingly uncertain as to our resolution to pursue the war to a successful conclusion.

The Joint Chiefs, therefore, recommended that the President: 1) issue during the Manila conference a statement of his “unswerving determination” to carry on the war until North Vietnam ceased its aggression against South Vietnam (as noted previously, President Johnson and US allies did this); 2) continue covert exploration of “all avenues leading to a peaceful settlement of the war”; and 3) remain alert for and react appropriately to any North Vietnamese withdrawal of their troops from the South and cessation of support to the Viet Cong.¹⁹

The Christmas and New Year Truces

As the end of the year approached, the Joint Chiefs of Staff focused much attention on the immediate issue of holiday truces. Mindful of their experience at the end of 1965, the Joint Chiefs took what action they could to reduce the probable military ill effects of the expected curtailment of operations during the coming Christmas, New Year, and Tet seasons. Although they opposed holiday curtailments in principle, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expected that higher authority would direct a reduction in military actions during those periods. Therefore, in late November they began efforts to influence the duration and nature of these truces. On 18 November, General Wheeler informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Pressures for a stand-down of military operations in Vietnam during the Christmas and TET holidays are already beginning, and I am convinced that some sort of cease fire during this period is inevitable.” He suggested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff take the initiative by proposing to the Secretaries of State and Defense arrangements that would have the least adverse effect upon US military activities.²⁰

During the next few days, the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the provisions that should be included in any truce arrangements to avoid a repetition of the military disadvantages that allied forces had experienced during the 1965/1966 holiday periods. These provisions included limitation of any stand-down to 48 hours duration, continuation during the stand-down of all air activities in Laos, and permission for CINCPAC to strike any unusually large or lucrative or threatening military targets in North Vietnam which might develop as a result of the stand-down. To enhance the friendly military position both before and after any stand-down, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also wanted a sharp increase in the intensity, and if possible the scope, of ROLLING THUNDER prior to and immediately after a truce. They included all these provisions in their recommendations to the Secretary of Defense.

Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) John McNaughton then prepared a position paper on a possible Christmas stand-down for the Secretaries of State and Defense to send to the President. This paper included all of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations except those which would authorize CINCPAC to strike certain targets in North

Vietnam and which would provide for a sharp increase in ROLLING THUNDER before and after the truce. General Wheeler told Mr. McNaughton that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not consider their proposal for increased intensity of ROLLING THUNDER to be of major importance. However, he said, the Joint Chiefs were convinced that CINCPAC should be allowed to bomb targets in North Vietnam which were especially lucrative or threatened his forces. Such a target, for example, might be a SAM unit moving south toward the DMZ. The Chairman asked Mr. McNaughton to modify the proposed letter to the President to that extent at least.²¹

On 25 November, the National Liberation Front, as it had in the previous year, forced the United States' hand by announcing its own holiday truce plans. Its forces would observe a 24-hour truce from 0700 24 December to 0700 26 December for Christmas and from 0700 31 December to 0700 2 January for the New Year. The Secretary of State immediately instructed Ambassador Lodge to reach an agreed position on truce arrangements with Prime Minister Ky and officials of the other allied nations. From the content of the instructions, it was obvious that the Johnson administration had accepted the Joint Chiefs of Staff views. Ambassador Lodge was informed that current plans called for not stopping air activities in Laos, and that "we are considering emergency waiver authority to strike any targets in NVN which pose immediate and direct threat to our forces." If Saigon could be induced to agree, the truce periods should be no longer than 48 hours.

Secretary Rusk assured Ambassador Lodge that he did not foresee any extensions of the bombing pause, such as had taken place during previous holiday stand-downs, in the absence of "the same clear indications of timely and appropriate reciprocal action by Hanoi on which we have insisted publicly and privately throughout the last ten months." Nor would there be any extension of the truce in South Vietnam. Secretary Rusk stated that the United States intended to take the same general position with respect to the Tet holiday. He suggested that the South Vietnamese government incorporate all three holidays in its announcement, which would become the official announcement of the allied position.²²

On 29 November, Ambassador Lodge notified the State Department that the South Vietnamese had agreed to the US position on the holiday periods. Saigon would announce the next day that South Vietnam and its allies would take no offensive actions at Christmas from 0700 24 December to 0700 26 December; at New Years from 0700 31 December 1966 to 0700 2 January 1967; and at the Lunar New Year (Tet) from 0600 8 February 1967 to 0600 12 February 1967.²³

On 4 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave CINCPAC his instructions for the Christmas stand-down, based on the policy set forth in the State-Defense message of 26 November. CINCPAC was to curtail military operations in North and South Vietnam during the period specified in Saigon's truce announcement. However, units in South Vietnam would not break contact and would respond if enemy initiatives placed them in danger. No offensive air operations would be mounted in South Vietnam except as necessary to protect friendly troops, in which case use of naval and ARC LIGHT forces might be authorized. MARKET TIME and GAME WARDEN would continue. CINCPAC

was to suspend all armed reconnaissance, air strikes, and naval gunfire in North Vietnam during the truce; but he could order attacks on North Vietnamese targets that posed an immediate and direct major threat to US forces, specifically SAMs moving southward toward the DMZ. Operations in Laos would continue as normal. Whenever US commanders believed their forces to be in danger, they could resume any or all military actions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that instructions for New Years and Tet would follow separately. From these provisions, it appeared that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by taking an early initiative in the matter, had managed to insert into the holiday truce instructions for 1966–1967 safeguards that had not been present in 1965–1966.²⁴

During the Christmas stand-down, the enemy violated the truce in South Vietnam on 101 separate occasions, killing three US soldiers and wounding 27 others. The RVNAF suffered 27 killed and 27 wounded. The enemy lost 26 killed. Of more concern to COMUSMACV, North Vietnam made maximum use of this relaxation of pressures to resupply its forces. During the 48-hour period, sightings of waterborne logistic craft, including large steel-hulled cargo carriers, in the SEA DRAGON area equaled those for the first two months of SEA DRAGON operations.²⁵

Noting this major enemy effort to move supplies and men southward, General Westmoreland called for authority to thwart any such effort during the New Year truce. Strongly backed by CINCPAC, he said that

unless directed otherwise, we intend to react (using VNAF aircraft if practicable) to such overt resupply activities which fulfill the following criteria: A) the activity is taking place in a known, well-established base area; B) supplies are being unloaded in sufficient quantities to indicate major resupply operations; C) the resupply is taking place in enemy base areas in close proximity to friendly units and/or installations, and hence, constitute a future threat to friendly forces.²⁶

The execute message for the New Year ceasefire had already been dispatched, along the same lines as the earlier Christmas instructions. Nevertheless, after receiving the agreement of the State and Defense Departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized COMUSMACV to act as he had proposed against enemy resupply activities. They specified, however, that the enemy activities must constitute a “direct” not a “future” threat to friendly forces.²⁷

Assessments of the State of the War

Against the background of the administration’s late-year diplomatic efforts, Secretary of Defense McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff produced differing assessments of the state of the war and proposals for the way forward. The center of the debate was Mr. McNamara’s draft memorandum for the President of 14 October. As noted previously, in this document the Defense Secretary recommended that the US level off ROLLING

THUNDER and possibly trade away the campaign to get negotiations started. That recommendation was only one of several that Secretary McNamara derived from his overall conclusions about the US position following a mid-October trip to South Vietnam.²⁸

In his draft memorandum, Secretary McNamara informed the President that “I see no reasonable way to bring the war to an end soon.” On the military side, US emergency deployments had “blunted” the communist battlefield initiative and removed any chance of an early Viet Cong victory. However, heavy casualties had not broken the enemy’s morale; and he appeared to be able to replace his losses by infiltration from North Vietnam and recruiting in the South. Pacification, which Mr. McNamara considered the key to permanent allied success, “is a bad disappointment” and had “if anything gone backward.” Enemy regional and guerrilla forces were stronger than in previous years; terrorism and sabotage had increased; the Viet Cong political infrastructure was thriving; the allies had gained almost nothing in population control; and “the enemy almost completely controls the night.” ROLLING THUNDER had neither significantly reduced infiltration nor cracked Hanoi’s morale. For his part, the enemy “has adjusted to our stopping his drive for military victory and has adopted a strategy of keeping us busy and waiting us out (a strategy of attriting our national will).”

In this “unpromising state of affairs,” what should the United States do? The Defense Secretary answered: “We must continue to press the enemy militarily; we must make demonstrable progress in pacification”; and “we must improve our position by getting ourselves into a military posture that we credibly could maintain indefinitely—a posture that makes trying to ‘wait us out’ less attractive.”

To achieve these ends, Mr. McNamara recommended a five-pronged course of action. First, he proposed to level off US troop strength in South Vietnam at 470,000 men, “enough to punish the enemy at the large-unit operations level and to keep the enemy’s main forces from interrupting pacification.” Second, the United States should install an anti-infiltration barrier across northern South Vietnam and the Laos panhandle. The barrier (planning for which was under way) would hinder the southward flow of men and supplies and would constitute “persuasive evidence both that our sole aim is to protect the South from the North and that we intend to see the job through.” Third, the United States should keep ROLLING THUNDER at its existing sortie level and avoid increasing the bombing’s intensity by changing the areas or kinds of targets struck. Fourth, the United States should revitalize the pacification program by pressing the South Vietnamese for a larger commitment of military and civil resources and by reorganizing the US advisory structure, if necessary placing the entire effort under COMUSMACV. Secretary McNamara emphasized that only the South Vietnamese could do the pacification job; the United States could only “massage the heart.” Fifth, the United States should “press for negotiations” and consider a cessation or reduction of ROLLING THUNDER operations to demonstrate sincerity in the search for peace and help get talks started. Secretary McNamara doubted that the diplomatic effort would succeed in the short run, but it would enhance US credibility at home and abroad and thus help sustain the effort for the long term.

In conclusion, the Secretary of Defense declared:

The prognosis is bad that the war can be brought to a satisfactory conclusion within the next two years.... The solution lies in girding, openly, for a longer war and in taking actions immediately which will in 12 to 18 months give clear evidence that the continuing costs and risks to the American people are acceptably limited, that the formula for success has been found, and that the end of the war is merely a matter of time.²⁹

On behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Wheeler commented point by point on Mr. McNamara's memorandum. He told the Defense Secretary that the Joint Chiefs of Staff views on the situation in Vietnam and future US actions "coincide substantially with yours in many areas; however, in some important areas the Joint Chiefs of Staff do not agree with you." The Chairman asserted that the military situation in South Vietnam had "improved substantially over the past year" and that ROLLING THUNDER, although restricted more than the Joint Chiefs thought it should be, was hurting North Vietnam. At the same time, he agreed with the Secretary that "there is no reason to expect that the war can be brought soon to a successful conclusion." General Wheeler also concurred in Secretary McNamara's belief that the enemy strategy "appears to be to wait it out." The Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted the Secretary of Defense's view that "manpower-wise" the enemy could replace his heavy combat losses; but they called attention to the "adverse effect over time of continued bloody defeats on the morale of VC/NVA forces and the determination of their political and military leaders." As did Mr. McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that pacification programs "have not been, and are not now, adequate to the situation."

Turning to future courses of action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred in Secretary McNamara's general recommendation that the United States "should continue to press the enemy militarily, improve pacification programs, and attain a military posture we can maintain indefinitely," but with comments on specific points. The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that a "stable, sustainable" force level in South Vietnam was desirable but noted that Mr. McNamara's proposed strength of 470,000 was "substantially less than earlier recommendations of COMUSMACV and CINCPAC." Hence, they would reserve judgment on the required force level until Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland sent in their revised deployment programs. The Joint Chiefs also pointed out the necessity of maintaining in the United States, Hawaii, and Okinawa "forces capable of immediate deployment to SVN to cope with contingencies."

On the barrier and pacification, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had no major quarrel with Secretary McNamara. They did emphasize that the barrier project "must not be permitted to impair current military programs," and noted that assignment of most of the ARVN to pacification security would "undoubtedly elicit charges of a US takeover of combat operations at increased cost in American casualties." The Chiefs endorsed the placement of US pacification support under COMUSMACV. As noted previously, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not concur in the Secretary of Defense's recommendation to level

off ROLLING THUNDER and declared that “to be effective, the air campaign should be conducted with only those minimum constraints necessary to avoid indiscriminate killing of population.” Concerning Secretary McNamara’s fifth point, the Joint Chiefs strongly objected to suspension or reduction of ROLLING THUNDER as a “carrot to induce negotiations.” Instead, they urged expansion of the campaign as outlined in their recommendations for RT 52.

Despite these reservations, General Wheeler concluded on behalf of his colleagues:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agree we cannot predict with confidence that the war can be brought to an end in two years. Accordingly, for political, military, and psychological reasons, we should prepare openly for a long-term, sustained military effort.

Finally, General Wheeler requested that these views be provided to the President. Secretary McNamara did so.³⁰

Subsequently, official Defense Department historians characterized the Joint Chiefs of Staff response to Secretary McNamara’s 14 October memorandum as “predictably rapid—and violent.” In his own memoirs, the Secretary of Defense also emphasized the sharpness of the Joint Chiefs’ disagreement with him.³¹ Yet the Joint Chiefs of Staff response was notable for its concurrence with most of Mr. McNamara’s conclusions on such issues as the length of the war, enemy strategy, pacification, and the desirability of topping off US troop strength in South Vietnam at an indefinitely sustainable level. The Joint Chiefs clashed head-on with the Secretary of Defense only on the expansion of ROLLING THUNDER and the use of a unilateral bombing cutback to promote negotiations. Overall, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed agreement that the United States should hang on in Vietnam and not expect an early successful end of the war; but in some areas they wished to hang on at a higher level of military effort than their civilian chief proposed. Herein lay the fundamental weakness of the Joint Chiefs of Staff position in the Johnson administration’s continuing Vietnam policy debate. The Joint Chiefs persistently urged military measures that entailed increased costs and risks, but they could not honestly promise dramatically more favorable results if their proposals were adopted. Hence, their recommendations, while they received a hearing from higher authority, usually were rejected or at best only partially accepted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff succeeded only in pushing the United States incrementally toward a military commitment too large and expensive to be sustained in the long run but too circumscribed to bring about victory.

Conclusion: Five Silent Men?

During the years 1964–1966, United States policy toward Vietnam went through three phases. In the first phase, from President Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963 through early 1965, President Johnson and his administration tried to press forward the counterinsurgency campaign in South Vietnam while debating and planning for military measures to compel North Vietnam to cease its support of the Viet Cong. The effort in South Vietnam was blocked by a buildup of insurgent forces, augmented by regular army units from the North, and by persistent governmental instability in Saigon. In the second phase, which extended through 1965 and early 1966, the administration, responding to Viet Cong and North Vietnamese military gains that appeared to threaten defeat of a still-weak South Vietnamese government, transformed the US role in South Vietnam from advice and support to full-scale war, waged by American ground, sea, and air forces. At the same time, the United States initiated and gradually escalated air attacks on North Vietnam. With basic policy thus set, the third phase, during the remainder of 1966, was devoted to the details of the US buildup and the military campaigns, as well as to tentative efforts to open negotiations for a diplomatic settlement of the conflict. By the end of 1966, the United States had placed immediate military success out of Hanoi’s reach and had brought about a measure of political stability in Saigon; but the Americans and South Vietnamese were still far from victory.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff participated at every stage of the Johnson administration’s policy deliberations. They consistently argued for rapid escalation of the air campaign against North Vietnam and usually endorsed the troop requests and tactical and logistic plans of CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. When they were consulted about possible peace talks, they urged the administration to take a firm negotiating position and counseled against trading away ROLLING THUNDER simply to get to the negotiating table.

In the chain of command, the Chairman transmitted to the theater commanders instructions from the President and Secretary of Defense. Via back-channel communications, he kept CINCPAC and COMUSMACV abreast of political and policy developments in Washington and indicated what proposals the President wanted to receive and likely would approve. The Chairman participated in many, but not all, Vietnam policy meetings of President Johnson and his senior advisers. He assisted Secretary McNamara in coordinating Service support of the buildup. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were represented on the succession of ad hoc interagency committees that attempted to coordinate Vietnam policy in Washington.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff thus discharged their statutory functions as principal military advisers and assistants to the President and Secretary of Defense. But how much influence did they exercise on the administration's overall conduct of the Vietnam War? On most matters of military detail, such as operations and tactics in South Vietnam and the US force buildup in Southeast Asia, President Johnson and Secretary McNamara usually accepted the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV, although sometimes incrementally or with delays. This was the case as long as the military leaders' proposals fell within the policy parameters set by the President. On two critical issues, however, military recommendations crossed presidential red lines. Those issues were the expansion of ROLLING THUNDER and the mobilization of reserves.

On ROLLING THUNDER, President Johnson and his senior civilian advisers did not accept the Joint Chiefs' recommendation for immediate heavy bombing of North Vietnam, the so-called "fast full squeeze." Instead, they chose a gradual buildup of pressure, considering that approach less likely to provoke Chinese or Soviet intervention. The Joint Chiefs of Staff perforce accommodated themselves to gradualism while continually negotiating for additions to the list of targets authorized for attack. They gained an incremental expansion of the bombing campaign but too slowly, in the Joint Chiefs' judgment, to secure the maximum effect. As the campaign wore on, the Joint Chiefs of Staff increasingly came into contention with Secretary of Defense McNamara, who had growing doubts about the effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER and sought to curtail it.

As to the reserve callup, Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff initially were on the same side. The Defense Secretary included a mobilization plan in his first recommendation for the 44-battalion reinforcement. President Johnson, however, vetoed mobilization for what he considered compelling domestic political and international diplomatic reasons. He held to this position throughout subsequent reinforcement programs, with severe long-term adverse effects upon the Services. But in contrast to ROLLING THUNDER, the only gradualism in the US troop buildup in South Vietnam was that imposed by geography and logistics.

During this period of critical decisionmaking, were the Joint Chiefs of Staff "five silent men" as their critics have charged? The record indicates that they were anything but silent. At each stage of the administration's deliberations, the Joint Chiefs took every opportunity to state their views on all matters at issue. Secretary of Defense McNamara transmitted their recommendations to the President and other agencies, although often stating his own disagreement with them. On many occasions, the Chairman made the Joint Chiefs of Staff case in face-to-face discussions with the President. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thus were heard by the President and other senior civilians, but their views were often rejected for reasons President Johnson and his advisers considered to be overriding.

It should be noted also that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not offer any military solution to the war that was radically different from the administration's strategy of bombing North Vietnam while holding off the Viet Cong and seeking political stability in South Vietnam. They could conceive of no approach that would promise quick, decisive victory.

This was not due to lack of imagination. Geography, logistics, and international political considerations ruled out such alternatives as invasion of North Vietnam or establishment of a ground cordon across Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Joint Chiefs thus could offer the President only proposals for more and faster escalation along the established lines. To presidential concern that too extensive or too rapid escalation might lead to a wider war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff replied with general assurances that the risks were limited and the potential consequences manageable—thin gruel for the man who carried the ultimate responsibility. Significantly, in their October 1966 response to Secretary McNamara's proposal to level off the military effort, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred with the Secretary's fundamental assessment of the situation and the probable duration of the conflict; they could recommend only marginal increases in ROLLING THUNDER and a slightly larger number of US troops for the South. Confronting an adversary determined to prevail and willing to accept heavy losses, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, like their civilian superiors, had no real solution except to hang on at steadily increasing cost. And on that course the United States was set to proceed as 1966 came to an end.

Acronyms

AFC	Armed Forces Council
AID	Agency for International Development
AM	air mobile
ANZAC	Australian/New Zealand Army Corps
ARVN	Army of Vietnam
ATF	Australian Task Force
BDA	(1) battle damage assessment (2) bomb damage assessment
BLT	battalion landing team
BOQ	bachelor officers' quarters
CAP	combat air patrol
CBU	cluster bomb unit
CG FMFPAC	Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific
CG III MAF	Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force
CG	Civil Guard
CHICOM	Chinese Communist
CHJUSMAG	Chief, Joint Military Advisory Group
ChMAAG	MAAG Commander
CHNAVGP	Chief, Naval Advisory Group
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CINC	Commander in Chief
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief, Pacific Command
CINCPACAF	Commander in Chief, Pacific Command Air Force
CINCPACFLT	Commander in Chief, US Pacific Fleet
CINCSAC	Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command
CINCSTRIKE	Commander in Chief, Strike Command
CINCUSARPAC	Commander in Chief, US Army, Pacific
CMC	Commandant of the Marine Corps
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COMAAFV	Commander, Australian Army Force, Republic of Vietnam
COMAFV	Commander, Australian Force, Vietnam
COMCRSFF	Commander, Central Region SEATO Field Forces

COMNZAFFE	Commander, New Zealand Army Forces, Far East
COMPHILCAGV	Commander, Philippine Civic Action Group, Vietnam
COMROKRV	Commander, Republic of Korea Forces, Vietnam
COMUSKOREA	Commander, US Forces, Korea
COMUSMACTHAI	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Thailand
COMUSMACV	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
COMUSSEASIA	Commander, US Forces Southeast Asia
CSC	Coastal Surveillance Center
CTF	Commander Task Force
CTG	carrier task group
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zone
DCI	Director of Central Intelligence
DEFCON	Defense Condition
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DOD	Department of Defense
DOICC	Deputy Officer in Charge of Construction
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
DSA	Defense Supply Agency
ECM	electronic countermeasures
EUCOM	European Command
EW	Early Warning
ExCom	Executive Committee (NSC Working Group)
FACs	forward air controllers
FBZs	Free Bomb Zones
FFORCEV	Field Force, Vietnam
FWMAF	Free World Military Assistance Forces
FWMAO	Free World Military Assistance Office
FWMAPC	Free World Military Assistance Policy Council
FY	Fiscal Year
GCI	ground controlled intercept
GVN	Government of Vietnam
HAWK	Marine antiaircraft missile
HNC	High National Council
HSAS	Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon
I&L	Installation and Logistics

ICC	International Control Commission
IDA	Institute for Defense Analyses
IMSTAF	International Military Security Task Force
ISA	International Security Affairs
JGS	Joint General Staff
JTD	joint table of distribution
JTF	Joint Task Force
JUSMAGTHAI	Joint US Military Advisory Group, Thailand
JUSPAO	Joint US Public Affairs Office
KANZUS	Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and United States
LAAM	Light Anti-Aircraft Missile
LANTCOM	Atlantic Command
LOC	Lines of Communication
LST	landing ship, tank
LZ	Landing Zone
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MAB	Marine Amphibious Brigade
MACSOG	Military Assistance Command, Studies and Observation Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAF	Marine Amphibious Force
MAG	Marine Aircraft Group
MAP	Military Assistance Program
MAROPS	maritime operations
MATS	Military Air Transport Service
MDMAF	Mekong Delta Mobile Afloat Force
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MLC	Military Logistics Council
MRC	Military Revolutionary Council
MSBs	Minesweeping Boat
MT	metric tons
MTTs	Mobile Training Teams
NAVFORV	US Naval Forces, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
NFLSM	National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam
NLC	(1) National Leadership Committee (2) National Legislative Council
NLF	National Liberation Front

nm	nautical mile
NPP	National Pacification Plan
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NSC	National Security Council
OCO	Office of Civil Operations
OPLAN	Operations Plan
PACOM	Pacific Command
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PBRs	River Patrol Boats
PCP	Patrol Craft, Fast
PCS	Permanent Change of Station
PF	Popular Forces
PHILCAGV	Philippine Civic Action Group, Vietnam
PICA	Pacification Intensification in Critical Areas
PIP	Phased Installation Plan
PL	Pathet Lao
POL	petroleum, oil, and lubricants
PTFs	fast torpedo boats
PX	Post Exchange
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
R&R	rest and relaxation
RAGs	River Assault Groups
RC	Rural Construction
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
RD	Revolutionary Development
RF	Regional Force
RKG	Royal Khmer Government (Cambodia)
RLAF	Royal Laotian Air Force
RLT	Regimental Landing Team
RMK	Raymond & Morrison & Knudsen
ROAD	Reorganization Objective Army Division
ROE	rules of engagement
ROK	Republic of Korea
ROKFB	Republic of Korea Forces, Vietnam
RP	Route Packages
RSSZ	Rung Sat Special Zone
RT	ROLLING THUNDER
RTMAGV	Royal Thai Military Assistance Group, Vietnam

RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SA	Systems Analysis
SAC	Strategic Air Command
SACSA	Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SAR	search and rescue
SASM	Special Assistant for Strategic Mobility
SATS	Short Airfield for Tactical Support
SDC	Self Defense Corps
SEA	Southeast Asia
SEABEE	Navy Mobile Construction
SEACoord	Southeast Asia Coordinating Committee
SEAL	Sea, Air, Land
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SELF	Short Expeditionary Landing Field
SLF	Special Landing Force (Marines)
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
SOC	Surface Operations Center
SOG	Studies and Observation Group
TF	Task Force
TFS	tactical fighter squadron
TO&E	Table of Organization and Equipment
TOT	time on target
UK	United Kingdom
USASCV	US Army Support Command, Vietnam
USCINCPACAF	US Commander in Chief, Middle East, Africa South of the Sahara, and South Asia
USIA	US Information Agency
USOM	United States Operations Mission
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republic
VC	Viet Cong
VNAF	Vietnamese Air Force
VNCC	Vietnam Coordinating Committee
VNMC	Vietnam Marine Corps
VNN	Vietnamese Navy
WESTPAC	Western Pacific

Principal Civilian and Military Officers

President and Commander in Chief

John F. Kennedy 20 Jan 61–22 Nov 63
Lyndon B. Johnson 22 Nov 63–20 Jan 69

Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

McGeorge Bundy 20 Jan 61–27 Feb 66
Walt W. Rostow 01 Apr 66–02 Dec 68

Secretary of State

Dean Rusk 20 Jan 61–20 Jan 69

Secretary of Defense

Robert S. McNamara 20 Jan 61–29 Feb 68

Deputy Secretary of Defense

Cyrus R. Vance 28 Jan 64–30 Jun 67

Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

William P. Bundy 29 Nov 63–14 Mar 64
John T. McNaughton 01 Jul 64–19 Jul 67

Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

General Maxwell D. Taylor, USA 01 Oct 62–01 Jul 64
General Earle G. Wheeler, USA 03 Jul 64–02 Jul 70

Chief of Staff, US Army

General Earle G. Wheeler 01 Oct 62–02 Jul 64
General Harold K. Johnson 03 Jul 64–2 Jul 68

Chief of Naval Operations

Admiral David L. McDonald 01 Aug 63–01 Aug 67

Chief of Staff, US Air Force

General Curtis E. LeMay 30 Jun 61–31 Jun 65
General John P. McConnell 01 Feb 65–01 Aug 69

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Commandant, US Marine Corps

General Wallace M. Greene, Jr.

