

WILLIAM C. GIBBONS

The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War

*Executive and Legislative Roles and
Relationships, Part IV*



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**THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND THE
VIETNAM WAR**

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Executive and Legislative Roles
and Relationships

PART IV: JULY 1965—JANUARY 1968

WILLIAM CONRAD GIBBONS

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*For my grandchildren, Benjamin Gibbons and
Alexander and Stephanie Meier-Gibbons, and
for my children Ashley and Justin, who
joined our family in June 1994,
with love.*

PREFACE

This, the fourth of a five-part policy history of the U.S. Government and the Vietnam war, covers the critical period of active American involvement from the decision in July 1965 to send large-scale troops, to January 1968, just before the beginning of the Tet offensive and the decision to stop bombing North Vietnam and to seek a negotiated settlement. Parts I, II, and III covered the periods 1945–1960, 1961–1964, and January–July 1965. Part V will cover the period from January 1968 to May 1975.

The goal here, as in previous volumes, is to describe and analyze major developments in U.S. policy—political, military, and diplomatic—and, by drawing on a wide variety of sources including interviews and previously classified documents, to present a comprehensive view of the decisions that were reached and the courses of action that were taken. The perspective is primarily that of the participants, and the judgments expressed and conclusions reached are generally drawn from their experiences.

Following a summary of the evolution of the decision to use U.S. forces in Vietnam, the study traces the efforts to “win” the limited war being waged, while avoiding a larger, more general war or jeopardizing other important U.S. interests. There are detailed discussions of the search for an effective political and military strategy, of differences of opinion within the government (including strong differences within the military), and of the process by which major policy and operational choices were made.

Included in this analysis is the question of maintaining political and legislative support for the war, as well as the problems encountered in fighting the war while expanding domestic programs. Also included are public reactions to the war, the activities of antiwar groups, and the responses of elected officials to pressures from the electorate.

Extensive consideration is given to the responses of the U.S. Congress to the war and the positions taken by various members and committees on funds and policy, as well as to interaction between the President and Congress. Political party activities are also considered, along with the effect of the war on congressional and presidential elections.

Events in South Vietnam are an important aspect of this study, and considerable attention is paid to American efforts to influence the South Vietnamese and to South Vietnamese reactions to their situation and the role of the United States.

There is also major emphasis on efforts to find a political/diplomatic settlement of the war, especially contacts between the U.S. and other major powers, as well as direct and indirect secret negotiations between the U.S. and the North Vietnamese.

Sources for this volume consisted primarily of White House and other records at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library; State Depart-

ment files; U.S. Army records, especially the papers of General William C. Westmoreland, and the 135 interviews conducted by the author with the help of Patricia McAdams and, for a portion of the early interviews, Dr. Anna Kasten Nelson. Also consulted were oral histories at the Johnson Library and at the U.S. Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. Materials on Congress were obtained from the papers of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the National Archives and from the Committee, White House, and other records at the Johnson Library, and interviews with Members of Congress and their staffs.

A number of persons have contributed to this part of the study. The continued support of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and of Senator Claiborne Pell and Geryld B. Christianson, who were Chairman and Staff Director of the Committee at the time this volume was completed, is deeply appreciated. The Committee's Editor, Donald McDonald, and Leon Stern, Assistant to the Editor, were very helpful in coding the manuscript and arranging for printing.

Reviewers of earlier parts who also examined all or parts of this volume were William P. Bundy, General Andrew J. Goodpaster, Chester Cooper, and Norvill Jones. (Their credentials were described in earlier volumes.) General Douglas Kinnard, who served in Vietnam in several capacities, and is the author of *The War Managers* (cited below), was also helpful, as were Generals William C. Westmoreland, Bruce Palmer, Jr., and Frederick C. Weyand. General Volney Warner provided useful information on PROVN.

The author owes a special debt to Professor Richard H. Immerman of Temple University, for his excellent critique of the draft manuscript.

Tom Johnson, former Press Secretary to President Lyndon Johnson and now the President of Cable News Network (CNN), kindly allowed the author to use and quote at length from his notes of meetings of the President and his advisers (the Tuesday Lunch).

Professor George Herring of the University of Kentucky generously made available page proofs of his new book, *LBJ and Vietnam* (cited below).

Mary Blake French, editor of *Army* magazine, suggested useful sources and materials.

In the Congressional Research Service, very helpful reviews were provided by Joan M. Davenport, Review Specialist in the Office of the Director, who studied Asian affairs and has lived in the region and who combines knowledge and excellent editorial judgment; Dr. Robert G. Sutter, Project Manager, an Asian specialist who was former Chief and now serves as a Senior Specialist of the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division; and Robert L. Goldich, a Specialist in National Defense who was the supervisor of this project during several years as a section head in the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division.

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At George Mason University, where the author is a Visiting Professor, important contributions have been made by Dr. Louise White, Chair of the Public and International Affairs Department, and Virginia V. McCaslin, Secretary, as well as the Office of Grants Administration and Mary F. Blackwell, Coordinator of Office Support Services.

At the Department of State, where the author spent many months examining classified materials, Teresa Farrell, Chief of the Research Branch of the Foreign Affairs Information Management Center, and Charles N. Mills, the former chief, were very cooperative in efforts to locate and declassify relevant documents. Others who were helpful included those former Foreign Service Officers who reviewed the material (but who, understandably, prefer anonymity) and others who processed the hundreds of documents that the author had requested.

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At the U.S. Army Military History Institute, David A. Keough, Assistant Archivist/Historian, and John J. Slonaker, Chief, Historical Reference Branch, were very helpful in making available information from that important archival source.

The most important source of materials used in this volume has been the papers in the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, where a small staff handles with skill and tact an enormous and complicated workload of requests. Thanks go to the Director, Harry Middleton; the Supervisory Archivist, Tina Houston; the Senior Archivist, Regina Greenwell, and her illustrious predecessor, Dr. David C. Humphrey (now a historian in the State Department); and Archivist Linda Hansen, for their splendid contribution. Archivist John Wilson, who bore with superb patience and good will the brunt of the author's many requests, deserves special recognition and appreciation for his excellent service.

Also helpful were Betty Austin, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries; Sheryl B. Vogt, Head of the Richard B. Russell Library at the University of Georgia; Jill Christiansen and Peter Drummey at the Massachusetts Historical Society; David S. Sheaves, Applications Analyst/Programmer at the Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina; and Leah D. W. Stoker, Media Correspondent, the Gallup Organization, Inc.

Above all, the author wishes to thank his assistant at George Mason University, Anne G. Bonanno, whose continued hard work, abundant tact and good will, and awesome pursuit of the smallest error are deeply appreciated. For 14 years she has been solely responsible

for the entire support side of this project, and deserves great credit for what has been accomplished.

Note:

After the publication of Part III of this study, the author received a letter from Allan W. Cameron commenting on the discussion on page 266 of the student people-to-people program sponsored by the U.S. Government in the summer of 1965 for a small group of American college students. Contrary to the statement in the text, Cameron says that the program was not coordinated by the American Friends of Vietnam but by the Institute of International Education under a grant from the Agency for International Development. He adds that the program was repeated in the summer of 1966 with 40 students (30 in South Vietnam and 10 in Laos), and that he was employed as the Field Representative and Team Leader for the group.

In reference to the question of the government's exploitation of the students in supporting U.S. policy, Cameron says that "after our return, there was absolutely no effort made to exploit my knowledge or that of another student from the same graduate school. Indeed, we were disappointed by the lack of interest in Washington, which contrasted starkly with the level of interest in Saigon."