01 Jan 64–31 Dec 67

Director, Joint Staff

Lieutenant General David A. Burchinal, USAF

24 Feb 64–31 Jul 66

Commander in Chief, Pacific

Admiral Harry D. Felt

31 Jul 58–30 Jun 64

Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp

30 Jun 64–01 Aug 68

Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command

General John D. Ryan

01 Dec 64–01 Feb 67

Commander, US Military Assistance

Command, Vietnam

General Paul D. Harkins

08 Feb 62–20 Jun 64

General William C. Westmoreland

20 Jun 64–02 Jul 68

Notes

Prologue

1. For details of these events, see Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968*, Part I (1 July 1970), chaps. 1–7.

2. The disagreements between Lodge and Harkins are described in Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 101–106; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

3. Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ronald D. Landa, and Edward J. Drea, *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961–1965* (Washington: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006), pp. 10–11, 537–539; hereafter cited as *McNamara Ascendancy*. *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1949–1999* (Washington: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2000), pp. 22–23; hereafter cited as *Chairmanship of the JCS, 1949–1999*.

4. *Chairmanship of the JCS, 1949–1999*, p. 22.

5. *Chairmanship of the JCS, 1949–1999*, pp. 22–24, 103–109. An example of the negative view of Wheeler is H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 108–111. For a more favorable view of Wheeler, see John S. Brown, “Earle G. Wheeler at 100,” *Army*, Jan 2008, pp. 70–71.

6. Gen LeMay had been on bad terms with the Kennedy administration from the beginning. Nevertheless, in May 1963 the President extended LeMay’s term as USAF Chief of Staff for an additional year. In mid-1964, President Johnson continued LeMay in office until 1 January 1965, allegedly to keep the general from publicly criticizing the administration until after the November 1964 election. See *McNamara Ascendancy*, p. 47–48. For the overall character of the Joint Chiefs, see George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 29–30.

7. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, p. 25.

8. McMaster’s *Dereliction of Duty* is a sharp indictment by an Army colonel still on active service. Other examples of this line of argument are: Gen Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The 25-Year War: America’s Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984) and Col Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982). Also critical of military strategy are the recollections of US generals in Vietnam, recorded contemporary with the war, in Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers: American Generals Reflect on Vietnam* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1977). For an example of the contemporary persistence of this critique, see Jason Blindauer, Luis Carlos Montalvan, and William Ruehl, “The Déjà vu of No Accountability,” *Baltimore Sun*, 21 Dec 2007.

1. President Johnson’s First Month

1. Dept of State *Bulletin*, L (27 Jan 64), p. 122.

2. (S-NOFORN-GP1) Dept of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Research Memorandum REU-16, 11 Feb 64, “DeGaulle and Vietnam,” OJCJS File, Black Note Book, “South Vietnam Conference—March 1964” vol. II, sec 6, Tab A. *NY Times*, 9 Jul 64, p. 1.

3. For US official rationales for rejection of neutralization, see US Dept of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. I, *Vietnam 1964* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 8–15; hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam 1964*.

4. For an account of this contingency planning, see Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 79–85; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

5. NSAM 273, 26 Nov 63, in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, vol. IV, *Vietnam August–December 1963* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1991), pp. 637–640; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam Aug–Dec 63*. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., “National Security Action Memorandum No. 273, dated 26 Nov 63,” 6 Dec 63, Encl to JCS 2343/297-1, 9 Dec 63, JMF 9155.3/5410 (22 Nov 63) sec 2.

6. Msg, State 908 to Saigon, 6 Dec 63, in *FRUS Vietnam Aug–Dec 63*, pp. 685–687. The 1961 State Department report is in Dept of State *Bulletin*, XLV (25 Dec 61), p. 1053.

7. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/295, 23 Nov 63, JMF 9155.3/5410 (22 Nov 63) sec 2.

8. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CJCS DIASO-3-4654-63 to CINCPAC, 2 Dec 63. (S) Msg, SecDef DIASO-3-4782-63 to COMUSMACV, 10 Dec 63.

9. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAG 4955 to CINCPAC, 20 Dec 63.

10. (TS-GP 1) SACSA T-2-64 to JCS, 4 Jan 64; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 3 Jan 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov 63–Feb 64, vol. II.

11. (TS) Briefing Sheet, Agenda Item E, “OPLAN 34A-64 (North Vietnam),” OCJCS File, Trip Book, Mar 64, 29 Feb 64.

12. *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 27–31. (TS) Msgs, Washington to Saigon, 22 Jan 64; (TS) Saigon to State, 28 Jan 64.

13. (S) Msg, Saigon 1173 to State, 7 Dec 63.

14. Memo, SecDef to President, “Vietnam Situation,” 21 Dec 63, in *FRUS Vietnam Aug–Dec 63*, pp. 732–735.

15. (TS) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, 21 Dec 63, OCJCS File, Trip Reports.

16. (S) Msg, Saigon 1374 to State, 23 Jan 64.

17. (S) Msg, MAC 0325 to CJCS, 30 Jan 64. (S) SACSA Briefing Sheet for JCS, “Coup d’Etat in Republic of Vietnam,” 30 Jan 64, OCJCS File O.

18. Msg, Saigon 1431 to State, 29 Jan 64, in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 37–39.

19. (S) Msg, Saigon 1432 to State, 30 Jan 64; (S) Msg, MAC 0325 to CJCS, 30 Jan 64.

20. (S) Msg, Saigon 1445 to State, 30 Jan 64; (C) 1446 to State, 30 Jan 64. (S) SACSA Briefing Sheet for JCS, “Coup d’Etat in Republic of Vietnam,” 30 Jan 64, w/Tab A “Coup Chronology,” OCJCS File O.

21. (S) Msg, Saigon 1443 to State, 30 Jan 64.

22. *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 42, 45–48. (S) Msgs, State 1154 to Saigon, 30 Jan 64; (S) Saigon 1464 to State, 1 Feb 64. *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963–1964* (1965), vol. I, pp. 254, 256; hereafter cited as *Public Papers, Johnson, 1963–1964*.

23. (TS) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, “OPLAN 34A-64,” 28 Feb 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 64. (TS) SACSA-M-180-64 to CJCS, 19 Mar 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 64.

24. (TS) SACSA-M-149-64 to CJCS, 4 Mar 64. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 031045Z Mar 64.

25. (S) SACSA Briefing Sheet, “GVN National and Province Plans,” 28 Feb 64, OCJCS File, Red Trip Book, 29 Feb 64, Agenda Item C2.

26. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 1266 to CINCPAC, 19 Feb 64.

27. NSAM 280, 14 Feb 64, in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 79–80.

28. (S-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to President, 16 Feb 64, Att to JCS 2343/321-1, 17 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (14 Feb 64).

29. (S) SACSA TP-6-64 to JCS, 18 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (14 Feb 64).

30. MRF, Michael Forrestal, "South Vietnam," 20 Feb 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 93–94. (TS-GP 1) DJSM-387-64 to CJCS, 4 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (11 Feb 64).

31. (TS-GP 1) Rpt, State Dept Policy Planning Council, "Alternatives for the Imposition of Measured Pressures against North Vietnam," 1 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (11 Feb 64) sec 1A.

32. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-46-64 to SecDef, 22 Jan 64, Encl to JCS 2339/117-2, 11 Jan 64; (C) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2339/117-2—Strategy in Southeast Asia," 15 Jan 64; (TS) Secy, JCS, "Decision on JCS 2339/117-2," 20 Jan 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (3 Jan 64) A.

33. (TS-GP 1) Ltr, SecState to SecDef, 5 Feb 64, Att to JCS 2339/117-3, 11 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (3 Jan 64) A.

34. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/317, 5 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 1. The media problem in Vietnam is analyzed in William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1963* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), chaps. 1 and 2.

35. (TS) Msg, JCS 559-64 to CINCPAC, 062117Z Feb 64. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 081046Z Feb 64.

36. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/317-1, 11 Feb 64; (TS) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/317-1—South Vietnam," 12 Feb 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 1.

37. (TS) JCSM-136-64 to SecDef, 18 Feb 64, Encl to JCS 2343/317-2, 13 Feb 64; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnam," 5 Mar 64, Att to JCS 2343/317-5, 9 Mar 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 1 and sec 4.

38. The rise of Communism in Vietnam is recounted in William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, Colo.: The Westview Press, 1981); hereafter Duiker, *Road to Power*. See also Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1966).

39. Statistics are from The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*. Trans by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 115–116. This volume was first published in Hanoi in 1988; hereafter cited as *Victory in Vietnam*. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 120 summarizes US estimates of enemy strength.

40. A senior enemy commander comments on the military problem in this period in Gen Hoang Van Thai, "A Few Strategic Issues in the Spring 1968 Tet Offensive and Uprising," *Military History Magazine*, Issue 2 (26), 1988, published by the Ministry of Defense's Military Institute of Vietnam, trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow, copy in Historians Files, US Army Center of Military History. The title notwithstanding, this article surveys the entire course of the war. See also Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 121.

41. *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 124–125. For analysis of the meaning of these decisions, see Duiker, *Road to Power*, pp. 221–227. For text of the key resolution, see The Central Committee's Ninth Plenum Resolution Discussing the Situation in South Vietnam, December 1963 (trans. version of copy captured by US forces in Cambodia, 13 May 70), Historians Files, US Army Center of Military History.

42. Details and statistics on the buildup are from *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 125–131. For diplomatic maneuvering, see Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987).

43. The relative timing of the two sides' decisions, leading to the failure of America's effort at military-diplomatic coercion, is analyzed in Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion*

and *Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964–1968* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980)

2. Johnson's Course Confirmed, NSAM 288

1. MFR of a Meeting, White House, Washington, February 20, 1964, 12:17 pm.; Msg, State 1281 to Saigon, 21 Feb 64; both in US Dept of State, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 93–94, 96.

2. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Vietnam," 21 Feb 64, Att to JCS 2343/326, 22 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) sec 1. A redacted version is in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 97–99.

3. (TS) CM-1213-64 to D/JS, 22 Feb 64; (TS-GP 1) DJSM-321-64 to CJCS, 22 Feb 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64).

4. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/326-1, 22 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64), sec 1.

5. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/326-3, 26 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64), sec 1.

6. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/326-2, 25 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64), sec 1.

7. JCSM-174-64 to SecDef, 2 Mar 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 112–118. (TS) Note to Control Division, JCS 2343/326-5—Vietnam," 29 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64), sec 2.

8. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Vietnam (Response to SecDef Memo of 21 Feb 64)," 2 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64).

9. Memorandum of a Conversation between the JCS and the President, March 4, 1964 (drafted by Gen Taylor), *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 129–130.

10. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-168-64 to SecDef, 2 Mar 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/330, 25 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) (D). An unclassified copy of this memo, without the list of specific actions, is in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 110–111.

11. (TS) Msg, JCS 5003 to CINCPAC, 241912Z Feb 64.

12. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 280311Z Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (24 Feb 64).

13. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/339, 6 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (24 Feb 64).

14. Ltr, President Johnson to SecDef, 5 Mar 64, in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, p. 131; see also pp. 133–134.

15. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/341, 10 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64), sec 4.

16. (S-GP 1) "Memorandum of Conversation," no sig., 13 Mar 64, Att to JCS 2343/353, 3 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (2).

17. (S) Draft Memo, SecDef to Pres, "South Vietnam," 13 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

18. (S) Draft Memo, SecDef to Pres, "South Vietnam," 13 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64). An unclassified copy, dated 18 Mar 64, is in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 153–167.

19. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/346-1, 17 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

20. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM-263-64 to JCS, 14 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

21. JCSM-222-64, 14 Mar 64, in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 149–150.

22. Memo, Bromley Smith, "Summary Record of the 524th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 17, 1964, Noon," *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 170–172.

23. NSAM 288, 17 Mar 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 172–173. Dept of State *Bulletin*, L (6 Apr 64), pp. 522–523.

24. Msg, State 1454 to Saigon, 17 Mar 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 167–169.

25. (TS) JCS 2343/350, 18 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (1). CMC views were on record in (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/345, 14 Mar 64 and (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/346-1, 17 Mar 64, both in JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

26. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/345-2, 30 Mar 64; (TS) CNOM-121-64 to JCS, 31 Mar 64; (TS) CSAM-203-64 to JCS, 31 Mar 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (1).

27. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-298-64 to SecDef, 14 Apr 64, Encl to JCS 2343/345-3, 14 Apr 64; Memo, Admin Secy, OSD, to Secy, JCS, “JCSM-298-64 Alternative Courses of Action, Vietnam,” 5 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/345/4, 7 May 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (1).

28. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., “Implementation of South Vietnam Programs,” 23 Mar 65, Encl to JCS 2343/348-1, 24 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

29. (C) Msg, Saigon 1992 to State, 15 Apr 64.

30. (S) Msg, State 1505 to Saigon, 23 Mar 64.

31. (TS-GP 3) “Report of General Earle G. Wheeler, Chief of Staff, US Army, on Visit to the Republic of South Vietnam ... 15–20 Apr 64,” 22 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (22 Apr 64) sec 1A; hereafter cited as Wheeler Report, 22 Apr 64.

32. (S) Msg, JCS 6073 to CINCPAC, 29 Apr 64.

33. LtGen Westmoreland had assumed duty as DepCOMUSMACV in January 1964, with an eye to his succeeding Gen Harkins around mid-year. See Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 122–123; hereafter cited as Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

34. (S) Msg, Saigon 2091 to State, 30 Apr 64; (S) Msg, MACV 3421 to JCS, 30 Apr 64; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 070725Z May 64.

35. (S) Msg, MAC J01 3846 to CINCPAC, 14 May 64; (TS) Msg, MAC J01 3849 to CINCPAC, 14 May 64. (TS) Memo, no sig [CJCS?] to CSA et al., “Visit of the Secretary of Defense and Chairman, JCS to RVN, 11–13 May,” undtd, OJCS Envelope Files.

36. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., “Implementation of South Vietnam Programs,” 23 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-1, 24 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

37. (S) Msg, Saigon 1767 to State, 17 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (B).

38. (TS) Msg, State 1448 to Saigon, 16 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (B).

39. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-245-64 to SecDef, 20 Mar 64, Att to JCS 2343/347-1, 20 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

40. (TS) Msg, State 1630 to Saigon, 7 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (B).

41. (TS-GP 1) CM-1332-64 to SecDef, 23 Apr 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-3, 27 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).

42. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/358, 13 Apr 64; (TS) Msg, Saigon 1913 to State, 6 Apr 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (6 Apr 64).

43. (TS) Msg, State 925 to Vientiane, 30 Apr 64. (TS) Msg, JCS 6098 to CINCPAC, 30 Apr 64. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 022223Z May 64.

44. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 6163 to CINCPAC, 5 May 64; (TS-GP 1) Memo, ActgASD(ISA) to CJCS, “Implementation of Recommendation 11, NSAM 288,” 13 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-5, 15 May 64; (TS) Msg, State 951 to Vientiane, 5 May 64; (TS) Msg, MAC 2310 to JCS, 12 May 64; (TS) Msg, MAC 2419 to JCS, 18 May 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (B).

45. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV J1 3849 to CINCPAC, 140330Z May 64.

46. *The United States in World Affairs, 1964*, pp. 163–164. *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, p. 260.

47. The 2nd Air Division was MACV’s Air Force component command.

48. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2344/79, 18 May 64, JMF 9155.2 (18 May 64). *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, pp. 269–270. Dept of State *Bulletin*, L (29 Jun 64), p. 994. Jacob Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960–1968* (Washington: Center for Air Force History, 1993), pp. 24–26.

49. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., “Implementation of Vietnam Programs,” 23 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-1, 24 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).
50. (TS) Msg, JCS 5390 to CINCPAC, 18 Mar 64.
51. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-256-64 to SecDef, 23 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/346-2, 23 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (A).
52. (S-GP 3) Memo, ActgASD(ISA) to CJCS, “Implementation of Recommendation 12 . . .,” 25 Mar 64, Encl to JCS 2343/346-3, 26 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64).
53. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, “Military Actions to Stabilize the Situation in RVN,” 30 Mar 64; (TS-GP 3) SM-560-64 to CINCPAC, 21 Apr 64 (derived from JCS 2054/627-5); JMF 3146 (30 Mar 64), secs 1 and 2.
54. (TS) Note to Control Div, “Status Report on the Political/Military Scenario, SVN,” 10 Apr 64; (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Draft Scenarios for Recommendation 12 (NSAM 288),” 23 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2343/348-2, 24 Apr 64; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-422-64 to SecDef, 16 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-4, 8 May 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (A). Memo, Forrestal to McGeorge Bundy, 16 Apr 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 242–243.
55. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-445-64 to SecDef, 23 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/382, 23 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (A).
56. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-460-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/383, 26 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64).
57. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-442-64 to SecDef, 16 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/348-4, 8 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (13 Mar 64) (A).
58. Ltr, Under SecState George Ball to the Secretary of State, 31 May 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 400–402.

3. Command Reorganization in South Vietnam

1. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), p. 120; hereafter, Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.
2. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 22, 122–123. Memo, SecDef to Pres, “Vietnam Situation,” 21 Dec 63, in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, vol. IV, *Vietnam August–December 1963* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), pp. 732–735. Memo, Forrestal to Bundy, 4 Feb 64, in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. I, *Vietnam 1964* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 59–60; hereafter, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*.
3. (C) Memo, Amb H. C. Lodge to COMUSMACV et al., 21 Apr 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 64.
4. (U) Memo, COMUSMACV to Amb Lodge, 22 Apr 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 64.
5. (C) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to SecState, 7 May 64, with two draft letters and note by SecDef; (C) Msg, JCS 2190-64 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 15 May 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 64. Memo, McGeorge Bundy to William Bundy, 1 May 64, quoted in Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 122.
6. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 122–124.
7. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 2833 to CJCS, 7 Jun 64.
8. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 123.
9. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/335, 28 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64)(E) sec 1. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 42–43.

10. These arguments are recounted in Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 43–44.
11. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-136-64 to SecDef, 18 Feb 64, Encl to JCS 2343/317-2, 14 Feb 65, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64).
12. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/335, 28 Feb 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64)(E) sec 1. General Harkins's reasons for changing his stand are not known for certain; a senior staff officer emphasized Harkins's continued assumption that MACV was a temporary headquarters, as well as reluctance to eliminate the job of the MAAG chief, who was a good friend of his. See Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 150, n19.
13. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 125. (S) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/355—Vietnam and Southeast Asia," 2 Mar 64; (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 220912Z Mar 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64).
14. (C-GP 3) Ltr, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, "Study on Reorganization of Hq MACV and MAAG," [12] Mar 64, Att to JCS 2343/335-3, 14 Mar 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) (E) sec 1. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 125–126.
15. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-288-64 to SecDef, 8 Apr 64 (derived from JCS 2343/335-5), JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) (E) sec 2. For Adm Felt's argument, see Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 126.
16. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "MACV/MAAG Reorganization," 8 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2343/335-7, 8 Apr 64; (C-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5802 to CINCPAC, 10 Apr 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (5 Feb 64) (E) sec 2.
17. At this time, MACV strength included both the headquarters staff and the Army, Navy, and Air Force advisory teams. It did not include the US helicopter and other units supporting the RVNAF. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 126 and 150, n25. (C-GP 4) Ltr, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, ser 0415, 23 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2482/360, 6 May 64; (S-GP 4) JCS 2428/360-1, 22 May 64; JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 2.
18. (C-GP 4) CINCPAC, First Endorsement, Ser 0339-64, on COMUSMACV Ltr, Ser 0339-64, 1 May 64, Att to JCS 2424/360, 6 May 64, JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 2.
19. (S-GP 4) "Air Force Statement of Nonconcurrency," Encl E (removed from paper by Decision) to JCS 2428/360-1, 22 May 64, JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 2. (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/408, 3 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Jun 64).
20. (S-GP 4) JCSM-484-64 to SecDef, 6 Jun 64 (derived from JCS 2428/360-1); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "MACV 15 May 64 Joint Table of Distribution," 29 Jun 64, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2428/360-1, 2 Jul 64; JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 2.
21. (S-GP 4) JCS 2428/348, 3 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/5000 (12 Mar 64).
22. (C-GP 4) JCSM-295-64 to SecDef, 9 Apr 64, Encl to JCS 2428/348-1, 9 Apr 64; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Chief of Staff, US Military Assistance Advisory [sic] Command, Vietnam," 10 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2428/348-2, 13 Apr 64; JMF 9155.3/5000 (12 Mar 64).
23. (S) Msg, JCS 1999-64 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 4 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 64.
24. (S) Msg, DepCOMUSMACV MAC 2217 to CJCS, 6 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 64. MajGen Moore was a boyhood friend of Gen Westmoreland, and the two officers had a close working relationship. See Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 134.
25. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 071926Z May 64, OCJCS File Vietnam May 64.
26. (S-GP 3) JCSM-514-64 to SecDef, 12 Jun 64, Encl to JCS 2343/408-1, 12 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Jun 64).
27. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6864 to COMUSMACV, 15 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Jun 64). (S) Msg, Dep-COMUSMACV MAC 3077 to CJCS, 18 Jun 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 64.

28. (S-GP 3) CM-1427-64 to SecDef, 15 Jun 64, Att to JCS 2343/408-2, 19 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Jun 64). Although dated 15 Jun 64, this memorandum contains a reference to Westmoreland's message of 18 June. An annotation on copy in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 64 indicates that Gen Taylor hand carried the memorandum to SecDef on the 18th.

29. (C) JCSM-569-64 to SecDef, 13 Jul 64, JMF 1141 (29 Jun 64).

30. These arguments are recounted in Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 295–299; see also pp. 36–38. Since the disestablishment of the Far East Command in 1957, the Navy had opposed any division of CINCPAC's domain. See Ronald H. Cole, Walter S. Poole, James F. Schnabel, Robert J. Watson, and Willard J. Webb, *The History of the Unified Command Plan 1946–1999* (Washington: Joint History Office, 2003), pp. 24–25 and Gen Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The Twenty-Five Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), pp. 29–30.

4. An Escalation Scenario Takes Shape

1. Msg, Saigon 2198 to State, 4 May 64, in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. I, *Vietnam 1964* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 284–287; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam 1964*.

2. Msg, State 1838 to Saigon, 5 May 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 291–293.

3. (TS) Msg, JCS 2025 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 6 May 64. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 070745Z May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam—Trip, 9–14 May 64.

4. (TS) Msg, MAC2247 to CJCS, 7 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam—Trip, 9–14 May 64.

5. *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, p. 304.

6. (TS-GP 3) Memo, no sig. to CSA et al., “Visit of the Secretary of Defense and Chairman, JCS to RVN, 11–13 May,” n.d., OCJCS File, Brown Envelope no. 4.

7. (S) Briefing Sheets, “Questions from Para 5 of SecDef Message,” Tabs 5b and 5c, SecDef Agenda Book (Gen Taylor), 10–14 May 64, OCJCS File. (S) Msg, MAC J01 3846 to CINCPAC, 140220Z May 64.

8. Msg, Saigon 2203 to State, 14 May 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 315–321. (TS) Msg, MAC 2247 to CJCS, 7 May 64; (TS) MFR, CJCS, “Visit to General Khanh, 4-5:00 p.m., May 13, 1964,” 13 May 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam—Trip, 9–14 May 64.

9. Dept of State Bulletin, L (8 Jun 64), pp. 891–893. *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, 1964 (1965), XX, pp. 297, 300–312.

10. (TS) Note to Control Div, “Visit of the Secretary of Defense and Chairman, JCS, to South Vietnam,” 15 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam—Trip, 9–14 May 64.

11. (S) MFR, LTC Sidney B. Berry, Jr., “Sec/Def Conclusions, Saigon, 13 May 64,” 13 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

12. Memo, President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to the President, “Planning Actions on Southeast Asia,” 22 May 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 349–351.

13. (TS-GP 3) J-3 T-102-64 for CJCS, 23 May 64; (TS) Draft Memo to Pres, “Scenario for Strikes on North Vietnam,” 23 May 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64) (A).

14. MFR, Bromley Smith, “Summary Record of the National Security Council Executive Committee Meeting, Washington, May 24, 1964, 11 am,” 24 May 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 369–374.

15. (TS) Memo to Pres, “Scenario for Strikes on North Vietnam,” 24 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64) (A). A slightly different unclassified version is in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 363–368.

16. (TS-GP 1) MFR, LTG A. Goodpaster, “Four Meetings on Extension of Operations against North Vietnam, 24–25 May,” 25 May 64; (TS) Memo by Sullivan, “Substitutes and Supplements in Southeast Asia,” 24 May 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64. The timing of Sullivan’s memo in relation to the other events of 24 May is unclear, but it was probably used at the morning meeting. It bore no addressee.

17. (TS-GP 1) MFR, LTG A. J. Goodpaster, “Four Meetings on Extension of Operations against North Vietnam, 24–25 May,” 25 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

18. Draft Memo, McGeorge Bundy to Pres, “Basic Recommendation and Projected Course of Action on Southeast Asia,” 25 May 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 374–377.

19. Msg, State 2087 to Saigon, 26 May 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 393–394.

20. (TS) Msg, State TOSEC 3 to New Delhi, 27 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

21. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-469-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/384, 26 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64) (A).

22. (TS-GP 1) SACSA-T-19-64 for CJCS, 23 May 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 64.

23. (S-GP 1) JCSM-465-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/388, 28 May 64; (S-GP 1) JCSM-464-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl to JCS 2343/387, 28 May 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (28 May 64).

24. (S-GP 1) JCSM-466-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/389, 28 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (28 May 64) (2).

25. CM-1450-64 to SecDef, “Transmittal of JCSM-471-64, Objectives and Courses of Action—Southeast Asia,” 2 Jun 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 436–437. The original version was (TS-GP 1) JCSM-471-64 to SecDef, 30 May 64 (derived from JCS 2343/394), JMF 9155.3 (28 May 64).

26. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-471-64 (Revised) to SecDef, 2 Jun 64, Encl B to JCS 2343/394-1, 2 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (28 May 64). This document, without the specific target recommendations, is printed in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 437–440.

27. (TS-GP 1) MFR, “Special Meeting on Southeast Asia, Plenary Session, 1 June 1964,” n.d., JMF 9150 (1 Jun 64) sec 1A. The following account of the plenary session is taken from this source without further citation.

28. This concept evolved into Operation HOP TAC, which General Westmoreland viewed as the prototype of a central management system for pacification. See Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 141–143.

29. (TS) MFR, CJCS, “Highlights of Honolulu Conference,” 2 Jun 64, OCJCS File M/R envelope.

30. Reorganization Objective Army Division, a flexible structure comprising three brigade headquarters and variable numbers and types of battalions.

31. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2339/124, 5 Jun 64, JMF 9150/3100 (4 Jun 64).

32. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-444-64 to SecDef, 22 May 64, Encl. to JCS 2344/80, 22 May 64, JMF 9155 (22 May 64). For continuation of the YANKEE TEAM operations, see chap. 2.

33. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-489-64 to SecDef, 5 Jun 64, Encl to JCS 2343/412-1, 5 Jun 64; (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Initial Low-Level Reconnaissance Operation into North Vietnam,” 15 Jun 64, Att to JCS 2343/412-2, 17 Jun 64; JMF 9155.3 (4 Jun 64) (1).

34. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 55-64, 9 Jun 64. (TS-GP 3) DJSM-1011-64 to CJCS, 17 Jun 64, OCJCS Loose Files, Jun 64. Jacob Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960–1968* (Washington: Center for Air Force History, 1993), pp. 27–28.

35. Dept of State Bulletin, L (8 Jun 64), pp. 907–913; (15 Jun 64), pp. 937–941; (29 Jun 64), pp. 1002–1004.

36. Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1966), pp. 473–474. *NY Times*, 29 Jul 64, p. 2.

37. (TS) Memo, W. H. Sullivan to SecDef, “Canadian Consultations in Hanoi, 22 Jun 64, OCJCS Loose Files, Jun 64.

38. (TS) Memo, William Bundy to SecState and SecDef, 15 June 64, OCJCS Loose Files, Jun 64. Memo, William P. Bundy, no addressee, “Memorandum on the Southeast Asia Situation,” 12 Jun 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 507–512.

39. Memorandum, William P. Bundy, no addressee, “Memorandum on the Southeast Asia Situation,” 12 Jun 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 507–512; see also pp. 513–516. (TS) Memo, William Bundy to SecState and SecDef, 15 Jun 64, OCJCS Loose Files, Jun 64.

40. (S) Memo, Deputy Legal Adviser to SecState, “President’s Request re Legal Basis for Sending United States Troops to Vietnam,” 26 Jun 64, OCJCS Loose Files, Jun 64. For discussions of alternative means of reassurance, see *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 516–520.

41. CM-1451-64 to SecDef, 5 Jun 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 457–458.

42. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 10 Jun 64, Att to JCS 2343/394-2, 15 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (28 May 64). (TS) Msg, JCS 6888 to CINCPAC, 16 Jun 64.

43. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 38-64, 1 Jun 64; (TS-GP 3) SM-1215-64 to CINCPAC, 29 Jul 64, Encl to JCS 2054/635-6, 17 Jul 64; JMF 3146 (1 Jun 64), secs 1 and 2.

44. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-541-64 to SecDef, 24 Jun 64, Encl to JCS 2343/415, 21 Jun 64, JMF 9155.3 (21 Jun 64).

45. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (13 Jul 64), p. 47.

5. New Faces in Saigon and More Troops

1. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (13 Jul 64), pp. 46–47. (U) CM-1437-64 to SecState et al., 18 Jun 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 64.

2. (S) Msg, State 20 to Saigon, 2 Jul 64. Ltr, President to Ambassador to Vietnam, 2 Jul 64, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*. vol. I. *Vietnam 1964* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 538; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam 1964*.

3. (S) Msg, Saigon 41 to State, 7 Jul 64.

4. (C) Msg, Saigon 117 to State, 16 Jul 64. (U) Msg, Saigon 254 to State, 30 Jul 64. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), p. 138; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

5. (S) Msg, Saigon JPS 538 to CJCS, 23 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov–Dec 64. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 124–125.

6. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J32 5380 to JCS, 25 Jun 64, JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 2.

7. (S-GP 4) JCSM-632-64 to SecDef, 24 Jul 64 (derived from JCS 2428/360-5), JMF 1040.1 (1 May 64) sec 3.

8. The basic submission was (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J31 6180 to CINCPAC, 16 Jul 64. The above discussion also draws on the subsequent detailed justifications contained in (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 6227 to CINCPAC, 17 Jul 64, and (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J1 7044 to JCS, 28 Jul 64.

9. Msg, Saigon 125 to State, 17 Jul 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 553–554.

10. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 200036Z Jul 64. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV J1 7044 to JCS, 28 Jul 64. (S-GP 4) JCS 2343/431, 2 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Aug 64).

11. (S-GP 4) JCSM-665-64 to SecDef, 4 Aug 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/431, 2 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Aug 64). The Army-Air Force disagreements were not resolved until April 1966. At that time, General Harold K. Johnson and General John P. McConnell, USAF, LeMay's successor, agreed that the Army could use its helicopters as it saw fit. At the same time, the Army turned over its Caribous to the Air Force and pledged to stay out of the fixed-wing airlift field in the future. See Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 56–57, 327.

12. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Additional Support for Republic of Vietnam on an Accelerated Basis," 7 Aug 64, Att to JCS 2343/431-1, 10 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Aug 64).

13. (S-GP 4) CM-80-64 to SecDef, 14 Aug 64, Att to 1st N/H to JCS 2343/431-1, 18 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Aug 64).

14. (S) Msg, State 205 to Saigon, 21 Jul 64; (TS) Msg, State 224 to Saigon, 23 Jul 64.

15. (TS) Msg, Saigon 215 to State, 25 Jul 64. *NY Times*, 28 Jul 64, p. 1.

16. *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, Figure I-6 and pp. 4-5.

17. *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, Figure I-6.

18. The origins of this issue are described in William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 16–17.

19. *NY Times*, 22 Apr 64, p. 1. *Life*, 8 May 64, pp. 34B–39. Hammond, *Military and Media*, pp. 75–78.

20. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J01 3849 to CINCPAC, 14 May 64, OCJCS File 091, Vietnam Trip, 9–14 May 64.

21. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6399 to CINCPAC, 20 May 64.

22. (TS) "Summary Analysis of Hearings Held by Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee on the Situation in South Vietnam," Encl to Ltr, Senator John C. Stennis to SecDef, 9 Jul 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, "Hearings by Stennis Committee"

23. (TS) Ltr, CJCS to US Amb Saigon, 17 Jul 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, "Hearings by Stennis Committee"

24. (TS) DJSM-1203-64 to CJCS, 16 Jul 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, "Hearings by Stennis Committee"

25. (TS) Memo, Deputy D/JS to CJCS, "Trip Report of the Fact-Finding Group Visiting South Vietnam in Connection with 'Summary Analysis' of Hearings," 5 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (5 Aug 64).

26. (TS-GP 1) CINCPAC Comments on Stennis Report, n.d.; (TS) Memo, C/S USMACV to Deputy D/JS, 2 Aug 64; (TS) DJSM-1203-64 to CJCS, 16 Jul 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, "Hearings by Stennis Committee"

27. (S) Msg, US Amb Saigon JPS 389 to SecState, SecDef, and CJCS, 30 Oct 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov–Dec 64.

28. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 310344Z Oct 64; (U) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 5791 to CINCPAC, 3 Nov 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov–Dec 64.

29. *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, pp. 338–344; 1965, pp. 528–529.

30. (S-GP 1) SecState, "Summary of Additional Steps in South Vietnam," 20 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2343/360, 21 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (20 Apr 64).

31. (S) Msg, JCS 5966 to CINCPAC, 22 Apr 64; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 222333Z Apr 64; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-356-64 to SecDef, 25 Apr 64 (derived from JCS 2343/363): JMF 9155.3/3100 (20 Apr 64)(A).

32. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2101 to State, 2 May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (1 May 64) sec 1. LtGen Joseph M. Heiser, Jr., USA, *Logistic Support* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1991), pp. 12, 26–27.

33. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 052336Z May 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (1 May 64) sec 1.

34. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-399-64 to SecDef, 8 May 64 (derived from JCS 2343/368-1); Msg, JCS 6242 to CINCPAC, 9 May 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (1 May 64) sec 1.
35. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/368-2, 13 Jan 65; (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 080257Z Dec 64; JMF 9155.3/3100 (1 May 64) sec 2.
36. (TS-GP 3) DJSM-1861-64 to CJCS, 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia Jul 64–Jun 65. *COMUSMACV Command History, 1965*, p. 123.
37. (TS-GP 3) DJSM-1861-64 to CJCS, 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia Jul 64–Jun 65.
38. Dept of State *Bulletin*, L (4 May 64), p. 692.
39. (S-GP 1) SecState, “Summary of Additional Steps in South Vietnam,” 20 Apr 64, Att to JCS 2343/360, 21 Apr 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (20 Apr 64).
40. (S-GP 1) JCSM-352-64 to SecDef, 25 Apr 64 (derived from JCS 2343/360-1), JMF 9155.3/3100 (20 Apr 64).
41. *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, p. 386. (TS) Msg, State 1865 to Saigon, 7 May 64.
42. *Public Papers of President Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963–1964*, I, p. 522. (S-GP 3) JCS 2339/145, 1 Oct 64, JMF 9150 (1 Oct 64). *COMUSMACV Command History, 1965*, p. 353.
43. (S-GP 3) JCS 2339/145, 1 Oct 64, JMF 9150 (1 Oct 64).
44. *COMSUMACV Command History, 1965*, p. 71. (FOUO) CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, Jun 68, pp. 261–263.
45. (C) Msg, State 791 to Saigon, 8 Oct 64.
46. (S-GP 3) JCSM-847-64 to SecDef, 3 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2339/145), JMF 9150 (1 Oct 64). (TS-GP 1) MFR, Dir J–3, “Meeting of NSC Principals, 12 December 1964,” 12 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2339/164, 12 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (12 Dec 64). *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, p. 387.
47. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1763 to State, 9 Dec 64, JCS IN 48778. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2010 to USCINCSO et al., 15 Dec 64; (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 150134Z Dec 64; JCS IN 55452.
48. (S) Msg, State 1304 to Saigon, 18 Dec 64, JCS IN 59392.
49. (S) Msg, Saigon 1854 to State, 18 Dec 64. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 71. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 344.

6. Going North: Tonkin Gulf and Its Effects

1. (S) Msg, Saigon 109 to State, 15 Jul 64.
2. (S) Msg, Saigon 245 to State, 29 Jul 64.
3. (S) Msg, State 192 to Saigon, 20 Jul 64.
4. (S) Msg, Saigon 245 to State, 29 Jul 64. (C) Msg, Saigon 158 to State, 21 Jul 64. (C) Msg, Saigon 172 to State, 22 Jul 64. (S) Msg, Saigon 186 to State, 23 Jul 64. *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, p. 435.
5. (S) Msg, Saigon 180 to State, 23 Jul 64. (S) Msg, Saigon 193 to State, 24 Jul 64.
6. (S) Msg, Saigon 185 to State, 23 Jul 64.
7. Msg, State 235 to Saigon, 24 Jul 64, US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. I, *Vietnam 1964* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 563–564; hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam 1964*.
8. Msg, Saigon 213 to State, 25 Jul 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 563–566.
9. Msg, Saigon 214 to State, 25 Jul 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 566–568.
10. Msg, State-Defense 253 to Saigon, 25 Jul 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 569–571.

11. Msg, Saigon 232 to State, 27 Jul 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 576–579. Memo, M. V. Forrestal to SecState, “Vietnam,” 31 Jul 64, *ibid.*, pp. 587–588. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 8 Aug 64, *ibid.*, pp. 649–651.

12. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/426, 26 Jul 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Jul 64).

13. JCSM-639-64 to SecDef, 27 Jul 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 583–585.

14. (TS-GP 3) 1st N/H to JCS 2343/426, 3 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Jul 64). Memo, M. V. Forrestal to SecState, “Vietnam,” 31 Jul 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 587–588.

15. *CINCPAC Command History 1964*, pp. 367–368. The signal intelligence background of the Tonkin Gulf incident is recounted in Robert J. Hanyok, “Skunks, Bogies, Silent Hounds, and the Flying Fish: The Gulf of Tonkin Mystery, 2–4 August 1964,” *Cryptologic Quarterly*, Winter 2000/Spring 2001, vol. 19, no. 4 and vol. 20, no. 1. The entire declassified article can be found on the internet at www.nsa.gov/vietnam/releases/relea00012.pdf. That version is cited herein. Hereafter cited as Hanyok, “Skunks, Bogies.”

16. *CINCPAC Command History 1964*, pp. 368–369. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 100-64, 3 Aug 64. The other two North Vietnamese vessels also were damaged. See Hanyok, “Skunks, Bogies,” pp. 16–18.

17. *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 590–591. Hanyok, “Skunks, Bogies,” p. 18. An official North Vietnamese account of the 2 August attack states that “the General Staff and the Navy Headquarters” had ordered a torpedo boat group to “resolutely punish any enemy vessel violating the territorial waters of the Fatherland” and treats the attack on the USS *Maddox* as an implementation of that order. See The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (First published in Hanoi in 1988; rev. in 1994. Translated by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 132; hereafter cited as *Victory in Vietnam*.

18. Msg, CJCS 7680 to CINCPAC, 2 Aug 64; Msg, CJCS 7681 to CINCPAC, 2 Aug 64; *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 591, 593.

19. Dept of State Bulletin, LI (24 Aug 64), pp. 258–259. *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 597, 602–603.

20. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 102-64, 5 Aug 64. *CINCPAC Command History 1964*, pp. 369–370. Hanyok, “Skunks, Bogies,” pp. 21–24.

21. The evidence on the 4 August attack, in particular the signals intelligence errors, is reviewed in Hanyok, “Skunks, Bogies,” *passim*. Robert S. McNamara with Brian Van De Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 128–140, insists that the administration acted in good faith on the basis of what it knew at the time. For a recent analysis of administration decisionmaking, see Lawrence Kaplan, Ronald D. Landa, and Edward J. Drea, *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961–1965* (Washington: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006), pp. 521–524.

22. This account is drawn from two chronologies: (TS) J-3 Working Paper, “Command and Control of the Tonkin Gulf Incident, 4–5 August 1964,” 26 Feb 65, J-3 Records; and a chronology prepared by McGeorge Bundy on 28 Aug 64, excerpted in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 604–610. See also pp. 611–612.

23. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7720 to CINCPAC, 042115Z Aug 64, JMF 9155.3/3230 (64). Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam 1965–1966* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), pp. 48–49; hereafter Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*.

24. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7729 to CINCPAC, CINCSTRIKE, and CINCSAC, 050043Z Aug 64, JMF 9155 (26 Jun 64), sec 2. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 102-64, 5 Aug 64.

25. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (24 Aug 64), p. 259.

26. A sortie is one mission by one aircraft.

27. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 102-64 and 103-64, 5 and 6 Aug 64. *CINCPAC Command History 1964*, p. 372. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, p. 49. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 132.

28. “Notes of the Leadership Meeting, White House, Washington, August 4, 1964, 6:45 pm.,” *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 615–621. McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, pp. 139–140.
29. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (24 Aug 64), pp. 261–263.
30. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (24 Aug 64), p. 268. PL 88-408 (H.J. Res. 1145, 78 Stat. 384), approved 10 Aug 64.
31. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (24 Aug 64), pp. 267–268. McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, pp. 136–139.
32. *Congressional Record*, vol. 110, pt. 14, 5–7 Aug 64, pp. 18133, 18399-18407, 18462, 18469-18470. The Cooper-Fulbright exchange is quoted in McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, pp. 138–139.
33. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (24 Aug 64), pp. 272–274. Msg, State 282 to the Mission at the United Nations, 5 Aug 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 628–630; see also pp. 635–636.
34. *The United States in World Affairs 1964*, pp. 149–150. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (7 Sep 64), p. 335.
35. *CINCPAC Command History 1964*, p. 373. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 133.
36. Msg, State 342 to Saigon, 4 Aug 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, p. 623. (S) Msg, Saigon 310 to State, 5 Aug 64. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 167–168; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.
37. (C) Msg, Saigon 329 to State, 7 Aug 64; (C) Msg, Saigon 342 to State, 15 Aug 64.
38. (U) Msg, Saigon 344 to State, 7 Aug 64. *CINCPAC Command History 1964*, p. 437.
39. (S) Msgs, Saigon 65 to State, 9 Jul 64; 96, 14 Jul 64; 126, 17 Jul 64; 152, 21 Jul 64; 203, 24 Jul 64. Quotation is from (S) Msg, Saigon 203 to State, 24 Jul 64.
40. (S) Msgs, Saigon 96 to State, 14 Jul 64; 245, 29 Jul 64; 310, 5 Aug 64. Msg, Saigon 377 to State 10 Aug 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 656–662. Gen Westmoreland viewed HOP TAC as the prototype of a unified military-civilian organization for pacification; see Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 141–143.
41. Msg, Saigon 377 to State, 10 Aug 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 656–662.
42. (TS) Msg, Saigon 364 to State, 9 Aug 64, JMF 9150 (18 Aug 64), sec 1.
43. McGeorge Bundy, “Memorandum for Record of a Meeting, Cabinet Room, White House, Washington, August 10, 1964, 12:35 pm.,” *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 662–663.
44. (TS) Note to Control Div, “Chairman’s Debrief of 10 August White House Meeting,” 10 Aug 64, JMF 9150 (18 Aug 64) sec 1.
45. Memo, W. P. Bundy to the President, “Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia,” 13 Aug 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 672–679.
46. JCSM-701-64 to SecDef, 14 Aug 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 681–682.
47. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 168–169.
48. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 169–171.
49. (TS) Msg, State 439 to Saigon, 14 Aug 64. (TS) Note to Control Div, “Further Actions in Southeast Asia,” 12 Aug 64, JMF 9050 (18 Aug 64) sec 1.

7. US Action Awaits Stability in Saigon

1. (C) Msgs, Saigon 355 to State, 8 Aug 64; 388, 11 Aug 64. (S) Msgs, Saigon 415 and 419 to State, 15 Aug 64; (S) Msg, State 446 to Saigon, 15 Aug 64.

2. (S) Msgs, Saigon 542 to State, 24 Aug 64; 561, 26 Aug 64; 572, 26 Aug 64; 698, 1 Sep 64. (TS) Msg, Saigon 684 to State, 30 Aug 64. (TS) Msg, State 714 to Saigon, 2 Sep 64. *The United States in World Affairs, 1964*, pp. 154–155. (TS-GP 3) *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, p. 438. *NY Times*, 30 Aug 64, 2.

3. *The United States in World Affairs, 1964*, pp. 155–156.

4. (S) Msgs, Saigon 833 and 836 to State, 13 Sep 64; 931, 22 Sep 64. (S) Msg, State 654 to Saigon, 13 Sep 64. Msgs, (U) Saigon 843 to State, 14 Sep 64; (C) 848 to State, 14 Sep 64; (S) 931 to State, 22 Sep 64; (S) 923 to State, 24 Sep 64. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 150318Z Sep 64.

5. (S) Msgs, Saigon 921 to State, 22 Sep 64; 952, 25 Sep 64; 985, 29 Sep 64. *USMACV Command History, 1964*, pp. 122–124.

6. These events are summarized in Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), p. 144; hereafter cited as Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

7. (S) Msgs, Saigon 700 to State, 2 Sep 64; 872, 16 Sep 64; 938, 24 Sep 64.

8. Taylor's recommendations are contained in Msg, Saigon 465 to State, 18 Aug 64, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. I, *Vietnam 1964* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 689–693; hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam 1964*.

9. (S) "Resume of Questions and Answers, Telecon with Gen Westmoreland, 25 August 1964," OJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul–Aug 64.

10. (TS-GP 3) CSAFM-732-64 to JCS, 26 Aug 64, JMF 9150 (18 Aug 64) sec 1. For LeMay's discontent with US Vietnam strategy, see also Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam, 1965–1966* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), pp. 40, 43, 53, 65–66.

11. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-746-64 to SecDef, 26 Aug 64 (derived from JCS 2343/444-1), JMF 9150 (18 Aug 64) sec 2. Unclassified copy in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 713–717.

12. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-729-64 to SecDef, 24 Aug 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/383-2, 18 Aug 64, JMF 9155.3/3100 (21 May 64) sec 2.

13. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/452, 3 Sep 64; (C) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/452," 4 Sep 64; JMF 9155.3 (3 Sep 64). During an argument over arming Army helicopters, Gen LeMay became so incensed that he challenged Gen Johnson to an aerial duel, LeMay in an F-105 and Johnson in an armed UH-1E helicopter. See Gen Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The Twenty-Five Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Touchstone Edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1985), pp. 26–28.

14. (TS-GP 1) CSAM-472-64 to JCS, 4 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Sep 64).

15. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM-759-64 to JCS, 4 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (3 Sep 64).

16. (C) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/452," 4 Sep 64; (TS-GP 1) J-3 TP 159-64 for JCS, 7 Sep 64; JMF 9155.3 (3 Sep 64).

17. Msg, Saigon 768 to State, 6 Sep 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 733–736.

18. Memo, ASecState (FE), "Courses of Action for South Vietnam," 8 Sep 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 746–749.

19. (TS-GP 1) CM-124-64 to SecDef, 9 Sep 64, Att to JCS 2343/457-1, 9 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (9 Sep 64).

20. Memorandum of this meeting is in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 749–755. See also (S) Note to Control Div, "The 9 September White House Meeting on Southeast Asia," 9 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Sep 64).

21. The directive is in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 758–760.

22. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8518 to CINCPAC, 10 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Sep 64).

23. *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, p. 376.

24. (TS) Msg, JCS 8789 to CINCPAC, 181508Z Sep 64; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8790 to CINCPAC, 181550Z Sep 64; (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8806 to CINCPAC, 182035Z Sep 64; OCJCS File, “RVN Incidents, Tonkin Gulf, 18 Sep 64.” (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT, 190152Z Sep 64. (TS-GP 4) Msgs, JCS 8839 to CINCPAC, 18 Sep 64; 8863, 19 Sep 64; (TS-GP 3) 8869, 19 Sep 64. *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, p. 377.

25. (TS) Msg, JCS 4593 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 20 Sep 64. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 210025Z Sep 64. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 5147 to CJCS, 21 Sep 64.

26. YANKEE TEAM was the code name for a US program of reconnaissance flights over Laos, begun in May 1964. In June 1964, the program was expanded to include armed escorts for the reconnaissance planes and suppressive air strikes against enemy anti-aircraft positions. *USMACV Command History, 1964*, pp. 107–108.

27. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-835-64 to SecDef, 30 Sep 64 (derived from JCS 2343/467), JMF 9155.3 (25 Sep 64).

28. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2344/98, 11 Oct 64; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-870-64 to SecDef, 13 Oct 64, App A to JCS 2344/98, 11 Oct 64; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS “Cross Border Operations,” 21 Oct 64, Att to JCS 2344/98-1, 22 Oct 64; JMF 9155.3 (25 Sep 64). (S) Jt State-Def Msg, State 330 to Vientiane, 13 Oct 64, JMF 9155.2 (11 Oct 64).

29. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-889-64 to SecDef, 20 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2344/101); (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “US Support, Laos Operations,” 29 Oct 64, Encl to JCS 2344/101-1, 30 Oct 64; JMF 9155.2 (17 Oct 64).

30. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/149, 22 Oct 64, JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64).

31. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/470, 30 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (25 Sep 64)(1).

32. (S-GP 4) JCS 2343/476, 7 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (6 Oct 64).

33. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MACV-J3 8887 to CINCPAC, 29 Aug 64. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 310100Z Aug 64. (S-GP 3) J-3 Briefing Sheet for CJCS on JCS 2343/476, 13 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (6 Oct 64).

34. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250150Z Sep 64, JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64). (U) 1st N-H of JCS 2343/476, 22 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (6 Oct 64).

35. This SNIE is reprinted in *FRUS Vietnam, 1964*, pp. 806–811.

36. (TS-GP 1) SNIE 10-3-64, 9 Oct 64. For the development of North Vietnamese strategy, see chap. 1.

37. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM J-24-64 to JCS, 12 Oct 64; (TS-GP 1) CSAFM J-34-64 to JCS, 16 Oct 64; JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64). For the JCS 2 Jun 64 memorandum, see *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 437–440.

38. (TS) Msgs, Saigon 1129 to State, 14 Oct 64; (S) 1167 to State, 17 Oct 64. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/149, 22 Oct 64, JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64). For a Communist description of their territorial gains, see The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 134–136.

39. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-893-64 to SecDef, 21 Oct 64, Encl B to JCS 2343/469, 29 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (24 Sep 64)(1).

40. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-902-64 to SecDef, 27 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2339/149), JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64). An unclassified copy of the memorandum is in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 847–857.

41. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Courses of Action, Southeast Asia,” 29 Oct 64, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2339/149, 30 Oct 64, JMF 9155 (22 Oct 64). See also footnote in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, p. 850.

8. The Bien Hoa Attack and the US Reaction

1. Msg, Saigon 1259 to State, 25 Oct 64, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. I *Vietnam 1964* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 845–846.

2. (S) Msg, Saigon 1292 to State, 27 Oct 64.

3. (S) Msg, Saigon 1385 to State, 4 Nov 64, JCS IN 12786. (S) Msgs, Saigon 1382 to State, 4 Nov 64, JCS IN 12447; 1397, 5 Nov 64, JCS IN 13765.

4. (C) Msg, Saigon 1426 to State, 8 Nov 64, JCS IN 16990. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, vol. XIV, 1963–1964, p. 20462B.

5. (S) Msg, Saigon 1414 to State, 7 Nov 64, JCS IN 15807. (C) Msg, Saigon 1563 to State, 20 Nov 64, JCS IN 29904.

6. (S) Msg, Saigon 1452 to State, 10 Nov 64, JCS IN 19014.

7. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to ASD(ISA), 30 Sep 64; (S) MFR, DepSecDef, “October Schedule for OPLAN 34A Operations,” 1 Oct 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep–Oct 64.

8. (TS-GP 1) CM-221-64 to DepSecDef, 29 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Oct 64). (TS-GP 1) CM-258-64 to DepSecDef, 14 Nov 64; (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, “Operation Plan 34A – Additional Actions,” 4 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/489-1, 7 Jan 65; JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 64).

9. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/462, 22 Sep 64, JMF 9155.3 (22 Sep 64).

10. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9584 to CINCPAC, 7 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2343/462-2), JMF 9155.3 (22 Sep 64). (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACAF et al., 280210Z Oct 64.

11. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM J-4-64 to JCS, 2 Oct 64; (TS) Note to Control Div, “Briefing on the Air Strike Annex to CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64,” 2 Oct 64; JMF 9155.3 (8 Oct 64).

12. (TS) Note to Control Div, “CINCPAC Air Strike Plan,” 5 Oct 64; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9769 to CINCPAC, 13 Oct 64 (derived from JCS 2343/477); JMF 9155.3 (8 Oct 64).

13. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6338 to CINCPAC, 16 May 64. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 230306Z May 64. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 022330Z Aug 64. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7801 to CINCPAC, 7 Aug 64.

14. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 37-65, 19 Nov 64; (TS-GP 3) SM-220-65 to CINCPAC, 10 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2054/649-7); JMF 3146 (19 Nov 64) secs 1 and 1A.

15. Development and JCS approval of OPLAN 38-64 are discussed in chap. 4. CINCPAC OPLAN 32-64 had received JCS approval on 6 Nov 63; *CINCPAC Command History, 1963*, pp. 38–40.

16. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7128 to CINCPAC, 27 Jun 64. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 39-65, 5 Sep 64, JMF 3146 (5 Sep 64) sec 1.

17. (TS-GP 3) SM-1534-64 to CINCPAC, 21 Sep 64, Encl to JCS 2054/644-6, 17 Sep 64, JMF 3146 (5 Sep 64) sec 2.