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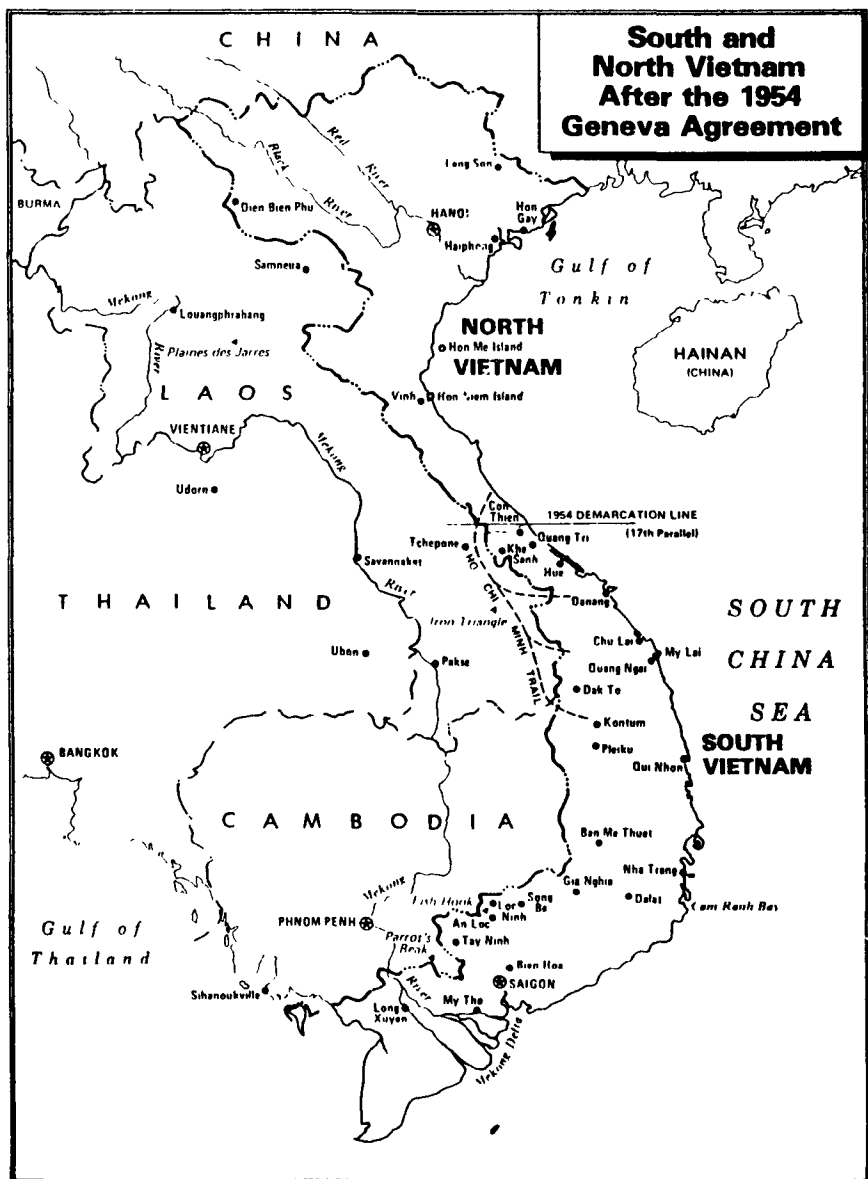
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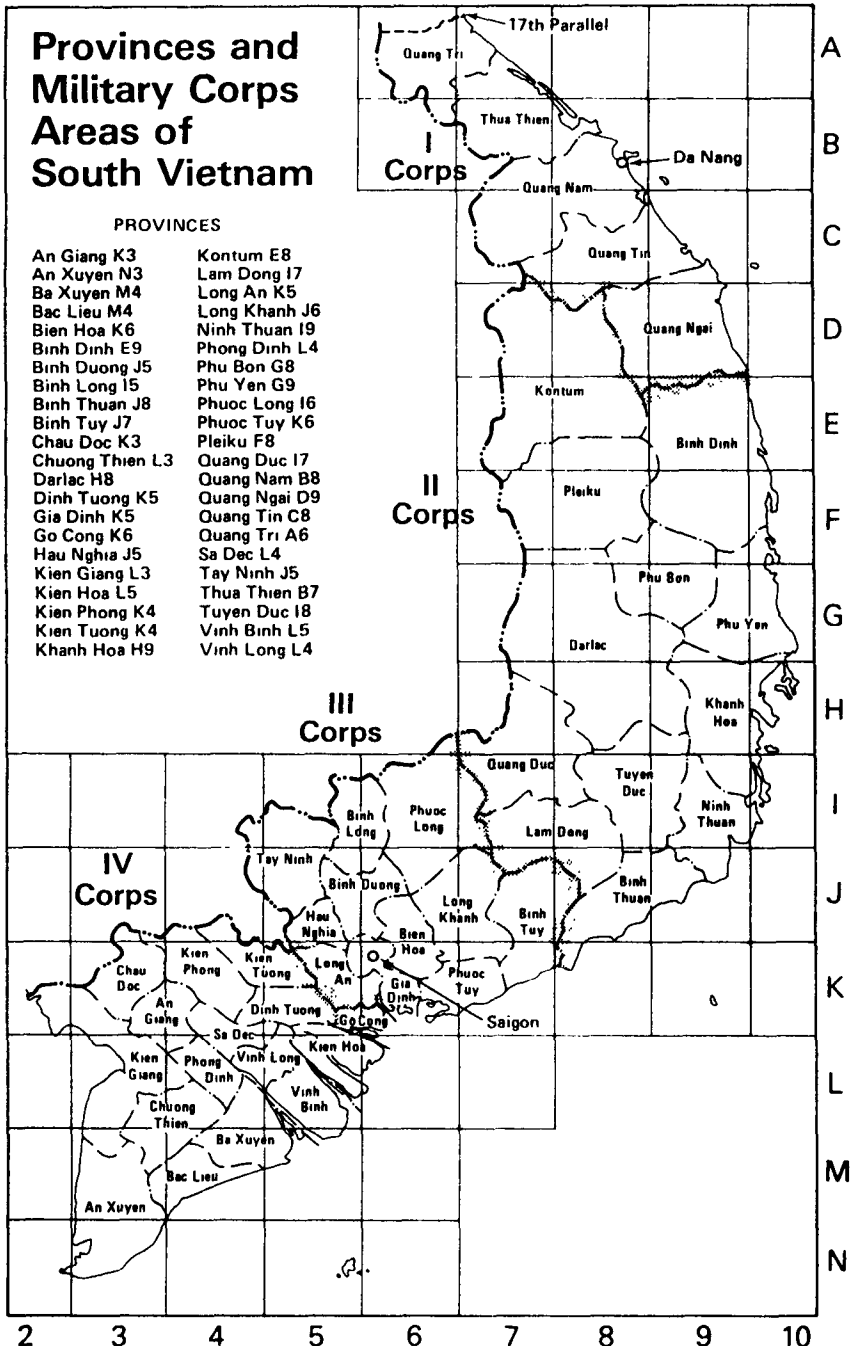
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Provinces and Military Corps Areas of South Vietnam