18. This account is drawn from Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 192–195; hereafter cited as Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*; and from The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*. Trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 134–136; hereafter cited as *Victory in Vietnam*.

19. *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 137–138.

20. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 136.

21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010501Z Nov 64, JCS IN 1006; (TS) “Resume of Bien Hoa Attack,” 3 Nov 64; OCJCS File, “Bien Hoa Incident.”

22. Msg, Saigon 1357 to State, 1 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, p. 873. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ00 12862 to JCS, 010359Z Nov 64, OCJCS File, “Bien Hoa Incident.”

23. The 2nd Air Division was MACV’s USAF component command in South Vietnam.

24. Msg, Saigon 1360 to State, 1 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 874–875.

25. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1449 to CINCPAC, 312112Z Oct 64, OCJCS File, “Bien Hoa Incident.”

26. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010501Z Nov 64, JCS IN 1006, OCJCS File, “Bien Hoa Incident.”

27. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/153, 3 Nov 64; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-933-64 to SecDef, 4 Nov 64, App to JCS 2339/153, 3 Nov 64; JMF 9150 (3 Nov 64).

28. (TS) Msg, State 976 to Saigon, 010400Z Nov 64, OCJCS File, “Bien Hoa Incident.”

29. Msg, JCS 1451 to CINCPAC, 012119Z Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 875–876.

30. Jt State-Def Msg 978 to Saigon, 1 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 876–878.

31. Msg, State 979 to Saigon, 1 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 878–879.

32. Msg, Saigon 1368 to State, 2 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 879–880.

33. Msg, JCS 1470 to CINCPAC, 2 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, p. 881. MACV had made persistent efforts to induce the South Vietnamese, who had principal responsibility for the function, to strengthen base security. However, like other aspects of the military effort, the project was hampered by RVNAF internal politics. See Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 171–172.

34. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040353Z Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 885–886.

35. (C) Note to Control Div, “Draft Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: Recommended US Courses of Action in Relation to Viet Cong Attack on Bien Hoa Airfield, 1 November 1964,” 2 Nov 64; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-933-64 to SecDef, 4 Nov 64, App to JCS 2339/153, 3 Nov 64; both in JMF 9150 (3 Nov 64).

36. Formation of the Working Group is described in Editorial Note, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 886–888.

37. (TS-GP 3) CM-228-64 to D/JS, 2 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2339/152, 2 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (2 Nov 64) sec 1.

38. JCSM-955-64 to SecDef, 14 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 902–906.

39. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Courses of Action in Southeast Asia,” 17 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2339/152-2, 19 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (2 Nov 64) sec 2. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Recommended US Courses of Action . . .,” 13 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2339/153-1, 16 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (3 Nov 64).

40. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/157, 13 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (13 Nov 64) sec 1. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Courses of Action in Southeast Asia,” 21 Nov 64, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2339/157-1, 24 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (13 Nov 64) sec 2.

41. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-967-64 to SecDef, 18 Nov 64, Encl A to JCS 2339/157-1, 15 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (13 Nov 64) sec 2.

42. Msg, Saigon 251 to OSD, 3 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 882–884.

43. Msg, Saigon 1440 to State, 9 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 896–899.

44. Msg, Saigon 1445 to State, 10 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 899–900.

45. Memo, W. W. Rostow to SecDef, “Military Dispositions and Political Signals,” 16 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 906–907. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Rostow to SecState, “Some Observations as We Come to the Crunch in Southeast Asia,” 23 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2339/162, 25 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (23 Nov 64).

46. (S-GP 1) JCS 2339/161, 17 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1. Msg, State 1113 to Saigon, 17 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 909–910.

9. A New Presidential Decision

1. Paper Prepared by NSC Working Group, “Summary: Courses of Action in Southeast Asia,” 21 Nov 64, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. I, *Vietnam 1964* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 916–929; hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam 1964*.

2. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/161-1, 19 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1. The JCS submissions of 14 and 18 November are treated in detail in chap. 8.

3. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-982-64 to SecDef, 23 Nov 64, Encl A to JCS 2339/161-2, 22 Nov 64, JMF 9150 (17 Nov 64) sec 1. An unclassified version of this memorandum, without the appendices, is in *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 932–935.

4. AsstSecState (FE), “Memorandum of Executive Committee Meeting, November 24, 1964,” 25 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 943–945. The above discussion also draws on a memo circulated before the meeting, defining the issues to be discussed: Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to SecState et al., “Issues Raised by Papers on Southeast Asia,” 24 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 938–942.

5. (TS) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to SecState et al., “Attached Papers Concerning Southeast Asia,” 26 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia, Jul 64–Jun 65. (TS) Revised Draft, “Summary: Courses of Action in Southeast Asia,” 26 Nov 64, OCJCS File, “Taylor Visit, Nov 64.”

6. (S) Msg, CJCS to Amb Taylor, Saigon, JCS 5119-64, 23 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov–Dec 64.

7. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 6191 to CJCS, 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File, “Taylor Visit, Nov 64.”

8. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 6164 to CJCS, 27 Nov 64, OCJCS File, “Taylor Visit, Nov 64.” Westmoreland’s conservative view on attacking North Vietnam was consistent with the COMUSMACV position since General Harkins’s time. See Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 158–159; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

9. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 230515Z Nov 64, JCS IN 32601, OCJCS File, “Taylor Visit, Nov 64.”

10. Paper by Ambassador Taylor, “The Current Situation in South Vietnam – November 1964,” n.d. [26 Nov 64], *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 948–957.

11. (S-GP 4) CM-277-64 to SecDef, 26 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2343/496, 27 Nov 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Nov 64).

12. AsstSecState (FE), “Memorandum of Meeting on Southeast Asia, November 27, 1964,” 27 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 958–960.

13. Amb Taylor, “Questions Requiring Answers,” 27 Nov 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 960–961. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-1005-64 to SecDef, 1 Dec 64 (derived from JCS 2343/498-1), JMF 9155.3 (27 Nov 64) (1).

14. Annotation by CJCS on (TS) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to SecState et al., “Issues Raised by Papers on Southeast Asia,” 24 Nov 64, OCJCS File 091 Southeast Asia, Jul 64–Jun 65.

15. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2368 to CINCPAC, 27 Nov 64.

16. (TS) Memo, AsstSecState (FE) to Southeast Asia Principals, “Scenario for Immediate Action Program,” 28 Nov 64, OCJCS File, “Taylor Visit, Nov 64.” The MACV estimate, released in October 1964, came from an expanded base of captured documents and prisoner interrogation reports. See Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 193.

17. (TS) AsstSecState (FE) to Southeast Asia Principals, 29 Nov 64, OCJCS File, “Taylor Visit, Nov 64.” For chronology of the final committee review of this paper, see *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 964–965.

18. (TS) CM-283-64 to CSAF et al., 1 Dec 64, OCJCS File, “Taylor Visit, Nov 64.”

19. (TS) Note to Control Div, “The Chairman’s Debrief of the 1 December White House Meeting on Southeast Asia,” 2 Dec 64; (TS) Note to Control Div, “The Chairman’s Debrief of the 3 December NSC Policy Group Meeting on SEAsia,” 4 Dec 64; OCJCS File, “Taylor Visit, Nov 64.” For accounts of the 1 December meeting, see *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 965–974 and Robert S. McNamara with Brian Van De Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 161–163.

20. (TS) Msg, JCS 5208-64 to CINCPAC, 3 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov–Dec 64.

21. *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 969–978.

22. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (21 Dec 64), p. 870.

23. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/164, 12 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (12 Dec 64). (TS-GP 1) JCS 2339/166, 19 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (19 Dec 64). (S-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg, State 1513 to Saigon, 22 Jan 65, JCS IN 89380; (S) Msg, State 1531 to Saigon, 25 Jan 65, JCS IN 92449. (S-GP 3) 2nd N/H of JCS 2343/490, 10 Feb 65, JMF 9155.3 (31 Oct 64). Dept of State *Bulletin*, LII (22 Mar 65), pp. 404–427.

24. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LI (21 Dec 64), p. 870.

10. Implementing the Presidential Decisions

1. “Instructions from the President to Ambassador Taylor,” 3 Dec 64, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. I, *Vietnam 1964* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 974–978; hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam 1964*.

2. Msg, Saigon 1746 to State, 7 Dec 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 982–984.

3. *NY Times*, 12 Dec 64, pp. 1, 3.

4. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 2524 to CINCPAC, 2 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Dec 64).

5. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-1042-64 to SecDef, 12 Dec 64 (derived from JCS 2343/502), JMF 9155.3 (2 Dec 64).

6. (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, “Intensification of OPLAN 34A Maritime Operations,” 14 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2343/502-1, 16 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (2 Dec 64).

7. (TS-GP 1) CM-295-64 to SecDef, 8 Dec 64; (TS-GP 4) Memo, CSA to CJCS, “Trip Report, Vietnam, 8–12 December 1964,” 21 Dec 64; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov–Dec 64. Initiation of the approval system several months earlier is described in chap. 8.

8. (TS-GP 1) MFR, Dir J–3, “Meeting of NSC Principals, 19 Dec 1964,” 19 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2339/166, 19 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (19 Dec 64).

9. *CINCPAC Command History, 1964*, pp. 269–272.

10. (TS-GP 1) J–3 TP 180-64 (Rev.), 11 Dec 64, JMF 9155.2 (11 Dec 64). Jacob Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960–1968* (Washington: Center for Air Force History, 1993), p. 44.

11. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 2848 to CINCPAC, 11 Dec 64; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-1041-64 to SecDef, 11 Dec 64, Encl A to JCS 2344/103, 11 Dec 64; JMF 9155.2 (11 Dec 64).

12. (TS-GP 1) MFR, Dir J–3, “Meeting of NSC Principals, 12 December 1964,” 12 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2339/164, 12 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (12 Dec 64). (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 2883 to CINCPAC, 12 Dec 64. (C-GP 4) Memo, Dir Corres and Directives Div, OASD (Admin) to Secy JCS, “Operations in Laos,” 17 Dec 64, JMF 9155.2 (11 Dec 64).

13. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 217-64, 21 Dec 64, and subsequent OPSUMs. Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Laos*, pp. 44–48.

14. (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/500-1, 11 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2.

15. (S-GP 3) JCSM-1047-64 to SecDef, 17 Dec 64 (derived from JCS 2343/500-1); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Increase in RVNAF Force Structure,” 13 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-2, 14 Jan 65; JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2.

16. (S-GP 4) JCSM-875-64 to SecDef, 15 Oct 64, Encl A to JCS 2343/417-2, 12 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (23 May 64).

17. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Vietnamese Air Force Fighter Squadrons,” 6 Nov 64, Att to JCS 2343/417-3, 9 Nov 64; Msg, JCS 1830 to CINCPAC, 13 Nov 64; JMF 9155.3 (23 May 64).

18. (S) Msg, Saigon 1758 to State, 9 Dec 64, JCS IN 48728, JMF 9155.3 (9 Dec 64).

19. (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/503, 10 Dec 64; (S-GP 3) JCSM 1040-64 to SecDef, 12 Dec 64, App A to JCS 2343/503, 10 Dec 64; JMF 9155.3 (9 Dec 64).

20. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-768-64 to SecDef, 4 Sep 64 (derived from JCS 2343/436-1); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Jet Training for South Vietnamese Pilots,” 25 Sep 64, Att to JCS 2343/436-2, 29 Sep 64; JMF 9155.3 (11 Aug 64).

21. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/497, 27 Nov 64; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 252150Z Nov 64, JCS IN 36221; JMF 9155.3 (27 Nov 64).

22. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 6373 to CJCS, 9 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov–Dec 64. (S) Jt State-Def Msg, State 1247 to Saigon, 11 Dec 64. For details of the deployment problems, see Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 170–171; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

23. Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos*, p. 47.

24. (TS-GP 1) MFR, Dir J–3, “Meeting of NSC Principals, 19 Dec 64,” 19 Dec 64, Att to JCS 2339/166, 19 Dec 64, JMF 9150 (19 Dec 64).

25. (C-GP 4) Telecon, COMUSMACV to NMCC, 200110Z Dec 64, JCS IN 59716, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov–Dec 64.

26. (C) Telecons, COMUSMACV to NMCC, 200607Z Dec 64, JCS IN 59810, and 200750Z Dec 64, JCS IN 59902, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov–Dec 64.

27. Msg, Saigon 1870 to State, 20 Dec 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 1014–1016. McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, pp. 163–164.

28. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1881 to State, 21 Dec 64, JCS IN 60342. See also *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 1020–1023.

29. FBIS 30, 22 Dec 64; AP news ticker excerpts, 23 Dec 64; OCJCS File Vietnam Nov–Dec 64. Msg, Saigon 1939 to State, 25 Dec 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 1041–1043. (S) Msg, Saigon 1950 to State, 26 Dec 64, JCS IN 64948.

30. Dept of State Bulletin, LII (11 Jan 65), p. 39. *NY Times*, 27 Dec 64, p. 1. (S) Msg, Saigon 1951 to State, 26 Dec 64, JCS IN 64974. Msg, Saigon 1999 to State, 30 Dec 64; Msg, Saigon 2010 to State, 31 Dec 64; *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 1053–1056, 1060–1063.

31. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 221-64, 26 Dec 64. A communist official history lists the Brinks bombing among successful sapper and commando attacks on American installations. See The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (Trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 136.

32. Msg, Saigon 1941 to State, 25 Dec 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 1043–1044.

33. Jt State-Def Msg, State 1355 to Saigon, 25 Dec 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 1044–1045.

34. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 262150Z Dec 64, JCS IN 65166.

35. (TS) Msg, Saigon 1975 to State, 28 Dec 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, p. 1049.

36. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-1076-64 to SecDef, 28 Dec 64, Encl to JCS 2343/510, 31 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (28 Dec 64).

37. Msg, JCS 5458-64 to CINCPAC, 28 Dec 64; Msg, State 1365 to Saigon, 29 Dec 64; *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 1050, 1052–1053. (S) Msg, JCS 5464-64 to CINCPAC, 29 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov–Dec 64.

38. Msg, JCS 5485-64 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 31 Dec 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 1063–1065.

39. Msg, President to Ambassador to Vietnam, 30 Dec 64, *FRUS Vietnam 1964*, pp. 1057–1059.

40. Msg, Taylor to the President, 6 Jan 65, National Security Council History, Deployment of Major Forces, box 40, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas. Westmoreland History File, tab 9, William C. Westmoreland Papers, US Army Center of Military History. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 189–190.

11. A New Stage of US Commitment

1. Enemy plans are described in The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*. Trans by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 137–138. Hereafter cited as *Victory in Vietnam*.

2. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 194–195. Hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*. A communist account and evaluation of the campaign is in *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 138–142.

3. *Special DIA IB*, 1 Feb 65; *DIA IB*, 14 Jan 65, p. S–3; *DIA IB*, 25 Feb 65, p. S–3. The North Vietnamese claim that 40,000 personnel had infiltrated by the end of 1963 and that almost 9,000 “cadre and soldiers,” including full-strength battalions and regiments, came south in 1964. See *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 115, 127, 138.

4. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 195.

5. DIA, SIS-267-65, Jul 65.

6. Msgs, Saigon 2079, 2080, 2099 to State, 060532Z, 071155Z, and 091050Z Jan 65, JCS IN 73113, 74666, and 76658.

7. Msgs, Saigon 2133 and 2166 to State, 121150Z and 160823Z Jan 65, JCS IN 78849 and 83669.

8. *NY Times*, 19 Jan 65, p. 1. (C) Msgs, Saigon 2176 and 2182 to State, 180459Z and 181111Z Jan 65; (S) Msg, Saigon 2201 to State, 200647Z Jan 65; JCS IN 84668, 85801, 87097.

9. Msgs, Saigon 2016, 2047, 2200, 2214, 2219, 2257, and 2262 to State, 020825Z, 051230Z, 200905Z, 201425Z, 210610Z, 231125Z, and 231313Z Jan 65, JCS IN 71059, 73126, 87113, 87235, 87936, 90785, and 90770.

10. Msgs, Saigon 2282, 2307, and 2308 to State, 251121Z, 270349Z, and 270403Z Jan 65, JCS IN 91762, 93956, and 93767.

11. Msgs, State 1542 and 1562 to Saigon, 27 and 29 Jan 65, JCS IN 94576 and 97870.

12. Msgs, Saigon 2382, 2389, 2391, and 2400 to State, 03053Z, 031107Z, 031405Z, and 041145Z Feb 65, JCS IN 11361, 11594, 11766, and 13335. Msg, State 1601 to Saigon, 4 Feb 65, JCS IN 12612.

13. Msgs, Saigon 2620, 2637, and 2719 to State, 16, 17, and 23 Feb 65, JCS IN 29589, 31034, and 37826.

14. Msgs, Saigon 2654, 2719, 2671, 2714, and 2740 to State, 19, 23, and 25 Feb 65, JCS IN 33415, 37826, 33648, 37577, and 40498. Telecons, MACV to NMCC, 191235Z, 200300Z, 200335Z, 200110Z, 201215Z, 211914Z, and 220423Z Feb 65, JCS IN 33750, 34701, 34747, 34606, 35334, 36567, and 36822.

15. Msg, Saigon 2787 to State, 27 Feb 65, JCS IN 44139.
16. This memo is printed in Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 166-168; hereafter McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*.
17. Recapitulation of US Strength Increases in South Vietnam, 1 Mar 64; DJSM-187-65 to CJCS, 16 Feb 65; OCJCS File 091 Feb 65.
18. Msg, Saigon 2053 to State, 6 Jan 65, JCS IN 73522.
19. NMCC OPSUM 20-65, 26 Jan 65, p. 4 and 21-65, 27 Jan 65, p. 5.
20. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 260532Z Jan 65, JCS IN 92948. Msg, JCS 4213 to CINCPAC, 27 Jan 65.
21. Msg, JCS 4244 to CINCPAC, 28 Jan 65.
22. Msgs, JCS 4297 and 4484 to CINCPAC, 29 Jan and 3 Feb 65.
23. Msg, Saigon 2359 to State, 31 Jan 65, JCS IN 98620.
24. Msg, JCS 4422 to CINCPAC, 2 Feb 65. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4612 to CINCPAC, 4 Feb 65. Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam, 1965–1966* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), p. 11; hereafter Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*.
25. Msgs, JCS 3486 and 3995 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 5 and 21 Jan 65. JCSM-72-65 to SecDef, 30 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/516); Msg, JCS 4707 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 052211Z Feb 65; both in JMF 9155.3 (15 Jan 65).
26. JCSM-70-65 to SecDef, 29 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/514); Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/514, 8 Feb 65; JMF 9155.3 (22 Jan 65).
27. CSAM 36-65, 1 Feb 65, Encl to JCS 2343/520, 5 Feb 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Feb 65).
28. MACV Catalogue of Incidents, CINCPAC SDO item no. 001, 29 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov–Dec 64.
29. Msg, JCS 5485 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 31 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov–Dec 64. CM-277-64 to SecDef, 26 Nov 64, Encl to JCS 2343/496, JMF 9155.3 (26 Nov 64). CM-359-64 to SecDef, 4 Jan 65; Memo, OSD to Secy JCS, 19 Jan 65, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/512; Note, sgd Bottomley, 4 Jan 65; JMF 9155.3 (4 Jan 65).
30. Msgs, State to Saigon, 14 Jan 65; Saigon to State, 18 Jan 65, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. II, *Vietnam, January–June 1965* (On-line publication. www.state.gov/www/about_state/history.html), Docs. 27 and 28. Hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, with document numbers.
31. J3M-69-65 to D/JS, 18 Jan 65; DJSM-65-65 to ASD(ISA), 18 Jan 65; JMF 9155.3 (4 Jan 65).
32. Msgs, CINCPAC to JCS, 270155Z Jan 65; COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 271715Z Jan 65, JCS IN 93713 and 93924.
33. CJCS to CINCPAC, 271547Z Jan 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 65.
34. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, p. 67. McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, p. 170. Msg, State to Saigon, 1 Feb 65, Document 56; Editorial Note, Document 57; *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*.
35. Telecon, MACV to NMCC, 070805Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17098. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 31-65, 8 Feb 65, p. 5. Statement by SecDef, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State *Bulletin*, LII (22 Feb 65), pp. 239–240.
36. Accounts of the 6 February NSC meeting are in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Documents 76 and 77. See also McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, pp. 170–171. NMCC EA Chronological Log, 6 Feb 65, OCJCS File, Pleiku Incident. Statement by SecDef, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State *Bulletin*, LII (22 Feb 65), pp. 239–240. Msg, JCS 4484 to CINCPAC, 030019Z Feb 64.
37. Msg, Saigon 2417 to State, 070430Z Feb 65, JCS IN 16924.

38. Msgs, JCS 4756, 4758, and 4766 to CINCPAC, 070246Z, 070428Z, and 070220Z Feb 65. Msg, State Circular 1438, 6 Feb 65 (11:41 PM EST), JCS IN 17080.

39. Msgs, CINCPAC to JCS 070750Z Feb 65; CINCPAC to CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, and COMUSMACV, 070300Z Feb 65; JCS IN 17259 and 16845.

40. The SLF normally comprised one Marine infantry battalion with attached helicopter, artillery, and other support units.

41. Msgs, JCS 4760 to CINCPAC and CINCSRIKE, 070455Z Feb 65; JCS 4762 to CINCPAC, 071341Z Feb 65; JCS 4766 to CINCPAC, 071707Z Feb 65. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, vol. II, p. 451. Note to Control Div, “US Reprisals against Viet Cong Attacks in South Vietnam,” 7 Feb 65, OCJCS File, Pleiku Incident.

42. NMCC OPSUM 31-65, 8 Feb 65, pp. 1, 7. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, pp. 15–16.

43. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 81. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, pp. 17–18. Msg, Saigon 2419 to State, 070636Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17047. Msgs, JCS 4764 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 071459Z Feb 65; JCS 4775 to CINCS, 081000Z Feb 65.

44. Msg, Saigon 2426 to State, 071015Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17183. White House Statement, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State *Bulletin*, LII (22 Feb 65), pp. 238–239.

45. The first US dependents left Saigon on 8 Feb and by 19 Feb all medically-able dependents (1,593) were gone from South Vietnam. Statement by the Pres, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State *Bulletin*, LII (22 Feb 65), p. 239. NMCC OPSUMs 32-65, 9 Feb 65, p. 4; and 41–65, 19 Feb 65, p. 5.

46. Msg, Saigon 2435 to State, 080825Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17792. (C-GP 1) USIA Special Memo, 10 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65. *NY Times*, 9 Feb 65, p. 1; 10 Feb 65, p. 1.

47. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 101540Z Feb 65, JCS IN 21384. Msg, Saigon 2491 to State, 10 Feb 65, JCS IN 21442. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, p. 21.

48. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Documents 97, 98, and 99. *NY Times*, 11 Feb 65, p. 1. Msgs, JCS 4962 and 4973 to CINCPAC, 10 Feb 65.

49. Msg, JCS 5010 to NSA et al., 11 Feb 65. NMCC OPSUM 35-65, 12 Feb 65, p. 3. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, pp. 21–24.

50. White House Statement and Joint US-South Vietnamese Statement, Dept of State *Bulletin*, LII (1 Mar 65), pp. 290–291.

51. Memo, SecDef for CJCS, 17 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 65.

52. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 0732 to Sharp, 12 Feb 65, quoted in Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 174; see also pp. 166–167.

53. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 130356Z Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65.

54. Msgs, Saigon 2455 to State, 9 Feb 65; State 1693 to Saigon, 11 Feb 65; JCS IN 19338 and 06067.

12. The Quantum Jump—ROLLING THUNDER

1. For the meaning of LeMay’s replacement by McConnell, see George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 29–30.

2. US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. II, *Vietnam, January–June 1965* (On-line publication. http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history.html), Document 83; hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, with document number.

3. Memo, Bundy for the Pres, “Re the Situation in Vietnam,” 7 Feb 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 84.

4. MFR, DCI John McCone, “Meeting of the National Security Council,” 8 Feb 65; Msg, State to Saigon, 8 Feb 65: *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Documents 88 and 91.
5. JCSM-100-65 to SecDef, 11 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/169), JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).
6. Msg, Saigon 2445 to State, 9 Feb 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 93.
7. CSAM-58-65 to JCS, 10 Feb 65; Army flimsy, unnumbered, n.d., tabled by CSA, 10 Feb 65, 1400; Briefing Sheet, J-3 for CJCS, “JCS 2339/169 – Courses of Action Southeast Asia – First Eight Weeks”; SM-140-65 to JCS, 11 Feb 65; Dec on Rept, J-3 to CJCS “Courses of Action Southeast Asia – First Eight Weeks,” 12 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/169); JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65), secs 1 and 2.
8. An MEB consisted of a Regimental Landing Team (RLT)—an infantry regiment with attached supporting units—and a Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters.
9. An MEF normally included a full Marine division and a Marine aircraft wing.
10. JCSM-100-65 to SecDef (derived from JCS 2339/169), 11 Feb 65, JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65). A copy of this memorandum without the detailed appendices is in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 109.
11. Msg, JCS 0531-65 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 11 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 65.
12. Msg, State 1718 to Saigon, 13 Feb 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 115.
13. Msgs, JCS 5095 to CINCPAC, 12 Feb 65; 5332, 16 Feb 65; 5349, 16 Feb 65.
14. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 140. Msg, JCS 5555 to CINCPAC, 18 Feb 65.
15. Msgs, Saigon 2654 and 2671 to State, 19 Feb 65; JCS 5572 to CINCPAC, 19 Feb 65. NMCC Telecon, Wheeler to Sharp and Westmoreland, item 004, 191542Z Feb 65.
16. These postponements are recounted in Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam, 1965–1966* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), pp. 81–83; hereafter cited as Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*.
17. Msgs, JCS 5959 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 65; JCS 6043, 27 Feb 65; JCS 6071, 28 Feb 65.
18. Msg, JCS 6091 to CINCPAC, 1 Mar 65.
19. NMCC OPSUMs 49-65 and 50-65, 2 and 3 Mar 65. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, pp. 83–84.
20. Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 1061 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 1 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), p. 175; hereafter cited as Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.
21. Msg, JCS 0739-65 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 1 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.
22. Msgs, Sharp to Westmoreland, 2 and 16 Mar 65, quoted in Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 175.
23. CSAFM-B-80-65 to JCS, 17 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/526, JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).
24. CSAM 66-65 to JCS, 12 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/526, JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).
25. JCSM-127-65 to SecDef, 25 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/526-1); Memo to SecDef from ASD(ISA), “Use of Napalm against North Vietnamese Targets,” 9 Mar 65, w/marginal notation by SecDef, Att to JCS 2343/526-1; JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).
26. Marc Leepson with Helen Hannaford, eds., *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1999), p. 380.
27. Msgs, JCS 6703 to CINCPAC, 9 Mar 65; 7025, 13 Mar 65. Msgs, JCS 7017 to CINCAL et al., 13 Mar 65; 7035 and 7042, 15 Mar 65.
28. Msg, Saigon 2949 to State, 13 Mar 65.

29. Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., no sub, with attached Report on Survey of the Military Situation in Vietnam, 14 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65. For more on Gen Johnson's pivotal trip and report, see chap. 13.

30. DJSM-379-65 to CJCS, 27 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65.

31. Msg, JCS 0936-65 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65. Msg, JCS 7185 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65.

32. Msg, JCS 7167 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65. MFR, McGeorge Bundy, "Memorandum for Discussion, Tuesday, March 16, 1:00 pm.," 16 Mar 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 200.

33. CSAFM J-78-65 to JCS, 17 Mar 65, JCS 2343/549, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

34. Amended Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/549—Concept for North Vietnam," 26 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

35. JCSM-221-65 to SecDef, 27 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/551), JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

36. JCS 2343/551-1, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65). Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040304Z Apr 65, JCS IN 91149.

37. JCS 2343/551-1, 14 Apr 65; 1st N/H of JCS 2343/551-1, 20 Apr 65; JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

38. Msg, JCS 7672 to CINCPAC, 2 Mar 65.

39. Msgs, JCS 7699 to CINCPAC, 24 Mar 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 251321Z Mar 65; JCS 7787 to CINCPAC, 25 Mar 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 240900Z Mar 65.

40. NMCC OPSUMs, 28-31 Mar 65. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, pp. 94–95.

41. Thanh Hoa Bridge, about 76 miles south of Hanoi, was the longest bridge below the 20th parallel. It was a key link in North Vietnam's transportation system and was a "prestige" bridge because Ho Chi Minh had personally dedicated it in 1964. It was to prove one of the toughest targets in North Vietnam. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, p. 105.

42. Note to Control Div, "The Meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense with Ambassador Taylor," 29 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

43. CM-534-65 to SecDef, 6 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Apr 65).

13. Limited Deployment of US Forces

1. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), p. 176; hereafter cited as Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*. JCSM-121-65 to SecDef, 20 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/525-1), JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65).

2. Msgs, COMUSMACV 0712 to CINCPAC, 17 Feb 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 180210Z Feb 65. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 177.

3. JCSM-121-65 to SecDef, 18 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/525-1), JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65).

4. Msg, Saigon 473 to JCS, 22 Feb 65, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. II, *Vietnam, January–June 1965* (On-line publication. http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history.html), Document 153; hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, with document number.

5. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 178.

6. Memo, J-3 to JCS, 24 Feb 65, Encl to JCS 2343/525-2, JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65). The Commander, 2nd Air Division opposed deployment of the Marine fixed-wing squadron, arguing that the Marines were not going to conduct offensive operations and hence did not need the support and that Da Nang airfield already was overcrowded with US and VNAF aircraft. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 186, fn. 52.

7. JCSM-130-65 to SecDef, 24 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/525-2), JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65). Msg, JCS 0736-65 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 27 Feb 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 170.

8. Msg, Saigon 2798 to State, 1 Mar 65, JCS IN 45134. Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J00 6394 to CINCPAC, 2 Mar 65, JCS IN 46032.

9. Msg, JCS 6580 to CINCPAC, 7 Mar 65. For details of the landing, see Jack Shulimson and Charles M. Johnson, *Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps, 1978), pp. 7–20.

10. Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 262155Z Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65.

11. Msg, JCS 0736-65 to CINCPAC, 27 Feb 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 170.

12. Msg, OSD to US Embassy in Vietnam, 2 Mar 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 178. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 200–201.

13. Editorial Note, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 179. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 201–202.

14. Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., 14 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65. Msg, Saigon 2879 to State, 7 Mar 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 186.

15. Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 6 Mar 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 182. Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., 14 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 197–198, 201–202.

16. Transcript of Briefing for USARPAC Staff, 12 Mar 65, box 9, Harold K. Johnson Papers, US Army Military History and Education Center, quoted in Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 202.

17. Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., 14 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

18. Msg, JCS 0936-65 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

19. Msg, JCS 0936-65 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

20. Westmoreland's proposals are discussed at length in Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 203–205.

21. Msg, Saigon 3003 to State, 18 Mar 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 204.

22. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 180840Z Mar 65, JCS IN 67919.

23. Memo, J-3 to JCS, 18 Mar 65; CSAFM-J-84-65, 19 Mar 65; JCS 2343/543, JMF 9155.3 (18 Mar 65).

24. Decision on JCS 2343/543, 19 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (18 Mar 65). JCSM-204-65 to SecDef, 20 Mar 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 208.

25. Msg, JCS 1008-65 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 210053Z Mar 65.

26. Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 1566 to CINCPAC, 22 Mar 65. At this time, both Gen Westmoreland and South Vietnam's civilian leaders favored an allied combined command, both to enhance operational efficiency and to place Saigon's fractious generals under American supervision and restraint. See Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 214–215.

27. Msg, Saigon 3120 to State, 27 Mar 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 218.

28. DJSM-395-65 to CJCS, 31 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

29. Accounts of this meeting are in: Note to Control Div, "The Meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense with Ambassador Taylor," 29 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65; and Msg, State to Saigon, 30 Mar 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 220.

30. Msg, JCS 5316 to CINCPAC, 16 Feb 65. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 199–200.

31. JCS 2343/530-6, 3 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65). Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 200.

32. JCS 2343/530-6, 3 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).
33. JCSM-161-65 to SecDef, 6 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/530-6), JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).
Msg, JCS 6692 to CINCPAC, 9 Mar 65.
34. JCSM-160-65 to SecDef, 6 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/530-7), JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).
35. JCSM-160-65 to SecDef, 6 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/530-7); Memo, OSD to Secy, JCS, “FARM GATE Restrictions in the Republic of Vietnam,” 12 Mar 65; JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).
36. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 200, 230–231. Westmoreland is quoted on p. 231. For details of air operations, see John Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive, 1965–1968* (Washington: Office of Air Force History, 1988), pp. 41–49, 81–82, 99–111, and app. 5.
37. The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 115–116.
38. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 87–89.
39. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 173. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, p. 435.
40. NMCC OPSUM 40-65, 18 Feb 65, p. 1. Msg, Saigon 2710 to State, 23 Feb 65, JCS IN 37579. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 12. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, p. 436.
41. CNOM-113-65 to JCS, 1 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/560, JMF 9155.3 (1 Apr 65).
42. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 152206Z Mar 65, JCS IN 64176.
43. Msg, JCS 7307 to CINCPAC, 18 Mar 65. Msg, JCS 7484 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).
44. Msg, State 2141 to Saigon, 31 Mar 65, JCS IN 86479.
45. JCSM-241-65 to SecDef, 1 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/560, 1 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Apr 65).
46. Msg, State 2171 to Saigon, 2 Apr 65, JCS IN 90310.
47. Msg, Saigon 3190 to State, 2 Apr 65, JCS IN 88860.
48. Msg, DEF 8710 to Saigon, 8 Apr 65.
49. Memo, OCNO to SecNav, 29 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (14 Apr 65). Msg, Saigon 3550 to State, 27 Apr 65, JCS IN 31995.
50. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 173.
51. Msg, JCS 1149 to CINCPAC, 30 Apr 65. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 9 Aug 65, JMF 1040.1 (2 Jun 65).

14. The Logistics of Escalation

1. MACV Staff Study, “Improvement of US Logistics Systems in RVN,” 26 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 1. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), p. 170; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.
2. Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, 23 Dec 64. J-4 TP 12-64, 29 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 2.
3. JCSM-33-65 to SecDef, 15 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/486-4), JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 3.
4. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 27 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-5, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 3.
5. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 12 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-8; JCS 2343/486-11, 25 Feb 65; JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 4.
6. JCSM-196-65 to SecDef, 19 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/486-12); JCSM-219-65 to SecDef, 27 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/486-14); Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 2 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-16; JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 5. J-4 TP 3-65 for CJCS, 4 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1.

7. Rept, Dir of Log to JCS, 5 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-11, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 4.
8. Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., 14 Mar 65, OCJCS File Vietnam Mar 65.
9. CAPT C. E. Smith, USN, Chief, Plans Division, J-4, interviewed by Willard J. Webb on 16 Jan 69.
10. JCS 2339/174-2, 7 Mar 65, JMF 9155 (19 Feb 65) sec 3.
11. JCS 2339/174-2, 7 Mar 65, JMF 9155 (19 Feb 65) sec 3.
12. JCSM-950-64 to SecDef, 11 Nov 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).
13. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Airfield Support of Contingency Plans for Southeast Asia,” 23 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).
14. JCSM-144-65 to SecDef, 4 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/483-2), JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).
15. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Additional Airfield Support for Southeast Asia,” 18 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).
16. CM-488-65 to DJS, 16 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).
17. JCS 2343/540-1, 24 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).
18. JCSM-238-65 to SecDef, 2 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).

15. Deployment Planning, March–June 1965

1. For an account of the Dominican intervention, which involved a US Army division and a US Marine expeditionary brigade, see Gen Bruce Palmer, Jr., *Intervention in the Caribbean: The Dominican Crisis of 1965* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989).
2. Memorandum by the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, 1 Apr 65, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. II, *Vietnam, January–June 1965* (On-line publication http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history.html), Document 228; hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–June 65*, with document number.
3. Msg, Wheeler to Westmoreland and Sharp, 3 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 65. DCI McCone, Memo to Deputy DCI, 1 Apr 65; NSAM 328, 6 Apr 65; *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Documents 230 and 242.
4. MFR, 3 Apr 65; Msg, State 2184 to Saigon, 3 Apr 65; *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Documents 238 and 239.
5. Msg, Wheeler to Westmoreland and Sharp, 3 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 65. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 5 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65), sec 1.
6. Terms of Reference for Honolulu Conference, 7 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 65. Msg, JCS 8528 to CINCPAC, 6 Apr 65.
7. Msg, JCS 8507 to CINCPAC, 5 Apr 65.
8. Terms of Reference for Honolulu Conference, 7 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 65. Msg, JCS 8528 to CINCPAC, 6 Apr 65.
9. CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistic and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia—Deployment Planning Conference, HQ PACOM, 8–10 Apr 65, 10 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1. For MACV’s role in the conference, see Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 209–210; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.
10. Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ 11682 to CINCPAC, 11 Apr 65, JCS IN 11366. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 210.

11. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 132235Z Apr 65, JCS IN 14207. JCS 2343/564-4, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 2.
12. Note to Control Div, “J-4 5-65/J-3 TP 19-65,” 12 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 2.
13. In 1963, Secretary McNamara assigned to the Commander in Chief Strike Command (CINCSTRIKE) responsibility for the Middle East, Africa South of the Sahara, and South Asia (MEAFSA). Ronald H. Cole, Walter S. Poole, James F. Schnabel, Robert J. Watson, and Willard J. Webb, *The History of the Unified Command Plan 1946–1999* (Washington: Joint History Office, 2003), pp. 30–31.
14. Msg, JCS 9375 to CSA et al., 19 Apr 65.
15. JCSM-288-65 to SecDef, 17 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/564-5), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.
16. For an optimistic assessment of military developments, see Saigon 3359 to State, 13 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 249. This same message takes a hopeful view of the Quat government.
17. Msg, Saigon 3332 to State, 12 Apr 65, JCS IN 11893.
18. Msg, JCS 9012 to CINCPAC et al., 14 Apr 65. The sequence of events leading to this message is recounted in Editorial Note, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 251.
19. Msg, Saigon 3373 to State, 14 Apr 65, JCS IN 14875. Bundy’s comment is quoted in Editorial Note, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 251.
20. Msg, Saigon 3374 to State, 14 Apr 65, JCS IN 14792.
21. Msg, Saigon 3384 to State, 14 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 252.
22. JCSM-281-65 to SecDef, 15 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/575), JMF 9155.3 (14 Apr 65).
23. Msg, State 2332 to Saigon, 15 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 257.
24. Msg, DEF 9164 to Saigon et al., 15 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–June 65*, Document 256.
25. Msg, Saigon 3421 to State, 17 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 258. Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Ploughshares* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 341–342.
26. Msg, Saigon 3424 to State, 17 Apr 65; Msg, White House CAP 65120 to Saigon, 17 Apr 65; *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Documents 260 and 262. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 211.
27. Msg, JCS 9310 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 192319Z Apr 65; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 65. Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.
28. Msg, Exec to CJCS 201641Z Apr 65, OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.
29. Accounts of the conference are in Diary Entry by the Ambassador to Vietnam, 20 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 264; and Robert S. McNamara with Brian Van De Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), pp. 182–183.
30. Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 265.
31. MFRs, by John McCone, 21 and 22 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Documents 266 and 269.
32. Msg, State 2397 to Saigon, 22 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 271. McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, p. 183.
33. Msg, DEF 1097 to Saigon, 30 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 280. Note to Control Div, “Deployment of Forces to South Vietnam,” 20 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65), sec 4. Msg, JCS 1141 to CINCPAC, 30 Apr 65.
34. Msg, COMUSMACV 14432 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 2 May 65, JCS IN 40071. Jack Shulimson and Maj Charles M. Johnson, USMC, *US Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington: History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1978), pp. 35–36. Hereafter Shulimson and Johnson, *Landing and Buildup*.

35. Msg, JCS 1510 to CINCPAC, 5 May 65. Shulimson and Johnson, *Landing and Buildup*, p. 36.
36. Marine Corps, *Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, 1965*, p. 174. Shulimson and Johnson, *Landing and Buildup*, pp. 36, 236–237. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 212.
37. JCSM-321-65 to SecDef, 30 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/564-7), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.
38. Memo, SecDef to JCS, 15 May 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 4.
39. The Marine Corps had had such an airfield under development for some time, which they called Short Airfield for Tactical Support (SATS). Built of steel matting, the runways could be put in place quickly to support amphibious landings. In effect a shore-based carrier deck, the SATS would use catapults and arresting gear to allow takeoffs and landings on a relatively short runway. Shulimson and Johnson, *Landing and Buildup*, p. 30.
40. Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 265.
41. JCSM-288-65 to SecDef, 17 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/564-5), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.
42. Msg, JCS 8654 to CINCPAC, 7 Apr 65.
43. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 152046Z May 65, JCS IN 62873.
44. CM-634-65 to SecDef, 21 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.
45. Msg, JCS 2627 to CINCPAC, 21 May 65,
46. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 300520Z May 65, JCS IN 83302.
47. Msg, JCS 3545 to CINCPAC, 8 Jun 65.
48. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, no subj, 9 Jun 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 65. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 108. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, p. 533.
49. Raborn replaced John McCone on 28 April 1965.
50. Ltr, DCI Raborn to the President, 8 May 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 286. See also Ltr, DCI McCone to the President, 28 Apr 65, *ibid.*, Document 279.

16. Into the Battle, June 1965–February 1966

1. Enemy intentions are described in The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (Trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 143–144; hereafter *Victory in Vietnam*.
2. Ad Hoc Study Group, Rpt, “Intensification of the Military Operations in Vietnam—Concept and Appraisal,” 14 Jul 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 65.
3. *MACV Command History 1965*, pp. 6, 220–223, 227–228. Msg, Saigon 4220 to State, 17 Jun 65, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. 3, *Vietnam, June–December 1965* (On-line edition. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus>), Document 5; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*.
4. Ad Hoc Study Group, Rpt, “Intensification of the Military Operations in Vietnam—Concept and Appraisal,” 14 Jul 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 65. Communist infiltration figures are in *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 138, 144 .
5. Encl C to JCS 2343/801, 28 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65). Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 228–229; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.
6. Msg, Saigon 3674 to State, 6 May 65, JCS IN 47399. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 18.

7. Dept of State, Intelligence Note MM-RFE 65-160, 28 May 65. Msg, Saigon 3982 to State, 1 Jun 65, JCS IN 84437. Msg, Saigon 4053 to State, 4 Jun 65, JCS IN 89573. Msg, Saigon 4079 to State, 5 Jun 65, JCS IN 91164. Msg, Saigon 4098 to State, 7 Jun 65, JCS IN 95724.

8. Msg, Saigon 4157 to State, 11 Jun 65, JCS IN 98876.

9. Msg, Saigon 4173 to State, 13 Jun 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Document 2.

10. Msg, Saigon 4192 to State, 14 Jun 65, JCS IN 11441. Msg, Saigon 4266 to State, 18 Jun 65, JCS IN 17671. Msg, MACV to NMCC, 19 Jun 65, JCS IN 19130. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 18–19.

11. Msgs, Saigon 4220 to State, 17 Jun 65; Saigon 4312 to State, 21 Jun 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Documents 5 and 9. William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1976), pp. 90–91, 138. For still more negative assessments of the new government, see Robert S. McNamara with Brian Van De Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 186; hereafter McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*.

12. Msg, JCS 5000 to CINCSAC, 11 Feb 65.

13. The technical aspects, including the formidable problems of guidance, control, and refueling of the B–52s on their strikes, are covered in *History of the Strategic Air Command*, Study No. 101, 1965; and No. 107, 1966. Hereafter cited as *SAC History* with year.

14. Msg, CINCSAC 02583 to JCS, 29 Mar 65. JCS 009079 to CINCPAC, 14 Apr 65. For Gen Ryan's reluctance to use the bombers in a tactical role, see Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 231.

15. *SAC History*, 1965, vol. I, p. 199.

16. *SAC History*, 1965, vol. I, p. 199. Msg, COMUSMACV 16006 to JCS, 14 May 65, JCS IN 59699.

17. Msg, JCS 1047 to CINCPAC/CINCSAC, 29 Apr 65. *SAC History, 1965*, vol. I, p. 201.

18. Msg, COMUSMACV 16006 to CINCPAC, 14 May 65, JCS IN 59699.

19. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 150214Z May 65, JCS IN 62112.

20. *SAC History*, 1965, pp. 204–205.

21. *SAC History*, 1965, pp. 205–208.

22. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 232.

23. Msgs, JCS 5774 and 6477 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 14 Jul 65 and 22 Jul 65. *SAC History, 1965*, vol. I, p. 224. Air Staff objections are noted in Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 232.

24. Msg, Saigon 4035 to State, 3 June 65, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. II, *Vietnam, January–June 1965* (On-line publication: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus>), Document 328; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, with document number.

25. Msg, Saigon 4074 to State, 5 June 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 332.

26. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 233.

27. Msg, COMUSMACV MAC JOO 19118 to JCS, 7 Jun 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 337.

28. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 234–236.

29. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 072325Z Jun 65, JCS IN 93177. JCSM-457-65 to SecDef, 11 Jun 65 (derived from JCS 2343/602, JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65)). A copy of this memorandum without the troop list is in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Document 346. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 236–237.

30. McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, pp. 188–191. The quotation is from a recorded conversation in the Presidential tapes collection in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

31. These deliberations can be followed in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Documents 338, 343, and 340. JCS 2343/602-1, 17 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65).

32. Msg, CJCS to COMUSMACV, 22 Jun 65; Msg, COMUSMACV 3240 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 24 Jun 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Documents 13 and 17. Msgs, COMUSMACV 3237 to CINCPAC, 24 Jun 65; CINCPAC to CJCS, 250542Z Jun 65; OJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 65.

33. See chap. 15 for the details of this decision.

34. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 238–240. For administration public relations missteps on the mission question, see William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 161–168. In the end, COMUSMACV did not find it necessary to intervene with US ground troops at Dong Xoai.

35. Editorial Note, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Document 16. McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, pp. 192–193.

36. Memo, SecDef for the President, “Program of expanded military and political moves with respect to Vietnam,” 1 July 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Document 38. It is not clear whether this program represented McNamara’s personal conviction or whether he was making a case as the President had directed.

37. JCSM-515-65 to SecDef, 2 Jul 65 (derived from JCS 2343/602-3), JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65), sec 2.

38. *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Documents 42, 43, 44, and 49 describe the circumstances and results of the meeting. McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, pp. 194–196.

39. MFR, SecDef Meeting, 9 Jul 65, “Buildup to Meet Vietnam Situation,” OJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 65. Memo, President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to President, “Vietnam Planning at Close of Business, July 19,” 19 Jul 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Document 64.

40. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 240–241.

41. *NY Times*, 9 Jul 65, p. 1; 10 Jul 65, p. 2. Msg, McG. Bundy to Pres, 4 Jul 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Document 49.

42. Msg, SecDef to Embassy in Vietnam, 7 Jul 65; Msg, Saigon to State, 18 Jul 65; *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Documents 54 and 62. MG Rosson is quoted in Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 243.

43. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 41–42. “Questions by the Secretary of Defense and Replies by the US Ambassador to South Vietnam,” 22 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3 (22 Jul 65).

44. Msg, Vance to McNamara, 17 Jul 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Document 61. The number 34 referred to the US battalions in General Westmoreland’s request; the other ten would be third country forces.

45. Memo, McNamara to the President, 20 Jul 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Document 67.

46. Transcripts and accounts of these meetings are in *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Documents 71, 72, and 76. The latter document consists of notes on the President’s meeting with the JCS.

47. Memo, Bromley Smith, “Summary Notes of the 553d Meeting of the National Security Council,” 27 Jul 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Document 93.

48. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965, II* (1966), pp. 725 and 795. The President’s understatement of the full dimensions of his July decision gave rise to later charges of duplicity against him. Once again, Johnson was trying to reconcile his commitment to Vietnam with his desire to avoid distracting Congress from his domestic legislative program. For comment, see McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, pp. 205–206.

49. The JCS role in this episode has been subjected to bitter criticism. See H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 312–320. Gen Johnson is quoted in US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The US Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part IV: July 1965–January 1968* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1994), p. 22. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 244–245.

50. MFR, JCS Meeting, 21 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3, 1965. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 44. *NY Times*, 29 Nov 65, 1. Memo, ASD(M) to JCS et al., 1 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2343/724, 1 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65).

51. JCSM-590-65 to SecDef, 30 Jul 65 (derived from JCS 2343/602-6); JCSM-729-65 to SecDef, 5 Aug 65; JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65), sec 2.

52. JCSM-643-65 to SecDef, 23 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-2), JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65), sec 2.

53. Memos, SecDef to Pres, 1 Sep 65 and 22 Sep 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Documents 132 and 149. For examples of SecDef approval of individual units within the 23 Aug 65 program, see Memos, DepSecDef to CJCS, 29 and 30 Sep 65, Encls to JCS 2343/655-10 and -11, 29 Sep and 1 Oct 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65).

54. JCSM-779-65 to SecDef, 23 Oct 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-17), JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65), secs 3 and 4.

55. JCSM-811-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-26), JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65), sec 6. For details of the planning at MACV and CINCPAC, see Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 252–254.

56. JCSM-721-65 to SecDef, 24 Sep 65 (derived from JCS 2343/640-1); JCSM-814-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/640-2); JMF 9155.3 (23 Jul 65).

57. Draft Memo, SecDef to Pres, 3 Nov 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Document 189. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 253–254. For the bombing pause and diplomacy, see chaps. 19 and 20.

58. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 44. *NY Times*, 29 Nov 65, 1. Westmoreland asked also for another one and one-third South Korean infantry division; see Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 254–255. Memo, ASD(M) to JCS et al., 1 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2343/724, 1 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65).

59. Memo, SecDef to Pres, 11 Dec 65; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., 13 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2458/42-12, 16 Dec 65; JMF 7000 (24 Nov 64) sec 2.

60. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 44, 259. NMCC OPSUM 255-65 (Supp.), 1 Nov 65, p. 8. Talking Paper for CJCS, “Draft Memorandum for the President on Recommended FY 1966 Southeast Asia Supplemental Appropriation,” 9 Dec 65, JMF 7000 (24 Nov 65) sec 2. CSA Report, 1968, pp. 27–28.

61. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 256.

62. Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 000474, “Reprogrammed Phased Force Requirements for FY 1966,” 16 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65) sec 1A.

63. Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 00055, 12 Feb 66, Encl to JCS 2343/769-2, 16 Feb 66; Hq CINCPAC, “CY 66 Capabilities Programs,” vol I; JMF 9155.3 (11 Jan 66). JCS 2343/772, 18 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66).

64. SM-170-66 to CSA et al., 18 Feb 66 (derived from JCS 2343/772); JCS 2343/772, 18 Feb 66; Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 17 Feb 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-1, 18 Feb 66; all in JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66).

65. JCSM-130-66 to SecDef, 1 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-5); JCSM-156-66 to SecDef, 11 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-9); JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) secs 3 and 4.

66. Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., “Deployments to Southeast Asia,” 10 Mar 65, Encl to JCS 2343/760-12, 11 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 5.

67. JCSM-218-66 to SecDef, 4 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-17); JCSM-274-66 to SecDef, 28 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-38); JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) secs 6 and 9.

68. Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 11 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-13, 13 Apr 66, JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 8. For SecDef approval of individual unit movements, see same file, secs 9–19.

69. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 69–70. NMCC OPSUM 108-66 (Supp.), 9 May 66, p. 33.

70. None of the earlier programs were designated Program #1 or #2.

71. Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 2 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-74, 6 Jul 66; Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., 15 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-77, 18 Jul 66; Memos, ASD(SA) to CJCS et al., 1 Aug 66, 18 Aug 66, 6 Oct 66, and 28 Oct 66, Encls to JCS 2343/760-85, -91, -101, -102, 3 Aug, 23 Aug, 10 Oct, and 1 Nov 66; in JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66), secs 12, 13, 14, 16, and 18.

72. Memo, Pres to SecDef, 28 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/858, 28 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (28 Jun 66).

73. JCSM-540-66 to SecDef, 8 Jul 66 (derived from JCS 2343/858-1); Memo, SecDef to Pres, 15 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/858-2, 18 Jul 66; JMF 9155.3 (28 Jun 66).

17. Command Arrangements and Allies

1. CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistic and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia—Deployment Planning Conference, Hq, PACOM, 8–10 Apr 65, 10 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1.

2. Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 11535 to CINCPAC, 13 Apr 65, JCS IN 11504.

3. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 140831Z Apr 65, JCS IN 14777. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), p. 217; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

4. Msg, JCS 9063 to CINCPAC, 14 Apr 65.

5. JCS 1223-65 to CINCPAC, 7 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 65.

6. CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistic and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia—Deployment Planning Conference HQ PACOM, 8–10 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1. General Westmoreland initially viewed the combined staff as a first step toward a full-fledged combined allied command. See Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 214.

7. Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ3 11682 to CINCPAC, 11 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 65. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 214.

8. Msg, Saigon 3622 to State, 3 May 65, JCS IN 41715.

9. Msg, JCS 9222 to CINCPAC, 16 Apr 65.

10. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 080700Z May 65, JCS IN 50558.

11. JCSM-345-65 to SecDef, 10 May 65 (derived from JCS 2343/550-2); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 10 May 65; JCS 2343/550-3: all in JMF 9155.3 (24 Mar 65).

12. Msg, JCS 2159 to CINCPAC, 14 May 65. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 220400Z May 65, JCS IN 72070. The call for more USAF representation on the MACV staff reflected an ongoing interservice controversy over key staff positions at the Saigon headquarters. In particular, the Air Force believed it was being shortchanged in billets in what was supposed to be a joint headquarters but in fact was dominated by the Army. See Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 295–299.