PROVINCES

An Giang K3	Kontum E8
An Xuyen N3	Lam Dong I7
Ba Xuyen M4	Long An K5
Bac Lieu M4	Long Khanh J6
Bien Hoa K6	Ninh Thuan I9
Binh Dinh E9	Phong Dinh L4
Binh Duong J5	Phu Bon G8
Binh Long I5	Phu Yen G9
Binh Thuan J8	Phuoc Long I6
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Go Cong K6	Quang Tri A6
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Kien Giang L3	Tay Ninh J5
Kien Hoa L5	Thua Thien B7
Kien Phong K4	Tuyen Duc I8
Kien Tuong K4	Vinh Binh L5
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CHAPTER 1

THE IDIOM OF POWER

On July 28, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced that the United States was deploying additional troops to South Vietnam and declared that the U.S. would use its forces to defend South Vietnam from the "growing might and grasping ambition of Asian communism." This action, he said, was necessary in order to maintain the credibility of U.S. power and commitments. "If we are driven from the field in Vietnam," he said, "then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in American promises, or in American protection."¹

The goal, the President stated, was to convince the Communists that they could not win in Vietnam by force of arms. Once this was accomplished, a peaceful solution to the conflict was "inevitable." He declined to predict how long the war might last, saying that it would take "months or years or decades," but he warned that there was no "quick solution." In response to a question about the economic effects of the decision, he said that the U.S. was in a period of unprecedented prosperity and that there was no need to declare a national emergency (under which the government could have exercised various economic and other controls). Although he did not say so publicly, he had been advised by the Chairman of his Council of Economic Advisers that the additional military expenditures required by the decision to use U.S. forces would have a favorable effect on the economy, at least in the short-run.²

The President's decision was based on the recommendations of most of his foreign policy and military advisers and all of his three principal advisers—Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, and the Presidential Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy—that the military situation was becoming more critical, and that if the U.S. did not intervene in force, there was an imminent threat that the Communists would take control of South Vietnam. Failure to act would have far-reaching consequences, according to Rusk, not only in Southeast Asia but worldwide: "The integrity of the U.S. commitment is the principal pillar of peace throughout the world. If that commitment becomes unreliable, the communists would draw conclusions that would lead to our ruin and almost certainly to a catastrophic war. So long as the South Vietnamese are prepared to

¹ U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965 (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, 1966), p. 794. For Johnson's explanation of his reasons for this decision, see his memoirs, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), pp. 151–152.

² For a detailed discussion of these and other aspects of the July 28, 1965 decision, see pt. III of this study, ch. 6.

fight for themselves, we cannot abandon them without disaster to peace and to our interests throughout the world."³

Evolution of the Decision to Use U.S. Forces

The decision to use U.S. forces to defend South Vietnam was the culmination of 20 years of political and military actions by which the United States had become progressively involved in preventing Communist domination of Vietnam. In 1945, President Harry S. Truman agreed to let the French resume control of Indochina (the three "Associated States" of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia), and from then until the French withdrew in 1954 the U.S. provided financial and military assistance directly or indirectly to French forces fighting in Vietnam.⁴

In the spring of 1950, after the Communists had taken control of China, the U.S. decided to increase its assistance to the French as well as to begin providing military assistance directly to the Associated States. A small U.S. military mission was established in each of the three countries to aid in these efforts. The position of the U.S., as expressed in the policy decision of President Truman, National Security Council (NSC) Directive 64, April 24, 1950, "The Position of the United States With Respect to Indochina," was that, "It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia," and that, "The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave danger."⁵

After the Korean war began in the summer of 1950, the U.S. was concerned about possible Communist designs on Southeast Asia, and some consideration was given to using U.S. forces, including ground forces, in Indochina. Gen. J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff of the Army, stated in a memorandum on October 18, 1950, that as a last resort and under certain conditions the U.S. should use its ground forces in Indochina to stop the Communists.⁶ In November, however, with U.S. forces tied down in Korea, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) took the position, based on a study by the JCS's Joint Strategic Survey Committee, that the U.S. should not use its own forces in Indochina but, rather, should seek to get the French to do more to gain support of the people. According to the Survey Committee, "While minor commitments of United States military forces [in addition to French and indigenous forces] might be sufficient to defeat the Viet Minh [the Communists] in Indochina, it is more probable that such commitments would lead to a major involvement of the United States in that area similar to that in Korea or even to global war. Accordingly, there would be great potential danger to the security interests of the United States in the commitment of any 'token' or 'minor' United States forces in Indochina."⁷

³ Johnson Library, NSF NSC History, Deployment of Forces, Rusk Memorandum to the President, July 1, 1965.

⁴ For background on U.S. involvement in Vietnam prior to 1965 see pts. I and II of this study.

⁵ For NSC 64, see pp. 66-67 of pt. I of this study.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

In 1953–1954, the newly elected President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his associates also debated whether and under what circumstances to use U.S. forces in Indochina. In October 1953, Eisenhower approved a broad National Security Council directive which took an even stronger view of the strategic importance of Indochina than had the Truman administration. Indochina, the directive said, was “of such strategic importance” that an attack on it from outside (i.e., China) “probably would compel the United States to react with military force either locally at the point of attack or generally against the military power of the aggressors.”⁸

The Army became concerned, however, about the gap between policy and capability, and in late 1953 a study was conducted by the Army Plans Division of the requirements for U.S. forces if the French withdrew from Indochina. It was estimated that seven U.S. Army divisions and one Marine division, a total of 275,000–300,000 men including support forces (but not including naval and air forces), would be required to replace the French, and that it would take five to eight years to pacify the country using the techniques successfully employed by the British in Malaya.⁹ The Plans Division concluded that there were not enough troops to fill such a requirement while still meeting other U.S. commitments. The Joint Strategic Plans Committee of the JCS, however, recommended, and the JCS approved, that if necessary to prevent Communist control the U.S. should use its forces in Indochina.¹⁰

At a meeting of the National Security Council on January 8, 1954, to consider whether U.S. forces should be used, Eisenhower expressed strong opposition to the use of U.S. ground forces in Vietnam:¹¹ “For himself, said the President with great force, he simply could not imagine the United States putting ground forces anywhere in Southeast Asia, except possibly in Malaya, which one would have to defend as a bulwark to our off-shore island chain. But to do this anywhere else was simply beyond his contemplation. Indeed, the key to winning this war was to get the Vietnamese to fight. There was just no sense in even talking about United States forces replacing the French in Indochina. If we did so, the Vietnamese could be expected to transfer their hatred of the French to us. I can not tell you, said the President with vehemence, how bitterly opposed I am to such a course of action. This war in Indochina would absorb our troops by divisions!” Eisenhower did not necessarily oppose the use of some U.S. personnel and equipment, especially from the Air Force and the CIA, to assist the French, and he was in favor of having the U.S. take over most of the train-

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁰ At least one military official disagreed. In a memorandum in early January 1964, Vice Adm. Arthur C. Davis, Director of the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in the International Security Affairs Division of the Defense Department, made this memorable statement (*ibid.*, p. 150):

“Involvement of U.S. forces in the Indochina war should be avoided at all practical costs. If, then, National Policy determines no other alternative, the U.S. should not be self-deceived into believing the possibility of partial involvement—such as ‘Naval and Air units only.’ One cannot go over Niagara Falls in a barrel only slightly. . . . If it is determined *desirable* to introduce air and naval forces in combat in Indochina it is difficult to understand how involvement of ground forces could be avoided. Air strength sufficient to be of worth in such an effort would require bases in Indochina of considerable magnitude. Protection of those bases and port facilities would certainly require U.S. ground force personnel, and the force once committed would need ground combat units to support any threatened evacuation. It must be understood that there is no cheap way to fight a war, once committed.” (emphasis in original)

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

ing of local forces in Indochina. He also agreed with a statement by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in another NSC meeting on January 14, 1954 that if the French withdrew, the U.S., without intervening directly, could support a guerrilla operation inside Vietnam.¹²

During the battle of Dien Bien Phu in the early months of 1954, Eisenhower agreed to provide France with aircraft and aircraft technicians, as well as the use of the CIA in ferrying troops and supplies into Dien Bien Phu. As the battle worsened, the French asked the U.S. to bomb the attacking forces. This or any other intervention by U.S. forces was considered and rejected, in part because of the opposition of key Members of Congress, but primarily because of the President's opposition to the use of U.S. forces in this manner, which was buttressed by similar opposition from Army Chief of Staff Matthew B. Ridgway. According to Ridgway, "The adverse conditions prevalent in this area [Indochina] combine all those which confronted U.S. forces in previous campaigns in the South and Southwest Pacific and Eastern Asia, with the additional grave complication of a large native population, in thousands of villages, most of them about evenly divided between friendly and hostile." Moreover, he said, "Such use of United States armed forces, apart from any local successes they might achieve, would constitute a dangerous strategic diversion of limited United States military capabilities, and would commit our armed forces in a non-decisive theatre to the attainment of non-decisive local objectives."¹³

Following the partition of Vietnam at the Geneva Conference in the summer of 1954, the French withdrew, and the U.S. assumed responsibility for helping the new South Vietnamese Government. Eisenhower increased the size of the U.S. military mission to about 700 (only 342 were permitted by the Geneva Agreement; the others were considered "temporary"). Although the Communists became more active toward the end of the 1950s and steps were taken to provide for increased U.S. assistance, especially covert action in Laos, the U.S. military role remained limited during Eisenhower's Presidency.

In 1961, the newly elected President, John F. Kennedy, turned first to the problem of Laos, which appeared to be more critical than Vietnam.¹⁴ He considered sending U.S. forces to Laos, either unilaterally or as part of a multilateral force under the Southeast Asia Treaty (SEATO). For a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the strong opposition of key congressional leaders to

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 153–155.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 203, 237.

¹⁴ By late 1960, as he was leaving office, Eisenhower was very concerned about the situation in Laos. In a meeting with President-elect John F. Kennedy in January 1961, he was reported by Clark M. Clifford, who was present, to have said, "with considerable emotion," that the U.S. could not afford to let the Communists take Laos, the "key to the whole area." Clifford's notes of the meeting also state that Eisenhower told Kennedy that if all else failed the U.S. would have to intervene, alone if necessary. See pt. II of this study, p. 9. Notes on the meeting by Robert McNamara, which were declassified in 1985 after the publication of pt. II, state, however, that although Eisenhower told Kennedy that if Laos were "lost" all of Southeast Asia would be also, he advised against unilateral action by the U.S. Johnson Library, NSF Memoes to the President—McGeorge Bundy, attachment to Memorandum for the President, Aug. 26, 1965.

For a detailed explanation see Fred I. Greenstein and Richard H. Immerman, "What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina? The Politics of Misperception," *Journal of American History*, 79 (September 1992), pp. 568–587.

U.S. military intervention in Laos, Kennedy decided to negotiate a settlement in Laos but to strengthen the U.S. role in Vietnam.

A few days after taking office, Kennedy approved a new counterinsurgency program for Vietnam which had been developed during 1960 by the Eisenhower administration, under which the U.S. increased its assistance to Vietnam. He also established a high-level interdepartmental Counterinsurgency Group and exhorted his advisers to give priority to the development of counterinsurgency doctrine and capabilities.

On May 11, 1961, Kennedy approved NSC 52, which reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to Vietnam and authorized a sweeping program of action. The objective, it said, was "to prevent Communist domination of South Vietnam; to create in that country a viable and increasingly democratic society, and to initiate, on an accelerated basis, a series of mutually supporting actions of a military, political, economic psychological and covert character designed to achieve this objective."¹⁵

The JCS took the position that, consistent with NSC 52, the U.S. should deploy its own forces to South Vietnam in order to:¹⁶

A. Provide a visible deterrent to potential North Vietnam and/or Chinese Communist action.

B. Release Vietnam forces from advanced and static defense positions to permit their fuller commitment to counterinsurgency actions.

C. Assist in training the Vietnamese forces to the maximum extent consistent with their mission.

D. Provide a nucleus for the support of any additional major U.S. or SEATO military operation in Southeast Asia.

E. Indicate the firmness of our interest to all Asian nations.

Kennedy's response to the JCS was to ask for a study of the question of using U.S. forces. He also sounded out South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, who said he would welcome more military advisers but that he did not want U.S. forces to become involved in the war.

In June 1961, Kennedy and Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev met in Vienna, and although Khrushchev appeared to agree to a negotiated settlement for Laos he was very belligerent with respect to making a peace treaty with Germany. Kennedy apparently felt he was being tested, and that steps would have to be taken to prove U.S. resolve. As he was reported to have said, "Now we have a problem in making our power credible, and Vietnam looks like the place."¹⁷

In the summer of 1961, as Laos negotiations began but tension between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. increased over the German question, some of Kennedy's advisers recommended that the U.S. should seek to convince the Communists to agree to a reasonable settlement in Laos, as well as to make clear U.S. determination to defend Indochina and other American interests, by establishing a military headquarters in Thailand and by sending some troops to Vietnam and to Thailand. These advisers also suggested that if ne-

¹⁵ See pt. II of this study, p. 40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39, from JCS memorandum of May 9, 1961.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

gotiations were not successful, the U.S., in concert with Thailand and South Vietnam, should take and hold the southern part of Laos, or, with or without SEATO, send combat forces to South Vietnam on the border area adjacent to the southern part of Laos. There was also some discussion of the bombing of North Vietnam and a naval blockade as part of a plan for applying "graduated pressure" on the North Vietnamese. Kennedy voiced considerable skepticism about U.S. military involvement in Laos, however, and said he wanted to pursue negotiations. Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara agreed.¹⁸

By the fall of 1961, the situation in Laos had stabilized and negotiations for a settlement were proceeding satisfactorily. With respect to Vietnam, however, there was widespread concern among U.S. policymakers that the situation was deteriorating, and a feeling that the U.S. would have to play a more active role. On October 10, 1961, a paper, "Concept for Intervention in Vietnam," which combined the ideas of the State and Defense Departments and the JCS, was presented to President Kennedy.¹⁹ It proposed the deployment in the highlands of Vietnam (Pleiku) of a SEATO (primarily U.S.) force of 11,000 ground combat troops supported by 11,800 air, naval and other forces. "To clean up the Viet Cong threat," the paper said, might require 40,000 combat forces (all services) or more, depending on whether the North Vietnamese increased their aid to the South or if the Chinese intervened. Ultimately, there could be a need for as many as four ground combat divisions (160,000-200,000 including support forces).

The paper discussed the pros and cons of sending a SEATO force into South Vietnam. Among the "cons" was: "The plan itself would not itself solve the underlying problem of ridding SVN of communist guerrillas." Also, "It breaks the Geneva Accords and puts responsibility on the U.S. for rationalizing the action before the U.N. and the world." Furthermore, there would be the "risk of being regarded as interlopers à la the French. . . ." In addition, the Communists might react by a "change of tactics back to small-scale operations [which] might leave this force in a stagnant position."