13. Msg, COMUSMACV 17292 to CINCPAC, 24 May 65, JCS IN 73940. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 260332Z May 65, JCS IN 76889.

14. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 160250Z Jun 65, JCS IN 14248.

15. Msg, JCS 4561 to CINCPAC, 24 Jun 65.

16. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 246–247.

17. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 247–248, 331.

18. Besides commanding the temporarily deployed US troops, MACTHAI had under its purview a Joint US Military Advisory Group (JUSMAGTHAI), which assisted the Thai armed forces.

19. Msg, Bangkok 120 to State, 2 Aug 64. Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 30 Apr 65, JMF 9150 (28 Apr 65).
20. Msg, COMUSMACV 10021 to CINCPAC, 31 May 65, JCS IN 84276.
21. CM-565-65 to the JCS, 26 Apr 65; JCSM-319-65 to SecDef, 28 Apr 65; JMF 9150 (28 Apr 65).
22. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 373.
23. NSAM 328, 6 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/566, 7 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65). Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 130011Z Apr 65, JCS IN 15890.
24. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 300325Z Apr 65, JCS IN 37045.
25. Mil Working Arrangement between COMAAFV and COMUSMACV, 5 May 65; Financial Working Arrangement between MACV and AFV, 7 Sep 65; JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65).
26. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 71, 359–361. Ltr, CJCS to MGEN Charles E. Long, 10 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.
27. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 72, 362. Memo, COL Gibbons to Dir, J-3, “Trip Report,” 6 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65. Military Working Agreement between COMNZAFFE and COMUSMACV, 9 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65).
28. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 363–364.
29. Military Working Arrangement between COMROKRV and COMUSMACV, 6 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65). Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 070531Z Dec 65, JCS IN 84558. Westmoreland quotation is from Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 345; for the not totally satisfactory workings of the US-ROK arrangement, see pp. 346–347.
30. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 73, 365–366.
31. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 369. JCS 2343/515-7, 11 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (14 Jan 65).
32. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 73.
33. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 273. Hqs CINCPAC, Reprogrammed Phased Force Requirements for CY 66, 16 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65) sec 1A.
34. For the problems facing American advisers, see Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 81–83. Hereafter Clarke, *Final Years*.
35. Msg, COMUSMACV 14864 to CINCPAC, 24 Nov 64.
36. Msg, COMUSMACV 14864 to CINCPAC, 24 Nov 64. Encls A and B to JCS 2343/500-1, 11 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2.
37. JCSM-1074-64 to SecDef, 17 Dec 64 (derived from JCS 2343/500-1, 17 Dec 64); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-2, 14 Jan 65; Encl B to JCS 2343/500-4, 2 Apr 65; all in JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64), sec 2.
38. Msg, COMUSMACV 86874 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, JCS IN 71332. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 250102Z Mar 65, JCS IN 77121.
39. JCSM-265-65 to SecDef, 8 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/500-4, 2 Apr 65); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 12 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-5, 14 Apr 65; JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64), sec 2.
40. Msg, COMUSMACV 14734, 5 May 65, JCS IN 47391. JCSM-417-65 to SecDef (derived from JCS 2343/500-6, 25 May 65); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 4 Jun 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-7; JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2.
41. Encl C to JCS 2343/801, 28 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).
42. JCS 2343/801, 28 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65). Msgs, COMUSMACV 39875 to CINCPAC, 9 Nov 65, JCS IN 47121. CINCPAC to JCS, 112213Z Nov 65, JCS IN 47482. For South Vietnamese pressure for new units, see Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 111–112.
43. JCSM-227-66 to SecDef, 13 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/801, 13 Apr 66); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 25 Apr 66, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/801, 13 Apr 66; JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).

44. Msg, JCS 9439 to CINCPAC, 27 Apr 66.
45. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 117–118; see also pp. 113–116.

18. Military Operations, July–December 1965

1. NMCC OPSUMs 93-65, 22 Apr 65, and 147-65, 25 Jun 65. History and Museums Division, HQMC, *Marines in Vietnam, 1954–1973: An Anthology and Annotated Bibliography* (2nd ed. Washington: History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1985), p. 48; hereafter *Marines in Vietnam*.
2. Marine Corps Commandant's *Vietnam Chronology, 1965*, pp. 198–199. Jack Shulimson and Maj Charles M. Johnson, USMC, *US Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington: History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1978), pp. 69–83; hereafter Shulimson and Johnson, *Landing and Buildup*.
3. Briefing, JGS RVNAF to SecDef et al., 17 Jul 65, Att to JCS 2343/636, 22 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Jul 65).
4. Msg, COMUSMACV 32361 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 17 Sep 65, JCS IN 52156. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 251, 401; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.
5. JCSM-652-65 to SecDef, 27 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/646-1), JMF 9155.3 (30 Jul 65). Msg, JCS 9143 to CINCPAC, 25 Aug 65.
6. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965, Annex A, MACV*, pp. 141–153.
7. Msg, COMUSMACV 32361 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 17 Sep 65, JCS IN 52156.
8. Ltr, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 17 Sep 65, Att to JCS 2343/688, 27 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Sep 65).
9. Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, 7 Oct 65, w/App A, “Concept for Vietnam,” JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 2A.
10. Msg, JCS 4827 to CINCPAC, 22 Oct 65.
11. Memo, CJCS to LTG Goodpaster, 16 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov 65.
12. Memo, Gen Taylor to SecState et al., 26 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65. McGeorge Bundy, Draft Telegram to Embassy in Vietnam, 26 Oct 65, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. 3, *Vietnam, June–December 1965* (On-line edition, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus>), Document 183; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*. Msg, JCS 4827 to CINCPAC, 22 Oct 65.
13. Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 3 Nov 65, Att to JCS 2343/713, 10 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Nov 65).
14. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 022214Z Nov 65, JCS IN 34023.
15. Memo, CJCS to LTG Goodpaster, 16 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65. JCSM-811-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-26), JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65), sec 5.
16. Memo, Gen Taylor to SecDef and CJCS, 19 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.
17. Enemy buildup and intentions are described in The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 156–162; hereafter cited as *Victory in Vietnam*.
18. Marine operations are described in detail in Shulimson and Johnson, *Landing and Buildup*, chaps. 6–9. Msg, CG FMFPAC to CMC, 070857Z Aug 65.
19. The 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div had arrived in South Vietnam on 29 July 1965 and at this time was under operational control of the 1st Cavalry Div. For GIBRALTAR, see John M. Carland, *Stemming the Tide, May 1965 to October 1966* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2000), pp. 42–43; hereafter Carland, *Stemming the Tide*.

20. For a detailed account of the Pleiku campaign, see Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, chap. 6. The North Vietnamese view is in *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 158–160.
21. Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, pp. 73–76.
22. Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, pp. 76–94.
23. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
24. Note to Control Div, “JCS 2343/663,” 16 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
25. NMCC OPSUMs 174-65, 28 Jul 65, and 175-65, 29 Jul 65. Msg, Tokyo 361 to State, 30 Jul 65, JCS IN 72962. Ltr, USecState to SecDef, 31 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3 (31 Jul 65).
26. Memo, J–3 to JCS, “Use of Okinawa Bases for Strikes in Vietnam,” Encl to JCS 2343/648-2; JCSCM-600-65 to SecDef, 3 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/648-2); JMF 9155.3 (31 Jul 65).
27. *SAC History 1965*, vol. I, p. 220. App B to Encl B, JCS 2343/903-1, 22 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (12 Aug 66).
28. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 16 Aug 65; JCSCM -642-65 to SecDef, 21 Aug 65; JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65). Msg, COMUSMACV 28722 to CINCPAC, 16 Aug 65, JCS IN 95307.
29. JCSCM-642-65 to SecDef, 21 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
30. Ltr, DepASD (ISA) (Far East and Latin American Affairs) to AsstSecState for Far Eastern Affairs, 26 Aug 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-2, 31 Aug 65; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-2, 1 Oct 65; JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
31. *SAC History, 1965*, vol. I, pp. 225–226. JCSCM-775-65 to SecDef, 23 Oct 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
32. Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 40636 to CINCPAC, 16 Nov 65, JCS IN 59258. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, p. 429. CINCPAC to JCS, 161152Z Nov 65, JCS IN 53089. Msg, JCS 6459 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 16 Nov 65. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 170011Z Nov 65, JCS IN 54209.
33. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 011645Z Dec 65, JCS IN 76588. Msg, JCS 7795 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 3 Dec 65.
34. JCS 2343/663-6, 19 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65). Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 060140Z Nov 65, JCS IN 39525.
35. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 060140Z Nov 65, JCS IN 39525. Encl C to JCS 2343/663-6, 19 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
36. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Employment of ARC LIGHT Forces,” 18 Dec 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-4, 20 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
37. Memo, COMUSMACV to SecDef, 20 Jul 65, w/Encl, “MACV Shopping List for Secretary of Defense,” items 74, 75A, 75B, 75C, JMF 9155.3 (20 Jul 65).
38. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 100. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, vol. II, pp. 433–434, 443.
39. MACV Directive 525-4, “Tactics and Techniques for Employment of US Forces in the Republic of Vietnam,” 17 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Sep 65). *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, p. 440.
40. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, pp. 443, 446. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 89.
41. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 174–175.
42. For details of the expansion of the route, see *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 170–171.
43. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, pp. 390, 402. Msg, JCS 7624 to CINCPAC, 23 Mar 65. Jacob Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960–1968* (Washington: Center for Air Force History, 1993), pp. 53–62.
44. JCS 2343/601, 7 Jun 65, JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

45. SEACCOORD was composed of the US Ambassadors to South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand, together with their military commanders or advisers and CINCPAC. They met periodically to try to harmonize US efforts in the region.

46. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 27 Mar 65, JCS IN 90676; Msg, Vientiane to COMUSMACV, 23 May 65, JCS IN 27033; JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

47. JCSM-475-65 to SecDef, 18 Jun 65 (derived from JCS 2343/601), JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

48. JCSM-611-65 to SecDef, 7 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/601-1), JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

49. CM-831-65 to SecDef, 8 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601-2, 10 Sep 65, JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

50. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 18 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601-3, 20 Sep 65; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS and SecNav, 14 Oct 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601, 18 Oct 65; JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

51. Msg, JCS 1941 to CINCPAC, 12 May 65.

52. JCSM-812-65 to SecDef, 12 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2366/7-1), JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).

53. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 182315Z Nov 65, JCS IN 58241.

54. Msg, JCS 6900 to CINCPAC, 21 Nov 65.

55. Msg, COMUSMACV 43199 to CINCPAC, 9 Dec 65, JCS IN 89195.

56. Jt State-Def Msg to Saigon et al., 112319Z Dec 65, JCS IN 92758. Msg, JCS 8706 to CINCPAC, 15 Dec 65, JMF 9155.1 (15 Dec 65).

57. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2366/7-2, 10 Jan 66; JCSM-141-66 to SecDef, 3 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2366/7-4); Jt State-Def Msg, DEF 6606 to Saigon et al., 22 Mar 66; JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).

58. JCSM-231-65 to SecDef, 2 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/555; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 5 Jun 65; 1st N/H of JCS 2343/555; JMF 9155.3 (20 Mar 65).

59. JCS 2343/516-1, 2 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Jan 65). Msg, JCS 4303 to CINCPAC, 21 Jun 65. JCSM-791-65, 1 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/702). Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 29 Nov 65.

60. JCS 2343/611, 25 Jun 65 and JCSM-525-65, 3 Jul 65, derived therefrom; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 28 Jul 65, Att to JCS 2343/611-1; JMF 9155.3 (15 May 65).

61. JCSM-746-65 to SecDef, 12 Oct 65 (derived from JCS 2343/691); Memo, CDR C. A. H. Trost, MilAsst to DepSecDef, to SACSA, 25 Oct 65; JMF 9155.3 (26 Aug 65).

62. JCSM-893-65 to SecDef, 20 Dec 65 (derived from JCS 2343/730); Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 15 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/730-1; JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).

63. J-3, TP-4-65, on JCS 2339/171, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

64. J-3, TP-4-65, on JCS 2339/171, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

65. JCSM-118-65 to SecDef, 16 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/171), JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

66. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 12 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2339/171-1, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

67. J-3 TP-20-65, on JCS 2339/171-1, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65). Msg, JCS 9294 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65. Msg, JCS 9295 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65.

68. Msg, JCS 2838 to CINCPAC, 26 May 65.

69. Msg, MAC 6020 (CJCS) to CSA, 29 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65. For Westmoreland's troop request, see chap. 16.

70. MAC 6016 to DIA, 28 Nov 65, CJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

71. For enemy numbers, see *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 156.

72. According to North Vietnamese historians, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, now increasingly a truck route, moved during 1965 a volume of supplies almost equal to the total transported during the previous five years. See *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 170–171.

73. Memo, Dir DIA to D/JS, S-3589 AP-2F, 17 Dec 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 65.

74. DIA SIS-141-66, Jan 66, pp. v, 9. *NY Times*, 5 Dec 65, IV, 1; 27 Jan 66, p. 2.

75. For the Communist evaluation, see *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 171–172.

19. ROLLING THUNDER Continues

1. CM-604-65 to D/JS, 10 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.

2. Armed Reconnaissance Study, Nov 65, Ann D, OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Nov 66. The famous “Tuesday lunches,” the attendee list for which gradually expanded, was President Johnson’s primary instrument for managing the Vietnam War. The Chairman did not become a regular member of the group until late 1967. See George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 8–9, 14–15.

3. NSAM No. 328 to SecState, SecDef, and DCI, 6 Apr 65, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. II, *Vietnam, January–June 1965* (On-line edition. www.state.gov/www/about_state/history.html), Doc. 242; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*.

4. Msgs, JCS 8134 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 65; JCS 8554, 7 Apr 65; JCS 9006, 13 Apr 65; JCS 9451, 20 Apr 65.

5. Msg, JCS 1433-65 to CINCPAC, 25 Apr 65. Institute for Defense Analyses Study, “The Effects of US Bombing on North Vietnam’s Ability to Support Military Operations in South Vietnam and Laos: Retrospect and Prospect,” 29 Aug 66, OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Aug 66; hereafter cited as JASON SUMMER STUDY.

6. Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Doc 265.

7. CM-616-65 to SecDef, 17 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.

8. Msg, JCS 9990 to CINCPAC, 29 Apr 65.

9. CM-568-65 to D/JS, 26 Apr 65; Summary, ROLLING THUNDER 11 and 12 (to Date), 26 Apr 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 2, ROLLING THUNDER 13, 30 Apr–6 May 65.

10. Msg, State 2553 to Saigon, 10 May 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Doc 288. No evidence has been found in available records to indicate that the JCS were consulted prior to this presidential decision.

11. Msg, State 3103 to Moscow, 11 May 65; Msg, State 2425 to New Delhi et al., 18 May 65. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 96–97.

12. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 120314Z May 65, JCS IN 55813. A copy can also be found in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Doc 295.

13. JCSM-404-65 to SecDef, 22 May 65, Encl A to JCS 2343/597-1, 22 May 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 May 65).

14. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 Jun 65, Att to JCS 2343/597-2, 22 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 May 65).

15. Msg, Saigon 3753 to State, 131033Z May 65, JCS IN 48675. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 140351Z May 65, JCS IN 59404.

16. Msg, JCS 2230 to CINCPAC, 17 May 65. NMCC OPSUM, 22 May 65. Msg, JCS 1836-65 to CINCPAC, 19 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65. Msgs, JCS 2672 to CINCPAC, 22 May 65; JCS 3263, 2 Jun 65; JCS 3552, 8 Jun 65; JCS 3944, 15 Jun 65; JCS 4494, 24 Jun 65; JCS 4801, 29 Jun 65.

17. *CINCPAC Command History, 1965*, vol. II, pp. 337–338.

18. JCSM-457-65 to SecDef, 11 Jun 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Doc 346.

19. Msg, JCS 0438 to CINCPAC, 21 Jun 65; Briefing for JCS, 18 Jun, J-3, ROLLING THUNDER Twenty; Memo, J-3 for CJCS, 17 Jun 65; Note to Control Div, “Briefing on ROLLING THUNDER 20,” 18 Jun 65; Memo, ASD (ISA) to SecDef, “ROLLING THUNDER XX,” 22 Jun 65, w/penciled notation; all in JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 3, ROLLING THUNDER 20.

20. Msg, JCS 2400-65 to CINCPAC, 28 Jun 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 65.
21. CM-745-65 to SecDef, 14 Jul 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 65.
22. Interv, Secretary Rusk, 11 Jul 65, Dept of State *Bulletin*, 2 Aug 65.
23. JASON Summer Study, p. 88, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66. Note to Control Div, “ROLLING THUNDER,” 2 Jul 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 3, ROLLING THUNDER 22/23.
24. Briefing for the JCS on ROLLING THUNDER 22/23, 2 Jul 65; Memo for the CJCS, J-3, 1 Jul 65; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 3, ROLLING THUNDER 22/23.
25. JASON Summer Study, p. 88. Msg, JCS 6369 to CINCPAC, 21 Jul 65.
26. Msg, JCS 7398 to CINCPAC, 3 Aug 65.
27. Briefing for the Joint Chiefs of Staff on ROLLING THUNDER 28/29, 13 Aug 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) RT 28/29 – 20 Aug–2 Sep 65.
28. Note to Control Div, ROLLING THUNDER 28 and 29, 13 Aug 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 4. Msg, JCS 8472 to CINCPAC, 17 Aug 65.
29. Study, “Priority Listing of Targets Included in the JCS North Vietnam Target List,” 20 Aug 65, OCJCS Bulky File, 091 Vietnam Aug 65.
30. Briefing Sheet for CJCS, JCS 2343/566-4, 2 Aug 66, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65) sec 2. JCSM-976-64 to SecDef, 18 Nov 64 (derived from JCS 2339/157-1) JMF 9150 (13 Nov 64). NSAM no. 328 to SecState, SecDef, and DCI, 6 Apr 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Doc 242.
31. JCSM-608-65 to SecDef, 6 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/566-4), JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65) sec 2.
32. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 18 Aug 65, Encl to 1st N/H to JCS 2343/566, 19 Aug 66, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65) sec 2.
33. CM-519-65 to SecDef, 27 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (19 Mar 65).
34. DIA *IB* 69-65, 9 Apr 65. Memo, DIA to CJCS, 12 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65. DIA *IBs* 90-65, 103-65, 117-65, 10 May, 27 May, and 17 Jun 65. J-3, TP-13-65 for JCS, 20 Mar 65; JCS 2343/545-6, 2 Jul 65; JMF 9155.3 (19 Mar 65). Msg, JCS 6655 to CINCPAC, 24 Jul 65. An enemy account, acknowledging the role of Soviet advisers, is in *The Military History Institute of Vietnam, Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (Trans by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 165–166; hereafter cited as *Victory in Vietnam*.
35. JCSM-274-65 to SecDef, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Apr 65). Msg, JCS 8939 to CINCPAC, 14 Apr 65. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 19 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65).
36. JCSM-415-65 to SecDef, 27 May 65 (derived from JCS 2343/599), JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65).
37. JCSM-442-65 to SecDef, 7 Jun 65; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 15 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65).
38. Memo, JCSM-498-65 to SecDef, 26 Jun 65 (derived from JCS 2343/599-4), JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65). Memo, JCSM-529-65 to SecDef, 3 Jul 65 (derived from JCS 2343/545-5), JMF 9155.3 (19 Mar 65).
39. NMCC OPSUM 172-65, 26 Jul 65. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 167.
40. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250551Z Jul 65, JCS IN 65596. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 252115Z Jul 65, JCS IN 66229. Msg, Saigon 265 to State, 25 Jul 65, JCS IN 65801.
41. Notes of Meeting, 26 Jul 65, US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. 3, *Vietnam, June–December 1965* (On-line edition. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/>), Doc 90; see also Doc 87; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*. Msg, JCS 6748 to CINCPAC, 27 Jul 65.
42. Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam, 1965–1966* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), pp. 164–165, gives details of the raid. For the North Vietnamese view, see *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 167. For official suspicions of a decoy, see Editorial Note to Doc 90, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*.

43. Msg, JCS 7385 to CINCPAC, 3 Aug 65. Msg, JCS 7691 to CINCPAC, 11 Aug 65. Msg, JCS 8113 to CINCPAC, 12 Aug 65.

44. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, pp. 168–169. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 240238Z Aug 65, JCS IN 17417.

45. Memo, Dir DIA to CJCS, 22 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 65. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, pp. 169–176, 192.

46. Encl to DJSM-1077-66, 25 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66. To move personnel quickly into combat positions, the North Vietnamese, who did employ Soviet advisers, cut the missile training course from a year to three months and tried to complete the training on the job. See *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 165.

47. Ann F to Draft Report of the Armed Reconnaissance Study Group, 15 Nov 65 (hereafter cited as Armed Recce Study, Nov 65), OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Nov 66. Ann B to JCS 2343/599, 27 May 65, JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65). *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 165.

48. Msg, JCS 0936-65 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65. NSAM 328, 6 Apr 65. NMCC OPSUMs 77-65 and 78-65, 4 and 5 Apr 65. DIA/JCS, Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Oct 66, DIAISUP 274-66, pp. B–20, B–21. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040304Z Apr 65, JCS IN 91149. JCS 2343/571, 13 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Apr 65).

49. Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 092218Z May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65. JCSM-415-65 to SecDef, 27 May 65 (derived from JCS 2343/599); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 15 Jun 65, Att to JCS 2343/599-2, 16 Jun 65; JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65).

50. JCSM-498-65 to SecDef, 26 Jun 65, Encl A to JCS 2343/599-4, JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65).

51. DIA/JCS, Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Apr 67, DIAISUP 91-67, p. B–24.

52. DIA/JCS, Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Apr 67, DIAISUP 91-67, p. B–24. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 165.

53. Memo, Dir DIA to CJCS, 22 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 65. *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 167, 169.

54. Msg, JCS 8977 to CINCPAC, 24 Aug 65.

55. Msg, JCS 9569 to CINCPAC, 31 Aug 65. Memo, J–3 to CJCS, 27 Aug 65; Briefing for JCS on RT 30/31, 27 Aug 65; Msg, JCS 9779 to CINCPAC, 2 Sep 65; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 5, RT 30/31.

56. JCSM-652-65 to SecDef, 27 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/646-1), JMF 9155.3 (30 Jul 65); also in *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Doc 130.

57. JCSM-670-65 to SecDef, 2 Sep 65, App A to JCS 2343/673-1, 2 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (28 Aug 65).

58. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 15 Sep 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Doc 142.

59. Msg, JCS 1689 to CINCPAC, 15 Sep 65. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 182215Z Sep 65.

60. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 220238Z Sep 65.

61. Memo, AsstSecState for FE Affairs to ASD(ISA), 16 Sep 65, Encl to Memo, ASD(ISA) to CJCS, I-3635-65, 22 Sep 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 65.

62. CM-876-65 to ASD(ISA), 24 Sep 65; Memo, ASD(ISA) to AsstSecState for FE Affairs, I-36222/65, 28 Sep 65; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 65.

63. Ltr, Bundy to McNaughton, 1 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 65.

64. Draft Planning Msg, unnumbered, w/handwritten notes dated 13 Oct 65, showing changes directed by SecDef; Msg, JCS 3990 to CINCPAC, 13 Oct 65; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) RT 36/37. ROLLING THUNDER Chronology, Encl A to JCS 2472/9, 14 Feb 67, JMF 912/323 (30 Jan 67).

65. JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 6, ROLLING THUNDER 42/43, tabs 1-7. Encl A to Att to JCS 2472/9, 14 Feb 67, JMF 912/323 (30 Jan 67).

66. Tab B to App 1 to Ann C of Armed Recce Study, 15 Nov 65, OCJCS Bulky Files 091 Vietnam Nov 65. CM-940-65 to SecDef, 30 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 65.

67. “An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam,” Encl to Memo, Dir DIA to CJCS, 22 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 65.

68. JCS 2343/700-2, 7 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Oct 65).

69. JCSM-810-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65, Encl to JCS 2343/700-2, 10 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Oct 65).

70. JCSM-811-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-26), 10 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 5.

71. JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 6, ROLLING THUNDER 42/43, Tabs 1-7; and sec 7, ROLLING THUNDER 44/45.

72. JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 7, ROLLING THUNDER 46/47, Tabs 1-10.

73. Msg, JCS 8930 to CINCPAC, 18 Dec 65.

74. Msg, JCS 9198 to CINCPAC, 23 Dec 65; Msg, JCS 4991-65 to CINCPAC, 23 Dec 65; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 65.

20. The Search for Peace Begins

1. Statement, Mr. Rusk on TV Intvw, 3 Jan 65, Dept of State *Bulletin*, III (18 Jan 65), p. 65.

2. *NY Times*, 9 Mar 65, 10 Mar 65.

3. Msg, Saigon 2445 to State, 9 Feb 65, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. II. *Vietnam, January–June 1965* (On-line edition. www.state.gov/www/about_state/history.html), Doc 93; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*.

4. Msg, Saigon 2495 to State, 11 Feb 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Doc 104.

5. Msg, Saigon 2762 to State, 26 Feb 65, JCS IN 42147.

6. JCSM-180-65 to SecDef, 15 Mar 65, *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Jun 65*, Doc 198.

7. Statement, Pres Johnson, 25 Mar 65, Dept of State *Bulletin*, III (12 Apr 65), pp. 527–528.

8. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LII (26 Apr 65), pp. 610–612. This appeal was also delivered on 1 Apr 65 to the Secretary General of the UN, and to Canada, Communist China, Poland, the USSR, the United Kingdom, NVN and RVN, as well as to the NLF.

9. Speech at Johns Hopkins Univ, Pres Johnson, 7 Apr 65, Dept of State *Bulletin*, LII (26 Apr 65), pp. 606–610.

10. S. Com. on Foreign Relations, 90th Cong, 2nd Sess (1968), “Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam,” Mar 68, p. 302. Hereafter S. Com. on Foreign Relations, “Background Information ... SE Asia and Vietnam,” Mar 68.

11. JCSM-394-65 to SecDef, 20 May 65 (derived from JCS 2343/595); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 26 May 65, Att to JCS 2343/595-1, 1 Jun 65; JMF 9155.3 (7 May 65).

12. The administration’s motives are discussed in George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 96.

13. San Francisco Address, Pres Johnson, 25 Jun 65, Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIII (19 Jul 65). S. Com on Foreign Relations, “Background Information ... SE Asia and Vietnam,” Mar 68, p. 22.

14. Ltr, Pres Johnson to UN SecGen, 28 Jul 65; Ltr, UN SecGen to Pres Johnson, 29 Jul 65; Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIII (16 Aug 65), p. 275. Msg, USUN 340 to State, 12 Aug 65, JCS IN 91711.

15. Msg, State 432 to Saigon, 14 Aug 65.

16. Msg, State 749 to Saigon, 14 Sep 65, JCS IN 48811. This was only the latest of a series of efforts by U Thant to get peace negotiations started. See Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 91–93.