Among the "pros" was that such a move could strengthen the Vietnamese as well as U.S. influence with the Vietnamese and the U.S. bargaining position with the Russians. Moreover, "If we go into South Viet-Nam now with SEATO, the costs would be much less than if we wait and go in later, or lose SVN."

The paper took the position that because the deployment of such combat forces would represent a decision to intervene militarily in the war, it was a step which "cannot be taken without accepting as our real and ultimate objective the defeat of the Viet Cong and making Viet-Nam secure in the hands of an anti-Communist government."

At a meeting with his advisers on October 11, 1961, President Kennedy agreed to send a U.S. Air Force squadron to Vietnam, but decided that before acting on the recommendation for using ground forces he would send Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, then serving on the

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 58-68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

White House staff, and Walt W. Rostow, a deputy to McGeorge Bundy, to Vietnam to examine the situation. Taylor and Rostow, who had been advocating intervention with U.S. forces, reported after their trip that, "vigorous American action is needed to buy time for Vietnam to mobilize and organize its real assets; but the time for such a turn around has nearly run out. And if Vietnam goes, it will be exceedingly difficult if not impossible to hold Southeast Asia. What will be lost is not merely a crucial piece of real estate, but the faith that the U.S. has the will and the capacity to deal with the Communist offensive in that area."²⁰ They recommended, among other things, that the U.S. should send 6,000–18,000 ground combat and logistical troops to Vietnam to serve as a deterrent as well as a demonstration of U.S. resolve.

In early November 1961 there was considerable discussion of the Taylor-Rostow recommendation for sending U.S. troops. Most of the President's principal advisers, including McNamara, McGeorge Bundy and the JCS, were in favor of the proposal, but only, as the paper on intervention had also advised, if the U.S. made a categorical commitment to defend South Vietnam. McNamara, for himself and for Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric and the JCS, sent a memorandum to the President in which he argued that the fall of South Vietnam would have "extremely serious" strategic implications in Asia as well as worldwide. Moreover, "The chances are against, probably sharply against, preventing that fall by any measures short of the introduction of U.S. forces on a substantial scale." McNamara, Gilpatric and the JCS supported the Taylor-Rostow plan for a limited deployment, but said that the Communists would not be convinced of American resolve unless the U.S. also announced its commitment to defend South Vietnam and sent word to the North Vietnamese that continued support by them of the Communists in the South would lead to punitive retaliation by the U.S. against the North.

If the U.S. took these actions, the memorandum added, the possible extent of the military commitment would have to be faced. "I believe we can assume," McNamara said, "that the maximum U.S. forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia will not exceed 6 divisions, or about 205,000 men. . . ."

Secretary of State Rusk, however, had reservations, and in a cable from Tokyo he questioned whether a small number of U.S. troops could be a decisive factor unless the performance of the South Vietnam improved: "While attaching greatest possible importance to security in Southeast Asia, I would be reluctant to see U.S. make major additional commitment American prestige to a losing horse."

In order to present the President with a unified recommendation, Rusk and McNamara sent him a joint memorandum in mid-November 1961 in which, after restating the importance of defending South Vietnam, they proposed that the U.S. should be prepared to use its own forces "if that should become necessary for success." Moreover, it might also be necessary for the U.S. "to strike at the source of the aggression in North Vietnam." They recommended that plans should be made for using U.S. forces, but pointed out

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

that it would be preferable to postpone a decision to send forces until after the Laotian settlement had been completed.

In meetings with his advisers during November, President Kennedy agreed with the recommendation that combat forces should not be sent at that time, partly because of his concern about having the support of Congress, the public, and other countries before doing so. He approved, however, a major new program of U.S. assistance to South Vietnam, including a greatly increased number of U.S. military advisers, and the assignment of U.S. military units to provide direct support to the South Vietnamese military (airlift, reconnaissance by air and sea, intelligence, communications, etc.).²¹

Although Kennedy agreed with his advisers that U.S. combat forces should not be sent at that time, in a cable to Lodge, the language of which Kennedy personally cleared,²² the State Department said "We do not propose to introduce into the GVN [Government of Vietnam] U.S. combat troops now, but we do propose a phase of intense public and diplomatic activity designed to focus on the infiltration of men from the North. We shall decide what course of action we shall take later should infiltration not be radically reduced. . . . Very strictly for your own information, you should know that the Department of Defense has been instructed to prepare plans for the use of U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam under the various contingencies that can be foreseen, including stepped-up infiltration from the North as well as organized Communist military intervention into South Vietnam. However, you should be entirely clear that it must be the objective of our policy to do all possible to accomplish our purpose with respect to GVN without the use of U.S. combat forces."

After these decisions were made in November of 1961, the Kennedy administration attempted through this program of increased assistance to provide support to South Vietnam without committing U.S. forces to the war. (Although by the fall of 1963 there were more U.S. military forces in Vietnam than had been recommended in the fall of 1961, and although many of these "advisers" were engaged in combat, there were no U.S. military units engaged in combat, nor had there been any attacks by U.S. forces on North Vietnam.) By the end of 1962, however, there were increasing signs that the situation was continuing to deteriorate, and in November 1963, after months of preliminary activity, the U.S., in hopes of getting stronger indigenous leadership, supported a coup against President Diem. On November 22, Kennedy was assassinated, and Lyndon Johnson became President.

In a meeting with his senior advisers on November 24, 1963, President Johnson said that he "approached the situation [Vietnam] with some misgivings," but added, "we have to see that our objectives are accomplished."²³ A few days later, he reaffirmed the

²¹ For a critique of Kennedy's actions on the Taylor-Rostow recommendations, see Worth H. Bagley, "Kennedy and Taylor: Vietnam, 1961," *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (May 1993), pp. 106-115. At the time, then Lt. Commander Bagley was an assistant to Taylor, accompanied him to Vietnam, and was present at the meeting of Taylor with the President after the trip.

²² See the clearances listed at the bottom of the first page of the cable, Washington to Saigon 618, Nov. 15, 1961, in the Kennedy Library, Papers of Theodore Sorenson, Vietnam File. This cable is not included in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Vietnam, vol. I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1988).

²³ See pt. III of this study, p. 1.

U.S. commitment by approving National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 273, based on agreements reached by his military and civilian advisers at a conference in Honolulu on November 20, which stated in part: "It remains the central object of the United States in Vietnam to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy."²⁴

On December 21, 1963, McNamara, after a brief trip to Vietnam, reported to the President that "The situation is very disturbing. Current trends, unless reversed in the next 2-3 months, will lead to neutralization at best and most likely to a Communist-controlled state."²⁵ McNamara took the position that U.S. resources and personnel "cannot usefully be increased substantially," (at the time there were 20,000 U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam) but he recommended several steps, including new covert operations against North Vietnam, the so-called OPLAN (operations plan) 34-A. On January 22, 1964, Gen. Maxwell Taylor, now Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sent a JCS memorandum to Secretary of Defense McNamara proposing that to carry out NSAM 273 the U.S. must take steps to "make plain to the enemy our determination to see the Vietnam campaign through to a favorable conclusion."²⁶ U.S. failure in Vietnam, the memorandum declared, would not only have a direct effect on the neighboring countries of Asia and on the U.S. position in Asia, but because it was "the first real test of our determination to defeat the communist wars of national liberation formula, it is not unreasonable to conclude that there would be a corresponding unfavorable effect upon our image in Africa and in Latin America."

The JCS memorandum argued that "self-imposed restrictions" on the U.S., which included limiting the war geographically to the territory of South Vietnam, avoiding the direct use of U.S. combat forces, and limiting the role of the U.S. to that of giving advice to the South Vietnamese, were forcing the U.S. and South Vietnam to fight on the enemy's terms. "He has determined the locale, the timing, and the tactics of the battle while our actions are essentially reactive." A more aggressive attitude was needed, and a "much higher level of activity . . . to make plain our resolution, both to our friends and to our enemies."

"It is our conviction," the JCS memorandum concluded, "that if support of the insurgency from outside South Vietnam in terms of operational direction, personnel and material were stopped completely, the character of the war in South Vietnam would be substantially and favorably altered."

²⁴ See pt. III of this study, p. 3.

For President Johnson's handling of the war during the 1963-1965 period, see George Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1994); Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), and Lyndon Johnson's War: *The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989); and Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981). See also the analysis of Paul Y. Hammond, *LBJ and the Presidential Management of Foreign Relations* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1992).

²⁵ See pt. II of this study, pp. 211-212.

²⁶ For the text, see the *Pentagon Papers*, Gravel ed., vol. III, pp. 496-499 (hereafter cited as PP). This edition of the *Pentagon Papers* was published in 1971 in four volumes by the Beacon Press of Boston, based on material made available by Senator Mike Gravel (D/Alaska).

The JCS recommended "bolder actions which may embody greater risks," including making the U.S. military commander [in South Vietnam] responsible for all U.S. programs, civilian as well as military, and persuading the South Vietnamese to let the U.S. military commander assume ("temporarily") tactical direction of the war and full responsibility for all operations against North Vietnam. Operations against the North would be intensified. U.S. planes "under Vietnamese cover" would bomb the North, and the U.S. would equip and advise the South Vietnamese in their own program of bombing and mining harbors, as well as commando raids on the coast. The U.S. would also encourage South Vietnam to conduct ground operations in Laos against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Finally, the memorandum recommended that additional U.S. forces be committed "as necessary" in South Vietnam, and "as necessary" in attacks on North Vietnam.

In mid-March 1964, President Johnson again sent McNamara to Vietnam (accompanied, among others, by General Taylor), and then approved the report of the trip in its entirety, designating it as NSAM 288.²⁷ This document reiterated the objective of the U.S.—"an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam"—and the dire consequences which would occur if South Vietnam fell to the Communists. Once again, McNamara took the position that although the situation was worse, substantial increases in U.S. resources and personnel still were not needed. He proposed a number of steps to aid the South Vietnamese, predicting that the situation should improve in four—six months if the new government acted vigorously. (In January 1964, Gen. Nguyen Khanh had taken control of the government, previously headed since the Diem coup by Gen. Duong Van Minh.) He also recommended, however, that the U.S. should prepare for possible "graduated covert military pressure" against North Vietnam. A few weeks later, the JCS submitted a plan to implement NSAM 288, OPLAN 37-64, April 17, 1964, which proposed a three-phase program of graduated military pressure against North Vietnam and infiltration routes in Laos and Cambodia,²⁸ and on May 28 the JCS, under the acting chairmanship of the Air Force Commander, Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, argued that the only way to prevent the North Vietnamese from supporting the insurgency in the South was to destroy their ability to do so.²⁹

Meanwhile, in mid-May 1964 the President directed his advisers to prepare proposals for increased military and non-military actions. On May 25, Rusk, McNamara and McGeorge Bundy sent a memorandum to the President in which they recommended "a Presidential decision that the U.S. will use selected and carefully graduated military force against North Vietnam" unless other efforts were able to produce "a sufficient improvement of non-Communist prospects in South Vietnam and Laos to make military actions

²⁷ See pt. II of this study, p. 238.

²⁸ Phase I provided for air and ground strikes against targets in South Vietnam and "hot pursuit" into border areas of Laos and Cambodia. Phase II provided for "tit-for-tat" airstrikes and related military operations against North Vietnam. Phase III provided for more severe actions against North Vietnam. As part of its work on OPLAN 37, the JCS developed a list of targets for bombing the North, which became known as the "94 target list."

²⁹ The memorandum proposed airstrikes against infiltration points at Dien Bien Phu and Vinh. JCS Chairman Taylor told McNamara that he agreed with the proposals to increase military pressure on the North, but preferred less risky targets.

against North Vietnam unnecessary." Force would be used to achieve the politico-military goal of deterring the North Vietnamese and causing them to desist, rather than defeating them militarily: "Our clear purpose in this decision," the memorandum said, "should be to use all our influence to bring about a major reduction or elimination of North Vietnamese influence in Laos and in South Vietnam, and *not* to unroll a scenario aimed at the use of force as an end in itself." (emphasis in original)

The recommendations of Rusk, McNamara and McGeorge Bundy were based on these premises:³⁰

(1) that the U.S. cannot tolerate the loss of Southeast Asia to Communism;

(2) that without a decision to resort to military action if necessary, the present prospect is not hopeful, in South Vietnam or in Laos;

(3) 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.

The Bundy memorandum further recommended that deployment of U.S. forces to South Vietnam should be "on a very large scale" to maximize the impact of such a move.

At a meeting in early June 1964 of the President's civilian and military advisers it was agreed, however, that U.S. military action was not necessary at the time and that more preparations were needed to secure public and international support for such a move.³¹

³⁰ Pt. II of this study, p. 257. Notes of the preceding meeting on May 24, 1964, of Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy and other key officials involved in preparing the plans for increased action were declassified in 1990 and are available at the Johnson Library, NSF NSC History.

³¹ At this meeting (June 10, 1964), there was also a discussion, based on a paper prepared by William F. Bundy, of whether or not to seek a congressional resolution. The decision was made to defer action. See pt. II of this study, p. 266. Subsequent to publication of pt. II, a document was declassified in 1990 (Johnson Library, NSF Files of McGeorge Bundy, "Summary Record of the Meeting on Southeast Asia," June 10, 1964) that sheds new light on the factors involved. During the meeting, William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, said that because of the legislative calendar, the resolution would need to be sent to Congress in ten days or two weeks. McNamara said, without explanation, "we would not be in a position" to send it before July 1, adding that "a congressional resolution before September was unlikely unless the enemy acts suddenly in the area, which is also unlikely. Our actions to date are not such as to require a resolution." Rusk agreed, saying, "We should ask for a resolution only when the circumstances are such as to require action, and, thereby, force Congressional action." There would be "great difficulties in getting congressional approval," he said, prior to "basic decisions by the President on the U.S. course of action in Southeast Asia." Attorney General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach agreed, saying that "It would be much simpler to obtain approval of a resolution if U.S. actions are forcing the pace." "Heavy groundwork with Congressmen will be necessary," he added. McGeorge Bundy said that such groundwork would be difficult if the Executive was not committed to seek a resolution. He also "asked that the group not dismiss the proposal to seek a Congressional resolution without taking into account the great benefit such a resolution would have in conveying our firmness of purpose in Southeast Asia."

Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon pointed out that the argument "could be reversed"—that if a resolution were passed and the U.S. did not act promptly, there could be a "crisis of morale."

McGeorge Bundy raised the question of military actions that would be taken "without taking actions which could be initiated only with a Congressional resolution." McNamara replied that all of the actions he had recommended fell in that category, and that they would "go quite far." CIA Director John A. McCone commented that "putting U.S. troops on the ground in Southeast Asia would require a Congressional resolution."