17. For a summary of these initiatives, see Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 94–99.

18. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 99–100. For examples of administration thinking, see Docs 208, 213, 214, and 215 in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. 3. *Vietnam, June–December 1965* (On-line edition: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus>); hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*.

19. Unless otherwise noted, this entire section is based on the study JCS Hist Div, “Chronology of Events Concerning the Christmas Truce and Tet Stand-Down, 1965–1966,” 4 Jan 66.

20. Wheeler’s objections are recorded in *FRUS Vietnam, Jun–Dec 65*, Editorial Note, Doc 242, citing Msg, Wheeler BNK 1876 to McNamara, 25 Dec 65.

21. Unless otherwise noted, this section is based on JCS Hist Div, “Chronology of Events Concerning the Christmas Truce and Tet Stand-Down, 1965–1966,” 4 Jan 66.

22. Msg, JCS 9897 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 5 Jan 66. Msg, Saigon to State, 4 Jan 66, JCS IN 34221. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV et al., 060736Z Jan 66, JCS IN 37830.

23. Note to Control Div, “10 Jan Morning Meeting at the White House,” 10 Jan 66. Draft Joint State-Defense Msg to Saigon and MACV, n.d., OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 66.

24. CM-1105-66 to SecDef, 12 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (14 Dec 65) sec 1.

25. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 141236Z Jan 66, JCS IN 51620.

26. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 152032Z Jan 66, JCS IN 54163.

27. Msg, JCS 1983 to CINCPAC, 19 Jan 66. Msg, COMUSMACV to OASD(PA), 251029Z Jan 66, JCS IN 69652.

28. Unless otherwise indicated, material in this section is derived from JCS Hist Div, “Chronology of Events Concerning the Christmas Truce and Tet Stand-Down, 1965–1966,” Supplement I, 3 Mar 66.

29. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, p. 100. The public relations aspect of the bombing pause and peace offensive is discussed fully in William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 218–226.

30. Msg, State Circ 1243 to All Posts, 30 Dec 65, JCS IN 30438.

21. ROLLING THUNDER Resumes and Expands

1. JCS 2343/745, 3 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (14 Dec 65). Msg, JCS 9744 to CINCPAC, 4 Jan 66. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 041658Z Jan 66, JCS IN 34531.

2. JCSM-16-66 to SecDef, 8 Jan 66, US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. IV. *Vietnam, 1966* (On-line edition, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus>), Doc 13. Hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, 1966*.

3. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 120205Z Jan 66, JCS IN 46895, *FRUS Vietnam 1966*, Doc 17. This message was passed to the State Department and the White House.

4. CSAFM Y-32-66 to JCS, 12 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).

5. JCS 2343/744-3, 15 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).

6. JCSM 41-66 to SecDef, 18 Jan 66 (derived from JCS 2343/744-3), JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66); reproduced in *FRUS Vietnam 66*, Doc 27.

7. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Air Operations against North Vietnam,” 19 Jan 66; Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 19 Jan 66; JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66). For the President’s thinking, see Telephone Conversation between President Johnson and SecDef McNamara, 17 Jan 66, 9:15 am., *FRUS Vietnam 66*, Doc 26.
8. Memo, CIA to SecState et al., “Reactions to Continuation or Termination of the Pause in Air Attacks on the DRV,” 19 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1–20 Jan 66.
9. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 170515Z Jan 66, JCS IN 54398. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 201923Z Jan 66, JCS IN 60654.
10. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 231226Z Jan 66, JCS IN 65425.
11. JCSM 56-66 to SecDef, 25 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).
12. Telecon JCS to CINCPAC, 250209Z Jan 66, JCS IN 68101.
13. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 251930Z Jan 66, JCS IN 68633.
14. *NY Times*, 22 Jan 66, p. 1. George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 100–101.
15. Msg, State Circ 1387, 22 Jan 66. Msg, State Circ 1410, 26 Jan 66.
16. CAPT McKee, USN, J–3, Pac Div, interviewed by James F. Schnabel on 9 Feb 66. Msg, JCS 2830 to CINCPAC, 292126Z Jan 66. For a sampling of the President’s deliberations, see *FRUS Vietnam 66*, Docs 43, 46, 48, 50, 52, and 53.
17. Msg, JCS 2820 to CINCPAC, 292126Z Jan 66.
18. Msg, JCS 0451-66 to CINCPAC, 29 Jan 66; Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 300510Z Jan 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1–20 Jan 66.
19. Msg, State 595 to Canberra et al., 29 Jan 66. Msgs, State Circs 1434, 20 Jan 66; 1437 and 1440, 30 Jan 66. Msg, State Circ 1438, 30 Jan 66. Msg, Rangoon 391 to State, 31 Jan 66.
20. Msg, State 2192 to Saigon, 29 Jan 66. Msg, Saigon 2731 to State, 30 Jan 66.
21. NMCC OPSUM 26-66, 1 Feb 66. Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam 1965–1966* (Washington: USAF History and Museums Program, 2002), pp. 224–226.
22. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 11 Jan 66; CM-1134-66 to SecDef, 25 Jan 66; JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).
23. J-3 TP for CJCS, “Mining Haiphong Approaches,” 7 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (8 Mar 66). JCSM-608-66 to SecDef, 8 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/566-4); Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 18 Aug 65, encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/566, 19 Aug 65; JMF 9155.3 (6 Mar 65) sec 2.
24. Memo, CIA to SecState et al., “Reaction to Continuation or Termination of the Pause in Air Attacks on the DRV,” 19 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1–20 Jan 66.
25. J-3/DIA Study, “Attack on the North Vietnam Petroleum Storage System—A Study,” 23 Apr 65 (revised 24 Jan 66), OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Jan 66.
26. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 22–24.
27. Memo, CIA to SecState et al., “Reaction to Continuation or Termination of the Pause in Air Attacks on the DRV, 19 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1–20 Jan 66.
28. SNIE 10-1-66, 4 Feb 66. For the other side’s account, see The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (Trans by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 170–171; hereafter *Victory in Vietnam*.
29. Memo, ASD(ISA) for CJCS et al., “CINCPAC Briefings on Southeast Asia,” 11 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 (11 Jan 66).
30. NMCC Telecon, CJCS to CINCPAC, 132000Z Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.
31. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 160315Z Feb 66, JCS IN 14408.
32. JCSM-113-66 to SecDef, 19 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 (17 Feb 66).

33. Msg, JCS 4888 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 66; Memo, no sig [J–3 Pac Div] to CJCS, 25 Feb 66; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 6, ROLLING THUNDER 49.
34. Msg, JCS 0950-66 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.
35. J–3 TP 7-66, 7 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (8 Mar 66). JCSM-130-66 to SecDef, 1 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-5), JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 3.
36. Msg, Saigon 3168 to State, 2 Mar 66, JCS IN 39000. Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 6 Mar 66, JCS IN 44988.
37. JCSM-153-66 to SecDef, 10 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/790); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 28 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2343/790-1, 30 Mar 66; JMF 9155.3 (8 Mar 66).
38. Msg, COMUSMACV 08328 to CINCPAC, 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 64653. Msg, COMUSMACV 08332 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 64994.
39. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 19045Z Mar 66, JCS IN 69320.
40. Msg, JCS 7643 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 4 Apr 66.
41. Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT et al., 010200Z Apr 66, JCS IN 92503. For Westmoreland's efforts to extend MACV's influence over operations in North Vietnam, see Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 383–385.
42. Msg, JCS 1508-66 to CINCPAC, 22 Mar 66.
43. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250850Z Mar 66.
44. Note to Control Div, "ROLLING THUNDER 50," 23 Mar 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), ROLLING THUNDER 50.
45. JCSM-189-66 to SecDef, 26 Mar 66, *FRUS Vietnam 1966*, Doc 101.
46. Memo for Pres, no sig [SecDef], "April program of air strikes against North Vietnam and Laos," [with SecDef notations], 31 Mar 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50. Van Staaven, *Gradual Failure*, pp. 248–250. The President deferred the strikes due to a new public furor over the war in the United States, triggered by a South Vietnamese internal political crisis in I CTZ.
47. Msg, JCS 1711-66 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 66.
48. Msg, JCS 7480 to CINCPAC, 010112Z Apr 66.
49. Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT et al., 020255Z Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66.
50. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 12 Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66.
51. Msg, JCS 8297 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 12 Apr 66.
52. Msg, COMUSMACV 12815 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 13 Apr 66, JCS IN 22029.
53. Msg, JCS 8463 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 14 Apr 66.
54. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 14 Apr 66, JMF 9155.3 (12 Apr 66). Msg, DEF 8689 to CINCPAC and CINCOSAC, 16 Apr 66. Msg, JCS 8734 to CINCPAC, 18 Apr 66. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 190323Z Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66.
55. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV et al., 070309Z Jun 66, JCS IN 24761.
56. Msg, JCS 9326 to CINCPAC, 26 Apr 66. Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT et al., 290225Z Apr 66, JCS IN 52160.
57. Memo, CJCS to Mr. Bill Moyers (White House), 4 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66. MFR, Capt J. R. McKee, USN, J–3 Pac Div, 021545 May 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.
58. Memo, no sig, to CJCS, 3 May 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.
59. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040447Z May 66, JCS IN 57631. Msg, JCS 1433 to CINCPAC, 9 May 66.

60. MFR, CJCS, “Strikes on Hanoi and Haiphong POL Facilities,” 9 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

61. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 091226Z May 66, JCS IN 65820. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 100730Z May 66, JCS IN 67751. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 052329Z May 66, JCS IN 60899; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 062057Z May 66, JCS IN 62564; Msg, JCS 2719-66 to CINCPAC, 16 May 66; JMF 9155 (18 Jan 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50A. Msg, COMUSMACV 17603 to CINCPAC, 22 May 66, JCS IN 89352.

62. Msg, CJCS 2897-66 to CINCPAC, 24 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66. For discussion of South Vietnam’s internal political crisis, which dismayed US leaders, see chap. 23.

63. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 270341Z May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

64. MFR, OASD(ISA), 31 May 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 910, RT 50A Extended. Msg, JCS 3068-66 to CINCPAC, 2 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

65. Msg, COMUSMACV 19218 to CINCPAC, 5 Jun 66, JCS IN 22371. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 060805Z Jun 66, JCS IN 23294.

66. Msg, JCS 3167-66 to CINCPAC, 6 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

67. Msg, OSD 3339-66 to CINCPAC, 13 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66. Telecon 045-66, NMCC 752, J-3 to Dep C/S for Plans and Opns, PACOM, 132334Z Jun 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 66) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.

68. Msg, CINCPAC to SecDef, 140659Z Jun 66; Msg, CJCS to SecDef, 141548Z Jun 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

69. Msg, SecDef 3395-66 to CINCPAC, 15 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

70. Msg, CINCPAC to SecDef, 160920Z Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

71. For Notes on the NSC Meeting, 22 Jun 66, see *FRUS Vietnam 1966*, Doc 161. Msg, JCS 5003 to CINCPAC, 22 Jun 66.

72. NMCC Telecon 053-66, J-3 to C/S, PACOM et al., 231745Z Jun 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.

73. NMCC Telecon 033-66, C/S PACOM to J-3, 232229Z Jun 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.

74. Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT, 232130Z, 26 Jun 66, JCS IN 52911.

75. Msg, JCS 3633-66 to CINCPAC, 25 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66. Msg, JCS 5311 to CINCPAC, 25 Jun 66.

76. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 281019Z Jun 66, JCS IN 59442. Msg, JCS 5414 to CINCPAC, 28 Jun 66. Msg, JCS 5945 to CINCPAC, 5 Jul 66. Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, pp. 289–293.

22. Deployments and Forces, 1966

1. For details of the development of Program #3, see chap. 16.

2. For an official North Vietnamese account of the buildup, see The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (Trans by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 191–194.

3. *NY Times*, 21 Apr 66, p. 18; 30 Jun 66, p. 15.

4. Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 000255, 18 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855, 24 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66). Hq CINCPAC, “CY 66 Adjusted Requirements and CY 67 Force Requirements,” vols I and II, JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66), secs 1A and 1B.

5. JCSM-506-66 to SecDef, 5 Aug 66 (derived from JCS 2343/855-1), JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66).

6. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “CINCPAC CY 1966 Adjusted Requirements and CY 1967 Requirements,” 5 Aug 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855-4, 8 Aug 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66).

7. McNamara describes his growing doubts in Robert S. McNamara with Brian Van De Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 245–246, 252–262. For exposition of his views, see Memo, SecDef to Pres, “Actions Recommended for South Vietnam,” 14 Oct 66, US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol IV. *Vietnam, 1966* (On-line edition), Doc. 268; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam 1966*.

8. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 413–414; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

9. Hq CINCPAC, “CY 66/67 Requirements/Capabilities Programs,” vol I, JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66).

10. JCSM-702-66 to SecDef, 4 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/855-25), JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66), sec 8.

11. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Deployments to Southeast Asia,” 11 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855-27, 15 Nov 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66), Sec 9; cy in *FRUS Vietnam 1966*, Doc 301. For McNamara’s negotiations with Gen Westmoreland, see Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 413–414.

12. JCSM-739-66 to SecDef, 2 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/885-29); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Deployments to SEA and other PACOM Areas,” 9 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855-31, 12 Dec 66; JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66).

13. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 75, 82. NMCC OPSUM 1-67 (Supp.), 3 Jan 67, p. 35.

14. *NY Times*, 26 Jan 67, p. 2. For the enemy estimate, see the beginning of this chapter.

15. *NY Times*, 27 Dec 66, p. 3.

16. NMCC OPSUM 1-67 (Supp.), 3 Jan 67, p. 35.

17. SM-258-66 to Dir, J-5, 22 Mar 66; JCS 2343/764-2), 24 Jun 66; JMF 9155.3 (3 Feb 66).

18. Hq, CINCPAC, “Reprogrammed Phased Force Requirements for CY 1966,” 16 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65), sec 1A. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 86–88. NMCC OPSUM 1-67 (Supp.), 3 Jan 67, p. 35.

19. ROK Government Statement on Its Decision to Dispatch Additional Forces to the RVN, 28 Feb 66; Msg, JCS 6292-66 to MACV, 14 Oct 66; OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Oct 66. For the command issue, see Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 345–347.

20. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 89–90.

21. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 92–93. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 060130Z Mar 66, JCS IN 45703.

22. Military Working Arrangement between Chief of the General Staff, Australian Army, and COMUSMACV, 17 Mar 66; Logistical and Administrative Supplement to Military Working Arrangement between Australia and the United States, 17 Mar 66; Financial Working Arrangement between USMACV and AFV, 26 Mar 66; JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65).

23. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 93.

24. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 94. DIA IB 250-66, 28 Dec 66, p. A–8. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 248–250.

25. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 94–95.

26. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 95–97.

27. Military Working Arrangement between the Chief of Staff, Armed Forces of the Philippines and COMUSMACV, 20 Jul 66; Financial Working Arrangement between COMUSMACV and the Chief of Staff, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 21 Nov 66; JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65), sec 2.

28. Military Working Arrangement between COMRTMAG-V and COMUSMACV, 23 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65). NMCC OPSUM 1-67 (Supp.), 3 Jan 67, p. 35. It should be noted that Thailand provided bases for US aircraft engaged in ROLLING THUNDER and in Laos.

29. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 100.

30. For the Chinese Communist role, see Xiaoming Zhang, “The Vietnam War: A Chinese Perspective, 1964–1969,” *Journal of Military History* 60 (Oct 96): 731–762.

31. CMC-34-66, 18 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/814, 20 Apr 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Apr 66).

32. JCS 2343/814-1, 12 May 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Apr 66). SNIE 10-3-66, 19 May 66.

33. CMC-43-66, 31 May 66, Encl to JCS 2343/814-2, 6 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Apr 66). Msg, JCS 4336 to CINCPAC, 14 Jun 66. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 200135Z Jun 66, JCS IN 46107.

34. JCS 2343/814-3, 18 Jul 66; Note to Control Div, “Introduction of Additional Forces into SVN,” 20 Jul 66; JMF 9155.3 (18 Apr 66). *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 98.

35. Msg, Saigon 2934 to State, 080804Z Aug 66, JCS IN 38737. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 242348Z Sep 66, JCS IN 31896.

36. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 85–86.

23. The War in South Vietnam—1966

1. “Declaration of Honolulu,” 8 Feb 66, in Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIV (28 Feb 66), pp. 305–307. “Honolulu Meeting: Record Conclusions and Decisions for Further Action,” Att to Memo, Dep-SecState for FE Affairs to Honolulu Participants, 17 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66. For the deployment planning, see chap. 16.

2. CINCPAC Briefing for SecDef, “Southeast Asia Programs,” 8 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (8 Jul 66).

3. Joint Communiqué of Honolulu Conference, 8 Feb 66, in Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIV (28 Feb 66), pp. 304–307. “Draft Record of Conclusions and Decisions for Further Action of Honolulu Meeting,” Att to Memo, DepAsstSecState for FE Affairs to Honolulu Participants, “Follow-up Paper on Honolulu Conference,” 17 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

4. Ann & App A to JCSM-130-66 to SecDef, 1 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-5), JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 3.

5. James M. Gavin, “A Communication on Vietnam,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Feb 66, pp. 16–21. DJSM-92-66 to CJCS, 19 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1–20 Jan 66.

6. JCSM-76-66 to SecDef, 3 Feb 66 (derived from JCS 2343/759), JMF 9155.3 (17 Jan 66). It should be recalled that US officials from the beginning had assumed that American forces in South Vietnam would first establish coastal bases and then move out from them. See chap. 18.

7. Transcript of CJCS Testimony before Senate Committee on Armed Services, Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

8. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 598.

9. Msgs, Saigon 3315 and 3323 to State, 12 and 13 Mar 66, JCS IN 56664 and 58461. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 601–602.

10. Monograph, MACV, “The March–June 1966 Political Crisis in South Vietnam and its Effect on Military Operations,” 9 Dec 66, passim; hereafter cited as MACV Monograph, “Political Crisis.”

11. MACV Monograph, “Political Crisis.”

12. MACV Monograph, “Political Crisis,” pp. 32–34, 41–44, 48–49, 66–67. Msgs, Saigon 4786 and 4881 to State, 23 May 66, JCS IN 89883 and 89939. Msg, Saigon 4896 to State, 23 May 66, JCS IN 90678.

13. MACV Monograph, “Political Crisis,” pp. 57–59.
14. For the effect on ROLLING THUNDER, see chap. 21. “Memorandum of Conversation between Secretary of Defense McNamara and Ambassador at Large (Harriman), 14 May 66, in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. IV, *Vietnam, 1966* (On-line edition), Doc 137; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam 1966*.
15. Msg, CJCS 2837-66 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 20 May 66, *FRUS Vietnam 1966*, Doc 143.
16. *FRUS Vietnam 1966*, Doc 143.
17. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 2. The resource constraints on MACV are summarized in John M. Carland, *Combat Operations: Stemming the Tide May 1965 to October 1966* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2000), pp. 158–161; hereafter Carland, *Stemming the Tide*.
18. For enemy plans, see The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (Trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 173–175; hereafter *Victory in Vietnam*.
19. Msg, COMUSMACV 0533 to CJCS, 5 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66. For comparison, see *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 173–174.
20. For a detailed account of this engagement, see Jack Shulimson, *US Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington: History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1982), pp. 56–65; hereafter Shulimson, *Marines in Vietnam, 1966*.
21. Msg, COMUSMACV 6548 to CINCPAC, 30 Jul 66; Msg, COMUSMACV 6059 to CINCPAC, 17 Jul 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66. Shulimson, *Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 159–176.
22. Msg, COMUSMACV 41191 to CINCPAC, 13 Sep 66, JCS IN 99085. Msg, COMUSMACV 8371 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 24 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66. Shulimson, *Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 177–195.
23. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 368. Shulimson, *Marines in Vietnam, 1966*, pp. 195–198, 312–313.
24. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 371–379.
25. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 476.
26. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 381.
27. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 381.
28. For details of Operation ATTLEBORO, see George L. MacGarrigle, *Combat Operations: Taking the Offensive, October 1966 to October 1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1998), pp. 31–61.
29. Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, pp. 337–354.
30. Unless otherwise indicated, information in this section is derived from *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 133–143.
31. CM-1639-66 to SecDef, 27 Jul 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66.
32. Msg, COMUSMACV 8211 to CINCPAC, 20 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.
33. Msg, Saigon 6837 to State, 24 Sep 66, JCS IN 32073. Msg, Saigon 11978 to State, 29 Nov 66, JCS IN 57660. Msg, Saigon 14308 to State, 27 Dec 66, JCS IN 40108.
34. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 621.
35. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 621–623.
36. [Saigon] Mission Council Action Memo no. 120, 15 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66. *NY Times*, 13 Sep 66, pp. 1, 4. Msg, State 58064 to Saigon, 1 Oct 66, JCS IN 42799. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 96, 625.
37. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LV (14 Nov 66), pp. 730-735.

38. CM-1204-66 to OASD(ISA), 19 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 630–633, 636. CM-1094-66 to SecDef, 8 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 66. Joint Communiqué of Honolulu Conference, 8 Feb 66, Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIV (28 Feb 66), pp. 304–305. Minutes of [Saigon] Mission Council Meeting, 27 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66. MFR, OSD(ISA), “Visit by Mr. Charles A. Mann, USAID Director, Saigon, with DOD Agencies, 2 Aug 66,” 2 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

39. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864, 15 Jul 66; Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 13 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864, 15 Jul 66; JMF 9155.3 (13 Jul 66).

40. J-3 SM-353-66 to Secy, JCS, 29 Sep 66, Incl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/864, 4 Oct 67, JMF 9155.3 (13 Jul 66).

41. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 2 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-6, 7 Sep 66; DJSM-1280-66 to CJCS, 1 Oct 66; CM-1808-66 to SecDef, 6 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-8; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-10, 27 Oct 66; JMF 9155.3 (13 Jul 66).

42. Msg, Saigon 7332 to State, 1 Oct 66, JCS IN 42777. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 11 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855-27, 15 Nov 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66) sec 9. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 638.

43. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 18 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-17, 20 Nov 66; CM-1948-66 to SecDef, 23 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-19, 29 Nov 66; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 28 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-20, 30 Nov 66; JMF 9155.3 (13 Jul 66) sec 2.

44. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 638, 721–722.

45. Rpt, “Warrenton Meeting on Vietnam, January 8–11, 1966,” 13 Jan 66, Encl to JCS 2343/754, 17 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (13 Jan 66); hereafter “Warrenton Meeting Rpt.”

46. “Warrenton Meeting Rpt.”

47. Memo, SpecAsst Komer to Pres, 13 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/909, 19 Sep 66, JMF 9155.3 (13 Sep 66).

48. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 506.

49. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 510.

50. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 506.

51. NSAM 343 to SecDef et al., 28 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2343/804, 31 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (28 Mar 66).

52. This controversy is covered in Thomas W. Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1982), chaps. 2 and 3. See also Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), pp. 357–360; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

53. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 522–523.

54. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 523–527.

55. Draft memo (Draft/22), SecDef to Pres, 22 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/917, 24 Sep 66; Memo, ASD/ISA to CJCS, 22 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/917, 24 Sep 66; JCSM-626-66 to SecDef, 29 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/917-1); JMF 9155.3 (22 Sep 66).

56. JCSM-672-66 to SecDef, 14 Oct 66, JMF 9155.3 (14 Oct 66).

57. Msg, JCS 6339-66 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 17 Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 358–361.

58. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 548–549.

59. Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS and CINCPAC, 12 Dec 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 66.

60. Msg, JCS 7859-66 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 20 Dec 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 66.

61. DIA/JCS, *Southeast Asia Military Fact Book*, Jan 67, DIAISUP-3-67, p. A–2. Maj Richard C. Kriegel, USMC, “Revolutionary Development, Last Chance for Victory in Vietnam,” Encl to Ltr, CMC to CJCS, 13 Jan 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 67. *NY Times*, 14 Oct 66, p. 13.

62. JCSM-672-66 to SecDef, 14 Oct 66, JMF 9155.3 (14 Oct 66). Ltr, CJCS to SecState, 8 Feb 67, w/encl, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53.

63. *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 191–192, 195.

24. The Air, the Sea, and the Borders

1. JCSM-51-66 to SecDef, 22 Jan 66 (derived from JCS 2343/663-6), JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
2. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 3 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2343/663-8, 7 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65). Msg, JCS 6125 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 15 Mar 66.
3. Msg, COMUSMACV 16210 to CINCPAC, 11 May 66, JCS IN 70341. *SAC History, 1966*, p. 234. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, pp. 546–548.
4. J3M-1957-65 to ASD(M), 17 Dec 65, J-3 Files.
5. Msg, COMUSMACV 27891 to CINCPAC, 12 Aug 66, JCS IN 45477.
6. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 272143Z Aug 66, JCS IN 72776. CSAFM-B-40-66 to JCS, 7 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/903, 8 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (12 Aug 66).
7. JCSM-617-66 to SecDef, 29 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/903-1), JMF 9155 (12 Aug 66).
8. CM-1839-66 to DJS, 17 Oct 66; JCSM-743-66 to SecDef, 3 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/932-1); JMF 9155 (17 Oct 66).
9. JCS 2343/932-2, 1 Dec 66, JMF 9155 (17 Oct 66).
10. JCSM-757-66 to SecDef, 8 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/932-2), JMF 9155 (17 Oct 66).
11. Memo, SecAF to SecDef, 6 Dec 66, Att to JCS 2353/93-17, JMF 9158 (24 May 66) sec 5. Msg, State 120139 to Bangkok, 17 Jan 67. Jacob Van Staaveren, *Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960–1968* (Washington: Center for Air Force History, 1993), pp. 247–248; hereafter Van Staaveren, *Interdiction*.
12. JCSM-667-66 to SecDef, 15 Oct 66 (Derived from JCS 2343/897-1) JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66).
13. J3M-1957-65 to ASD(M), 17 Dec 65; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 242154Z Apr 66, JCS IN 41461; JCS 2343/897-1, 11 Oct 66, JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66). See chap. 26 for details of the air munitions shortages.
14. Msg, COMUSMACV 25380 to CINCPAC, 23 Jul 66, JCS IN 25023. JCS 2343/897-1, 11 Oct 66, JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66). Msg, JCS 1805 to CINCSAC and CINCPAC, 3 Sep 66. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 230259Z Sep 66, JCS IN 28446. Msg, JCS 8335 to CINCPAC, 18 Nov 66. Msg, JCS 2290 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 28 Dec 66.
15. Van Staaveren, *Interdiction*, pp. 190–192.
16. DJSM-955-66 to Acting CJCS, 25 Jul 66, w/encl, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66.
17. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 1 Sep 66, Att to JCS 2343/897, 8 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66).
18. JCSM-667-66 to SecDef, 15 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2343/897-1), JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66).
19. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, pp. 544–582.
20. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, pp. 597, 603.
21. DIA/JCS, Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Apr 66, DIASUP-105-66, pp. 39–41; Jul 66, DIA-ISUP-182-66, p. 43; Oct 66, DIASUP-274-66, p. A–40; Jan 67, DIASUP-3-67, p. A–50. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 406–408. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 602.
22. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 409.
23. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 409. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, pp. 594–597. JCS 2343/874, 19 Dec 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Apr 66).