In discussing the question of preparing the public for possible U.S. military action, McNamara suggested that there should be a "press campaign . . . of such a nature as to avoid building up public pressure for drastic action." Rusk responded that the Members of Congress to whom he had talked acted unconcerned, and did not seem to feel that there was a crisis. McNamara

In early August 1964, after a U.S. destroyer was attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam, the President approved the first direct U.S. air attack on North Vietnam. He also used the occasion to get congressional approval of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorizing him to "take all necessary steps" to defend South Vietnam, including the use of U.S. forces.

In the weeks that followed, the President's advisers continued to prepare for the use of U.S. forces in Vietnam and/or increased pressure on North Vietnam. At the time, however, the political situation in South Vietnam was very unstable, and in a meeting with his advisers in early September 1964 the President said that with such a "weak and wobbly situation" the U.S. could not act until there was a "base" on which to build. He said he would be "... ready to do more, when we had a base." He "did not wish to enter the patient in a 10-round bout when he was in no shape to hold out for one round." Accordingly, NSAM 314, September 10, 1964, directed that additional steps should be taken to prepare for increased U.S. intervention, but stressed the need to strengthen the South Vietnamese Government in order to create the necessary base.³²

On November 1, 1964, the Communists attacked an American base and the President was urged by Maxwell Taylor, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, as well as Gen. William C. Westmoreland, Commander of U.S. Forces in South Vietnam (COMUSMACV), and other military advisers, to retaliate by bombing North Vietnam. He declined to do so with the Presidential election campaign in its final days, but immediately after being elected on November 3 he directed his advisers to prepare alternative courses of action for the U.S. In early December, the President, saying that the "day of reckoning" was coming, approved a plan for graduated pressure by the U.S. on North Vietnam. He reiterated, however, the importance of strengthening the South Vietnamese Government before taking such action.³³

In late December, the Communists bombed a U.S. officers' billet in Saigon, and Taylor and the military again recommended retaliation against North Vietnam. The President, with advice from Rusk and McNamara, declined to do so, citing the political confusion in South Vietnam. He also told Taylor that instead of bombing the North, he favored increasing U.S. combat forces in order to take stronger action against the guerrillas in the South.³⁴

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

replied that there was, however, congressional dissatisfaction with what the U.S. was doing. He suggested that "in the event of a dramatic event in Southeast Asia we would go promptly for a Congressional resolution, but we would not plan on one and that our public information program would not be aimed at getting support for a resolution."

³² Pt. II of this study, pp. 353-354.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

³⁴ Johnson Library, NSF NSC History, Deployment of Forces, CAP 64375 from the President to Taylor, Dec. 30, 1964.

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 sacrifices. 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.

In his reply a few days later, Taylor included an analysis prepared by Westmoreland and his staff. The U.S. advisory effort, MACV said, had "gone about as far . . . as it is practical to go without passing the point of clearly diminishing returns." As for the direct use of U.S. forces in a non-advisory role, MACV examined several alternatives and concluded that the political disadvantages of using U.S. forces outweighed the military advantages.³⁵

The Vietnamese have the manpower and the 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 U.S. 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 U.S. carry the burden while others, probably the majority, would actively turn against us. Thus 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.

Moreover, a review of tactical operations during 1963-1964, the MACV analysis said, indicated that the instances where the use of U.S. ground combat forces would have been desirable and feasible were "few and far between," and that "In balance, they do not seem to justify the presence of U.S. units, even disregarding the political problems involved."

MACV recommended, therefore, that the U.S. continue to use the advisory system, providing some additional manpower and operational support as necessary.

At the end of January 1965, after it appeared that the political and military situation in South Vietnam was getting worse, McGeorge Bundy and McNamara urged the President not to wait for a stronger political base, but to "use our military power in the Far East and to force a change of Communist policy." Continued inaction, they said, would lead to "disastrous defeat." Rusk did not agree, feeling that the consequences of escalation (or withdrawal) were so serious that the U.S. had to find a way to make existing programs effective. Except for Rusk, however, William P. Bundy says that McGeorge Bundy and McNamara's memorandum "summed up all of the feelings of all of us at that moment."³⁶

After he received the McGeorge Bundy-McNamara recommendation, the President sent McGeorge Bundy to Vietnam for a report.

³⁵ Same location, Saigon to Washington 2058, Jan. 6, 1965.

³⁶ Pt. III of this study, p. 47.

During the last day of the visit, when Bundy's report, which recommended that the U.S. begin applying "sustained pressure" on North Vietnam (Phase II of the plan approved in December), was being completed, the Communists attacked the U.S. base at Pleiku, and McGeorge Bundy joined Ambassador Maxwell Taylor and General Westmoreland in recommending that the U.S. bomb North Vietnam. At an NSC meeting that night (February 6, 1965) which the Democratic leaders of Congress, John W. McCormack (D/Mass.), Speaker of the House, and Mike Mansfield (D/Mont.), majority leader of the Senate, attended, it was agreed by all except Mansfield that the U.S. should respond by a retaliatory airstrike on North Vietnam.

After another NSC meeting the next day (February 8), the President sent a cable to Ambassador Taylor in which he said that, despite the weaknesses of the South Vietnamese Government, he had decided to begin sustained reprisal ("continuing action") against North Vietnam (Phase II of the plan approved in December 1964). Shortly thereafter, the U.S. began the air war, codenamed ROLLING THUNDER.³⁷

During the spring of 1965, after McNamara, at the direction of the President, had told the military in early March that there would be no limitation on funds, equipment or personnel,³⁸ increasing numbers of U.S. forces were approved for Vietnam (82,000 by June of 1965). In mid-March, Gen. Harold K. Johnson, Army Chief of Staff, after a trip to Vietnam on which he had been sent by the President to recommend ways to "get things bubbling,"³⁹ proposed, based on discussions with Westmoreland and Ambassador Taylor, a number of specific steps to provide more support for the South Vietnamese, as well as the deployment of additional U.S. ground combat units.⁴⁰ He recommended that an Army combat division be sent either to enclaves on the coastal region or to the highlands (the area of Pleiku). He said he preferred the latter, but recognized that coastal enclaves "may be the maximum action that is politically possible within the U.S. at this time."

General Johnson said it might also be necessary to send additional forces to interdict infiltration from the North, and he suggested, as he had in August 1964 when he became Chief of Staff of the Army, that this be done by invoking the Southeast Asia Treaty (SEATO) and deploying an international force (primarily or entirely Americans) of four divisions along the 17th parallel (the 1954 demarcation line between the North and the South) from the Gulf of Tonkin to Savannakhet on the Mekong River in Laos.

The President approved most of General Johnson's recommendations, but he waited a few weeks before approving the deployment of the U.S. division, and, according to available records, did not indicate whether he would approve the international force.

³⁷ For these developments, as well as the events leading up to the July 28, 1965 decision, see *ibid.*

³⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 149. This was not the open-ended authorization it may have appeared to be, however, as the military were soon to learn.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Taylor wanted to increase bombing of the North and was leery of sending more U.S. ground combat troops to the South. Westmoreland, however, thought U.S. forces would have to play a stronger role, and that more ground combat units would be needed. See *ibid.*, pp. 158-160.