24. JCSM-517-66 to SecDef, 17 Aug 66 (derived from JCS 2343/874); Ltr, ASD(ISA) to DepA Sec State for FE Affairs, 24 Aug 66, Att to JCS 2343/874-1, 6 Oct 66; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 15 Oct 66, Att to JCS 2343/874-2, 31 Oct 66; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 8 Nov 66, Att to JCS 2343/874-3, 10 Nov 66; JMF 9155.3 (16 Apr 66).

25. Msg, JCS 1627 to CINCPAC, 16 Dec 66. Msg, JCS 1629 to CINCPAC, 16 Dec 66.

26. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 597.

27. JCS 2343/767, 10 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 (13 Jan 66).

28. Msg, COMUSMACV 1175 to CINCPAC, 13 Jan 66, JCS IN 48923; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 251120Z Jan 66, JCS IN 69133; JMF 9155.3 (13 Jan 66).

29. Msg, JCS 3964 to CNO and CINCPAC, 14 Feb 66 (derived from JCS 2343/767), JMF 9155.3 (13 Jan 66). *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, pp. 467-468.

30. See above, chap. 18.

31. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 28 Mar 66, JCS IN 84950. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 31 Mar 66, JCS IN 89658. Msg, Saigon 4120 to State/Defense, 21 Apr 66, JCS IN 35359.

32. Msg, JCS 7460 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 66. Msg, JCS 1710-66 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 31 Mar 66, OJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 66. Jt State-Def Msg (State 3212) to Saigon, 26 Apr 66, JCS IN 44793.

33. JCSM-8-66 to SecDef, 7 Jan 66 (derived from JCS 2339/171-3); JCSM-295-66 to SecDef, 9 May 66 (derived from JCS 2339/171-5); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 16 May 66, Encl to JCS 2339/171-6, 18 May 66; JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

34. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and JCS, 1 Feb 66, JCS IN 78527; JCSM-309-66 to SecDef, 9 May 66 (derived from JCS 2343/820); JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66).

35. Memo DepAsstSecState for FE Affairs to Dir, Far East Region (ISA), 7 Jun 66, Att to Encl to JCS 2343/820-1, 15 Jun 66, JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66).

36. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/820-1, 15 Jun 66, JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66). Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 27 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-70, JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 12.

37. JCSM-812-65 to SecDef, 12 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2366/7-1; Ltr, Acting SecState to SecDef, 17 Jan 66, Encl to JCS 2366/7-3, 20 Jan 66; JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).

38. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 26 Apr 66, JCS IN 44755. Jt State-Defense-USIA Msg (State 3641) to Saigon and CINCPAC, 26 May 66, JCS IN 95467. Jt State-Defense-USIA Msg (State 1469) to Saigon, 6 Jun 66, JCS IN 30739. JCS 2366/9, 22 Aug 66, JMF 9155.1 (25 Jun 66).

39. JCSM-547-66 to SecDef, 27 Aug 66 (derived from JCS 2366/9), JMF 9155.1 (25 Jun 66).

40. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 130401Z Aug 66, JCS IN 48355. JCSM-612-66 to SecDef, 24 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/820-2), JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66).

41. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 3 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2343/820-3, 7 Dec 66; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 4 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 2343/820-5, 5 Jan 67; Ltr, USecState to DepSecDef, 9 May 67, Encl to JCS 2343/820-6, 24 May 67; JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66).

42. JCSM-779-66 to SecDef, 19 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2366/10-1), JMF 9155.3 (28 Jul 65).

43. JCSM-8-66 to SecDef, 7 Jan 66 (derived from JCS 2339/171-3), JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65). JCSM-216-66 to SecDef, 6 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2339/223), JMF 9155 (23 Mar 66).

44. Msg, JCS 4007 to CINCPAC, 9 Jun 66, JMF 9155 (23 Mar 66). JCSM-295-66 to SecDef, 9 May 66 (derived from JCS 2339/171-5); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 16 May 66, Encl to JCS 2339/171-6, 18 May 66; JMF 9150 (16 Feb 66).

45. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 8 Jan 66, JCS IN 41106. JCSM-191-66 to SecDef, 31 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/601-7); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 11 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/601-8, 13

Apr 66; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 16 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/601-9, 18 Apr 66; JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65) sec 1.

46. Msg, Vientiane 724 to State, 18 May 66, JCS IN 10692. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 28 May 66, JCS IN 10666.

47. JCSM-378-66 to SecDef, 7 Jun 66 (derived from JCS 2343/601-10); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 16 Jun 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/601-10, 20 Jun 66; JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65) sec 2.

48. *SAC History, 1966*, pp. 248–249.

49. Msg, COMUSMACV 08332 to CJCS, 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 64994. Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 032150Z Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66. Msg, Vientiane 1064 to State, 7 Apr 66, JCS IN 12552. Msg, JCS 8110 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 8 Apr 66. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 200221Z Apr 66, JCS IN 32747. Msg, JCS 9105 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 22 Apr 66. Msg, COMUSMACV 14735 to JCS, 29 Apr 66, JCS IN 49602. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 300405Z Apr 66, JCS IN 51806. Msg, JCS 9782 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 30 Apr 66.

50. Msg, COMUSMACV 14056 to CINCPAC, 23 Apr 66, JCS IN 39120. Msg, COMUSMACV 14052 to CINCPAC, 23 Apr 66, JCS IN 39071. Msg, Vientiane 1120 to State, 26 Apr 66, JCS IN 43616; JCSM-523-66 to SecDef, 19 Aug 66; JMF 9155.2 (15 Jul 66). Msg, COMUSMACV 6018 to CINCPAC, 16 Jul 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66.

51. Msg, Vientiane 340 to State, 19 Jul 66, JCS IN 94700. JCSM-523-66 to SecDef, 19 Aug 66, JMF 9155.2 (15 Jul 66).

52. Jt State-Def Msg 45705 to Vientiane, 13 Sep 66, JCS IN 1063.

53. Msg, Vientiane 1581 to State, 16 Sep 66, JCS IN 15967.

54. Van Staaveren, *Interdiction*, pp. 188–189.

55. Memo, Dir, Far East Region, OASD(ISA) to D/JS, 1 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/676, 2 Sep 65; JCSM-702-65 to SecDef, 20 Sep 65 (derived from JCS 2343/676-1); Ltr, DepAsstSecState for FE Affairs to ASD(ISA), 2 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2343/676-3, 7 Jun 66; JMF 9155.3 (23 Jul 65).

56. DJSM-506-66 to OASD(ISA), 21 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/676-2, 22 Apr 66, JMF 9155.3 (23 Jul 65). Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 64994. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 19 Mar 66, JCS IN 69320.

57. Memo, Dir, Far East Region, OASD(ISA) to D/JS, 1 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/676-3, 7 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (23 Jul 65).

58. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 25. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 13 Jul 66, JCS IN 85166. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 18 Jul 66, JCS IN 92786. Msg, Saigon 5537 to State, 15 Jun 66, JCS IN 38916.

59. Msg, JCS 7184 to CINCPAC, 20 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (13 Jul 66). Msgs, JCS 7991 and 7992 to CINCPAC, 30 Jul 66. Msg, JCS 8550 to CINCPAC, 6 Aug 66. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 355.

60. Msg, COMUSMACV to AIG 7041, 28 Jul 66, JCS IN 19452; Memo, J-3 to JCS, “Employment of ARC LIGHT Force,” 17 Aug 66; JMF 9155.3 (28 Jul 66). Msg, COMUSMACV 29148 to AIG 7041, 21 Aug 66, JCS IN 60384, JMF 9155.3 (21 Aug 66).

61. Memo, AsstSecState for FE Affairs to RADM Lemos, OSD/ISA, “ARC LIGHT Strikes in North Vietnam,” 2 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

62. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “Use of ARC LIGHT Forces,” 7 Sep 66; Msg, JCS 2105 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 8 Sep 66; Msg, JCS 5333-66 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 8 Sep 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

63. Msg, COMUSMACV 41191 to CINCPAC, 13 Sep 66, JCS IN 99085, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

64. Msg, JCS 2554 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 13 Sep 66; Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 16 Sep 66, JCS IN 15561; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66. Msg, COMUSMACV 41856 to CINCPAC, 17 Sep 66, JCS IN 17771. Msg, JCS 2979 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 17 Sep 66. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 581.

65. *SAC History, 1966*, p. 256. DIA IB 203-66, 19 Oct 66, p. A-4; 191-66, 20 Oct 66, p. A-4. Msg, COMUSMACV 46395 to CINCPAC, 20 Oct 66, JCS IN 77260.

66. Msg, JCS 5877 to CINCPAC, 19 Oct 66. Msg, JCS 6143 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, and COMUSMACV, 21 Oct 66, JMF 9155.3 (21 Oct 66). *SAC History, 1966*, p. 256.

67. JCSM-675-66 to SecDef, 20 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2343/929), JMF 9155 (10 Oct 66).

68. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 28 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 2343/292-1, 31 Jan 67, JMF 9155 (10 Oct 66).

69. JCSM-736-66 to SecDef, 29 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/964); Memo, OASD(ISA) to DepAsstSecState for FE Affairs, 1 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2343/964-1, 29 Dec 66; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 4 Feb 67; JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).

70. JCS 2343/910, 17 Sep 66; Msg, Saigon 3601 to State, 16 Aug 66, JCS IN 51790; JMF 9155 (16 Aug 66).

71. JCSM-603-66 to SecDef, 22 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/910); CM-1772-66 to SecDef, 22 Sep 66; Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 4 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/910-1, 10 Oct 66; JMF 9155 (16 Aug 66).

72. Ltr, SecState to SecDef, 18 Nov 66, Att to Encl to JCS 2343/910-3, 8 Dec 66; Jt State-Def Msg (State 91707) to Saigon and JCS, 28 Nov 66, JCS IN 54955; DJSM-196-67 to ASD (ISA), 13 Feb 67, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/910-3, 16 Feb 67; JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).

73. Jt Emb-MACV Msg (Saigon 7583) to State, 4 Oct 66, JCS IN 46905. JCSM-711-66 to SecDef, 10 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/910-2); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 5 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2343/910-3, 8 Dec 66; JMF 9155 (16 Aug 66).

74. J-3 TP-58-65 for CJCS, 8 Nov 65, JMF 9155 (8 Nov 65).

75. CM-1286-66 to SecDef, 22 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2339/222, 24 Mar 66, JMF 9155 (8 Nov 65).

76. CM-1353-66 to SecDef, 18 Apr 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2339/222, 20 Apr 66, JMF 9155 (8 Nov 65).

77. Robert S. McNamara with Brian Van De Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 246; hereafter McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*.

78. Memo, IDA to SecDef, “JASON Summer Study,” 30 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

79. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 3 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/898, 6 Sep 66, JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) sec 1.

80. Memo, SecDef to LGEN Starbird, Dir, JTF 728, 15 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907, 15 Sep 66, JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) sec 1.

81. JCSM-594-66 to SecDef, 17 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/898-2), JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) sec 1. McNamara and Van De Mark, *In Retrospect*, p. 246.

82. JTF 728, “Report to the Secretary of Defense on Schedules and Requirements for the Project of JTF 728,” 29 Sep 66; Memo, Dir, JTF 728, to SecDef, 16 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-6, 17 Oct 66; Memo, ASD(A) to DDR&E et al., Encl to JCS 2343/907-9, 25 Oct 66; JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) secs 2 and 3.

83. JCSM-652-66 to SecDef, 10 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2343/907-2); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 25 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-10, 28 Oct 66; JCS 2343/907-11, 31 Oct 66; JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) secs 2 and 3.

84. CM-1845-66 to Secy, JCS, 17 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-7, 19 Oct 66, JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) sec 3. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 21 Oct 66, JCS IN 78800. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 25 Oct 66, JCS IN 89093.

85. Msg, JCS 8228 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 18 Nov 66. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 1073–1075.

86. Memo, Dir JTF 728 to SecDef, 14 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-14, 15 Nov 66, JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) secs 4 and 4A.

87. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 15 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-16, 17 Nov 66, JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) sec 4.

88. JCSM-740-66 to SecDef, 1 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/907-24), JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) sec 5.

89. Memo, Dir JTF 728 to SecDef, “Plan for Increased Anti-Infiltration Capability for SEA,” 22 Dec 66; Talking Paper for CJCS, same subj, 30 Dec 66; JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) sec 7.

90. Note to Control Div, “JCS 2343/907-28 – Plan for Increased Anti-Infiltration Capability for SEA,” 6 Jan 67; JCSM-11-67 to SecDef, 9 Jan 67 (derived from JCS 2343/907-34); Msg, JCS 2986 to CINCPAC, 6 Jan 67; JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) secs 7 and 8.

91. Memo, SecDef to Dir, DCPG, 9 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 2343/907-35, 11 Jan 67, JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) sec 8. Memo, DepSecDef to Pres, 7 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 1725/644, 10 Jan 67; NSAM 358, 13 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 1725/644-3, 29 Mar 67; JMF 418 (7 Jan 67).

25. Logistics Issues, 1966

1. Unless otherwise stated, information in this chapter is from *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 230–321.

2. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 104–128.

3. JCS 2343/724-1, 11 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65). Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), p. 281; hereafter Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

4. JCSM-891-65 to SecDef, 20 Dec 65 (derived from JCS 2343/724-1), JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65).

5. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 281–282.

6. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 6 Jan 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/724-1, 17 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65). *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 707. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, p. 282.

7. JCS 2343/847-1, 23 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 66).

8. MFR, 9 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2339/225, 12 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (8 Jul 66).

9. Ltrs, CINCPAC to JCS, 17, 20, and 30 Sep 66, Encls to JCS 2343/913, /915, and /913-1, JMF 9155.3/4900 (19 Jul 66) secs 1 and 2. JCSM-659-66 to SecDef, 12 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2339/225-8), JMF 9155.3 (8 Jul 66) sec 2. JCSM-698-66 to SecDef, 2 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/913-3), JMF 9155.3/4900 (19 Jul 66) sec 3.

10. *MACV Command History, 1965*, p. 482. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 725. JCSM-624-66 to SecDef, 27 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/818), JMF 9155.3 (26 Apr 66).

11. JCSM-355-66 to SecDef, 26 May 66 (derived from JCS 2343/828-1); Memo, DepSecDef to SecAF, 27 May 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/828-1, 2 Jun 66; JMF 9155.3 (13 May 66). *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 725.

12. Rpt, MACV Directorate of Construction, “Observations on the Construction Program, RVN, 1 October 1965–1 June 1967,” n.d., JMF 911/420 (26 Jul 67) sec 1A.

13. Ltr, MACV to CINCPAC, “Saigon Port Operations,” JMF 9155.3 (17 May 66).

14. Msg, DEF 9408 to JCS, 2 Dec 66; Msg, JCS 9507 to CINCPAC, 3 Dec 66; Ltr, MACV to JCS, "Saigon Port Plan," 5 Jan 67; JMF 9155.3 (17 May 66) sec 2. Msg, Saigon 17376 to State, 6 Feb 67, JCS IN 86868.

15. Joint Staff Study, "Responsive Logistic Support for Combined Operations in the Republic of Vietnam," Aug 65, JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 1A. JCSM-763-65 to SecDef, 19 Oct 65 (derived from JCS 2315/349-8); Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 9 Nov 65, Encl to JCS 2315/349-9, 12 Nov 65; JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 2.

16. DA Plan for Common Supply Support in RVN, 12 Jan 66, Att to CSAM 13-66 to JCS, 14 Jan 66, Encl to JCS 2315/349-11, 14 Jan 66, JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65).

17. JCSM-64-66 to SecDef, 4 Feb 66 (derived from JCS 2315/349-12), JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 3.

18. Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., 28 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2315/349-13, 3 Mar 66, JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 3.

19. Memo, SecA to SecDef, 11 Aug 66, Encl to JCS 2315/349-17, 16 Aug 66, JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 4.

20. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 23 Jul 66, JCS IN 13783. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 5 Aug 66, JCS IN 35833. SM-777-66 to CINCPAC, 22 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2315/349-20), JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 4.

21. JCSM-604-66 to SecDef, 22 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2315/349-20), JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 4.

22. Memo, SecDef to Secys of Mil Depts and CJCS, 12 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2315/349-23), 15 Dec 66, JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 4.

23. Msg, CINCPAC to SecDef, 290445Z Jan 66, JCS IN 75183. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 256.

24. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and CJCS, 8 Apr 66, JCS IN 14720.

25. Msg, DEF 8036 to COMUSMACV, 8 Apr 66.

26. Msg, JCS 8037 to CINCPAC, 8 Apr 66. Msg, DEF 8126 to CINCPAC, 9 Apr 66.

27. Msg, JCS 8558 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, 14 Apr 66. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 758.

28. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 759. *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 258.

29. CDR Bruce W. Robertson, J-4, interviewed by James F. Schnabel on 25 Feb 68. NSAM No. 346 to SecDef et al., 26 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 1725/593-1, 28 Apr 66, JMF 4000 (16 Apr 66).

30. *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 256–258. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 760.

31. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 24 Apr 66, JCS IN 41461, JMF 9155 (24 Apr 66).

32. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 2 May 66, JCS IN 53911; JCSM-317-66 to SecDef, 10 May 66, Encl to JCS 2343/823, 5 May 66; Msg, JCS 1498 to CINCPAC, 10 May 66; JMF 9155 (24 Apr 66). JCS 2343/760-69, 28 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 11.

33. Memo, ASD(I&L) to Secys of Mil Depts and CJCS, 23 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/853-1, 24 Jun 66; Msg, JCS 5297 to CSA, CNO, CSAF, CMC, and CINCPAC, 24 Jun 66; Msg, JCS 9796 to CSA et al., 23 Aug 66 (derived from JCS 1672/328-1); JMF 9155.3 (21 Jun 66).

34. The 2nd Air Division, MACV's USAF component command, was upgraded to the Seventh Air Force in March 1966 in recognition of the expansion of its forces and responsibilities.

35. CINCPAC Briefing for SecDef, 8 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (6 Jul 66). *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 260.

36. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 1725/621, 4 Oct 66, JMF 9155 (8 Aug 66). *MACV Command History, 1966*, pp. 260–265.

37. CM-1887-66 to SecDef, 5 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 1725/621-1, 8 Nov 66, JMF 9155 (8 Aug 66).

38. The rifle had a tendency to jam, owing to problems with the ammunition and a shortage in the field of equipment for the frequent cleanings the weapon required. Changes in the ammunition, improved distribution of cleaning supplies, and better training of the troops in use and care of

the rifle gradually eliminated the problems. For a summary of the M–16 controversy, see William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 284–287.

39. Msg, JCS 1281 to CINCPAC, 10 Jan 66. JCSM-110-66 to CSA et al., 29 Apr 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2349/49, 4 May 66, JMF 4630 (29 Mar 66).

40. Msg, JCS 3727 to CINCPAC et al., 27 Sep 66. JCSM-325-66 to CSA et al., 7 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/15-1, 9 Nov 66, JMF 4630 (29 Mar 66).

41. *MACV Command History, 1965*, pp. 128–131.

42. JCSM-137-66 to SecDef, 3 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/741-1), JMF 9155.3 (23 Dec 65).

43. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 25 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2343/741-2, 29 Mar 66; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 16 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/741-3, 20 Apr 66; JMF 9155.3 (23 Dec 65). *MACV Command History, 1966*, p. 287.

44. Memo, SecDef to Secys of Mil Depts, CJCS, and Dir DSA, 30 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/968, 30 Nov 66, JMF 7300 (30 Nov 66).

26. ROLLING THUNDER, July 1966–January 1967

1. Msg, JCS 6008 to CINCPAC, 6 Jul 66. Msg, JCS 6904 to CINCPAC, 16 Jul 66.

2. Msg, JCS 4277 to CINCPAC, 21 Jul 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66.

3. CM-1638-66 to SecDef, 23 Jul 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66. On the ports, see Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam, 1965–1966* (Washington: USAF History and Museums Program, 2002), pp. 303, 307.

4. CM-1697-66 to SecDef, 24 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

5. Memo, J–3 to CJCS, 12 Aug 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52, Tab B. MFR, sgd Coleman, 18 Aug 66, same file, Tab D.

6. Memo, no sig [J–3] for CJCS, 18 Aug 66, w/encls, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52, Tab 2. Note to Control Div, “ROLLING THUNDER 52,” 19 Aug 66, same file, Tab 3.

7. This was a group of distinguished scientists working under contract.

8. Memo, JASON Summer Study Group to SecDef, 30 Aug 66, IDA TS/HQ 66-60, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

9. During this period of the war, some 200,000 Chinese military personnel were present in North Vietnam, serving as engineers, air defense troops, and coastal defense troops. For an account based on Chinese sources, see Xiaoming Zhang, “The Vietnam War: A Chinese Perspective, 1964–1969,” *Journal of Military History* 60 (October 1996), 731–762.

10. CIA/DIA Rpt, “An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam (through 12 September 1966),” Sep 66, OCJCS Bulky File Vietnam Sep 66.

11. J–3 DIA Rpt, “NVN Target Analysis,” 30 Sep 66, OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

12. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 290110Z Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66.

13. DJSM-1077-66 to CJCS, 25 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

14. Msg, JCS 2723 to CINCPAC, 15 Sep 66.

15. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 192210Z Sep 66, JCS IN 21905.

16. Msg, JCS 5855-66 to CINCPAC, 29 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

17. Memo, SecDef to CJCS, “SEA Utilization of Tactical Aircraft,” 17 Sep 66, Att to JCS 2339/235, 22 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (17 Sep 66).

18. Encl C to JCS 2339/235-1, 4 Oct 66, JMF 9155 (17 Sep 66).

19. JCSM-645-66 to SecDef, 6 Oct 66, Encl A to JCS 2339/235-1, JMF 9155 (17 Sep 66).
20. Msg, JCS 5855-66 to CINCPAC, 29 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.
21. Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 202111Z Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66.
22. CM-1831-66 to CNO et al., 14 Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66.
23. Memo, SecDef to Pres, 14 Oct 66, US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. IV. *Vietnam, 1966* (On-line edition), Doc 268; hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, 1966*.
24. CM-1831-66 to CNO et al., 14 Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66.
25. JCSM-672-66 to SecDef, 14 Oct 66, *FRUS Vietnam 1966*, Doc 269.
26. Msg, JCS 6339-66 to CINCPAC, 17 Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66. The same message, addressed to General Westmoreland, is in *FRUS Vietnam, 1966*, Doc 274; see also fnnt 3 to this document and Doc 272.
27. Study, “Attack of North Vietnam-ROLLING THUNDER 52,” n.d., [30 Oct 66], w/handwritten comment, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66. Conference Rpt, Encl to Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS et al., Ser 5050, 22 Nov 66, JMF 9155.3 (22 Nov 66).
28. Conference Rpt, Encl to Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS et al., Ser 5050, 22 Nov 66, JMF 9155.3 (22 Nov 66).
29. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 192247Z Nov 66, JCS IN 43412; Conference Rpt, Encl to Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS et al., Ser 5050, 22 Nov 66; JMF 9155.3 (22 Nov 66). Msg, JCS 9088 to CINCPAC, 29 Nov 66.
30. CM-1906-66 to SecDef, 8 Nov 66, *FRUS Vietnam, 1966*, Doc 295.
31. Memo, SecDef to President, 9 Nov 66, *FRUS Vietnam, 1966*, Doc 299.
32. Msg, JCS 7735 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66.
33. Msg, CJCS 6925-66 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 66.
34. Msg, JCS 7783 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66; Msg, JCS 6926-66 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 66.
35. Msg, JCS 7105-66 to CINCPAC, 21 Nov 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 66. For the course of MARIGOLD, see George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 104–108.
36. For the effect of the 13–14 December strikes, see Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 106–107.
37. Tabs 21 and 24, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 12, ROLLING THUNDER 52. DIA IB 244-66, 19 Dec 66, p. A–9. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 232042Z Dec 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52, Tab 26. For detailed coverage of the controversy, which intensified late in December with publication in the *New York Times* of reports by Harrison Salisbury from North Vietnam detailing civilian damage, see William M. Hammond, *The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 272–279.
38. Msg, JCS 1471 to CINCPAC, 15 Dec 66. Tabs 22 and 23, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52.
39. Msg, State 106358 to Warsaw, 21 Dec 66 (text from White House). Msg, State 107911 to Warsaw, 23 Dec 66, *FRUS Vietnam, 1966*, Doc 349; see fnnt 1 to this document. Msg, JCS 2135 to CINCPAC, 23 Dec 66.
40. Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 242142Z Dec 66, *FRUS Vietnam, 1966*, Doc 350.
41. Salisbury went to North Vietnam with the permission of the Hanoi government, which guided his tour; and it was later established that some of his information came from Communist sources rather than his own observations. Nevertheless, his stories excited controversy and embarrassed the Johnson administration. For a full account of this affair, see Hammond, *Military and Media, 1962–1968*, pp. 274–279.

42. MFR, sgd Coleman, 26 Dec 66; CJCS informal working paper, “ROLLING THUNDER 53,” 26 Dec 66; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53, tab 1.
43. Briefing for RT 53, 4 Jan 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53, Tab 1.
44. Msg, JCS 4441 to CINCPAC, 24 Jan 67.
45. Rpt, J-3 to JCS, JCS 2343/824, 9 May 66, JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
46. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012359Z May 66, JCS IN 54067.
47. JCSM-325-66 to SecDef, 13 May 66 (derived from JCS 2343/824), JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
48. Encl B to JCS 2343/824-1, 18 Aug 66, JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
49. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 23 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/824-2, 26 Sep 66, JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
50. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 587.
51. Note to Control Div, 14 Oct 66; Msg, JCS 5427 to CINCPAC, 14 Oct 66; JCSM-736-66 to SecDef, 29 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/964); JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
52. Msg, JCS 1122 to CINCPAC, 10 Dec 66.
53. JCSM-755-66 to SecDef, 7 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/941-1), JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
54. *CINCPAC Command History, 1966*, p. 591. The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (trans. by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 190–191; hereafter *Victory in Vietnam*.
55. Msg, JCS 4441 to CINCPAC, 24 Jan 67.
56. According to a post-war communist history, the enemy air force during 1966 worked on improving flying skills, training in the use of air-to-air missiles, practicing coordinated combat operations, and “the use of surprise and hit-and-run tactics.” See *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 189.
57. These figures are from Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure*, p. 317.
58. DJSM-10-67 to CJCS, 3 Jan 67, w/encl; CJCS Briefing for NSC, 7 Feb 67; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53, Tabs 1 and 21.
59. Statement, CJCS, 7 Feb 67, Att to Ltr, CJCS to SecState, 8 Feb 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53, Tab 21.

27. Efforts toward Negotiation

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