In early June 1965, General Westmoreland, concluding that there was imminent danger of a Communist victory, requested large-scale deployment of U.S. combat forces—the “44 Battalion” request—“to take the war to the enemy.”⁴¹ He recommended that U.S. ground combat forces be increased to 175,000 by the end of 1965 and to 275,000 in 1966, and that they be deployed on the coast as well as inland and used both offensively and defensively. Although U.S. forces had not yet become involved in major combat against the Communists, Westmoreland said he was “convinced that U.S. troops with their energy, mobility, and firepower can successfully take the fight to the VC.”⁴²

In the following weeks, Westmoreland’s request was discussed by the President and his advisers. Papers were prepared summarizing major points of view, and a report was filed by McNamara after a trip which he and others made to Vietnam in mid-July. In addition, the JCS prepared a study, at McNamara’s request on behalf of the President, on the question, “Can we win if we do everything we can?” (The answer was, yes, but with a number of provisos.)⁴³

In connection with McNamara’s trip to Vietnam, Westmoreland was asked a series of questions pertaining to the use of large-scale U.S. forces, one of which was: “How long do you think it will take with your recommended forces (a) to seize the initiative, (b) to prove to the Viet Cong that they cannot win, and (c) thereby to force them to a settlement on our terms?” Westmoreland’s reply was that U.S. forces would dislodge the Communists from local areas, but that this would not have a “lasting effect” unless the South Vietnamese were able to retain control over such areas. Therefore, he concluded, in a very significant caveat, “The objective of forcing the VC to the conclusion that he cannot win is considered to reside in a campaign of uncertain duration.”⁴⁴

Between July 21 and 28, 1965, a number of meetings were held by the President to discuss McNamara’s report prior to a decision on Westmoreland’s request. These appear to have been conducted primarily for instrumental rather than substantive purposes—how to tailor and present to the public the decision approving troops rather than whether to approve the request to send large-scale U.S. forces. The President apparently had already decided that he was going to approve the request,⁴⁵ and although the meetings were proclaimed by the White House to be deliberations on policy, they were, in fact, directed primarily at building and shaping a consensus in the Executive, Congress, and the public as the basis for gaining support for the President’s decision.⁴⁶

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 359 ff.

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of State, Lot File 67 D 45. For the list of questions see pt. III of this study, pp. 372–373.

⁴⁵ On July 17, Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance sent a “literally eyes only” message to McNamara in Vietnam stating that it was the President’s “current intention” to approve Westmoreland’s request. See *ibid.*, p. 381.

⁴⁶ John P. Burke and Fred I. Greenstein, in *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989), argue that in making decisions on Vietnam President Johnson did not adequately organize and use his advisory system, and that this, together with his other factors in his handling of the Presidency, adversely affected the quality of those decisions. “The Johnson policy process,” they say (p. 259), “had some of the qualities of an unassembled jigsaw puzzle. There was much information and analysis, but nowhere within the na-

The question of "winning" was one of the issues discussed during these meetings, including whether U.S. forces could fight effectively in the kind of war being waged in South Vietnam. McNamara and JCS Chairman Earle G. Wheeler assured the President that U.S. forces could fight effectively, and that, in the words of McNamara's report, there was "a good chance of achieving an acceptable outcome within a reasonable period of time." When Adm. William F. Raborn, Director of the CIA, reported that in the opinion of the CIA the Communists would avoid major confrontations with U.S. forces, thus frustrating plans by the U.S. to engage and defeat main force units, McNamara replied, "U.S. forces can engage guerrillas as well as main force units." General Wheeler said that because of harassment by U.S. forces, the Communists "will have to 'come out and fight.'"

In a meeting of the President with the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff other assurances were given by the military. In view of the difficulty of predicting how many U.S. forces might be needed and what the results might be, the President asked whether the U.S. should pause before making a further commitment. The reply from Adm. David L. McDonald, Chief of Naval Operations, was, "Sooner or later we'll force them to the conference table." The President then asked: "If we put in 100,000 would they put in an equal number?" General Wheeler replied that although the North Vietnamese might increase the deployment of their regular forces in the South, "they can't match us on buildup." Moreover, Admiral McDonald said, the threat of more troops from North Vietnam could be countered by increased bombing of the North. And in response to a question by the President as to whether bombing had been as effective as expected, Gen. John P. McConnell, Air Force Chief of Staff, said that it had been in the South but less so in the North because "we are not striking the targets that hurt them," implying that if the President would authorize striking such targets, bombing would be effective.

In a televised news conference on July 28, 1965, President Johnson announced that the U.S. would use its forces to defend South Vietnam. He said he was sending 50,000 more troops, (raising the total to 125,000), and that more would be needed and would be sent "as requested." For domestic and international political reasons, he did not reveal that he had already approved the deployment of another 50,000 (for a total of 175,000), and that another 100,000 (for a total of 275,000) were scheduled to be deployed in 1966.⁴⁷

On August 5, the President met from 6:00 p.m. to 7:10 p.m. with the members of the NSC.⁴⁸ General Maxwell Taylor, who had just

tional security apparatus were the various pieces assembled, posing the President and his aides with coherent proposals and counterproposals."

⁴⁷ See pt. III of this study, for further details.

⁴⁸ Johnson Library, NSF NSC Meetings File. Present were the President, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, Secretary of the Treasury Henry H. Fowler, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., George W. Ball, Cyrus Vance, William Bundy, David E. Bell (Administrator of the Agency for International Development), John T. McNaughton (Assistant Secretary of Defense) Ambassador at Large W. Averell Harriman, General Wheeler, Raborn, Richard Helms, Taylor, Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, U.N. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, Leonard H. Marks (Director of USIA), John Chancellor (director of the Voice of America), and Barry Zorthian, who was in charge of public affairs at the U.S. Mission in Saigon. Also present were Clark Clifford and NSC and White House staff members Bill D. Moyers, Chester L. Cooper, Douglass Cater, Bromley Smith and Joseph A. Califano, Jr.

been replaced as U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam by Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., told the group that the decision to increase U.S. forces "gave a lift to the South Vietnamese." "The present military situation is serious but not desperate. No one knows how much Viet Cong resilience is still left. The arrival of additional U.S. forces [the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division had arrived on July 29] must have convinced Hanoi that their chance of winning the war is lessening." "By the end of 1965," Taylor added, "the North Vietnamese offensive will be bloodied and defeated without having achieved major gains. Hanoi may then decide to change its policy. 1965 could be a decisive year."⁴⁹

1964-1965 Pentagon Games and Intelligence Estimates Predict Problems

Even as the decision to send large-scale forces to Vietnam was being made and Taylor was forecasting decisive U.S. military victories, SIGMA II-65, a "politico-military" game (broader in scope than the usual "war" game), which was conducted at the Pentagon July 26-August 5, 1965, once again raised serious questions about further U.S. military involvement in the war. Four previous games in 1963, 1964 and 1965 had suggested that the bombing of North Vietnam and the use of large-scale U.S. ground forces in the South would not defeat the Communists, who would respond with greater force in an effort to inflict increasing casualties and to compel the U.S. to withdraw.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ In a long cable to Washington (drafted by the Mission Intelligence Committee) on Aug. 26, 1965 from Lodge, in which Westmoreland concurred, a similar opinion was expressed: "Lack of complete success of their summer campaign has frustrated Viet-Cong aims for 1965. If they have not done so thus far, the Communists must soon acknowledge their inability either to achieve an early victory or to dislodge the growing military strength of the U.S. forces in the South." U.S. Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S, Saigon to Washington 624, Aug. 26, 1965.

⁵⁰ SIGMA I-63 was held in the spring of 1963, SIGMA I-64 in April 1964, SIGMA II-64 in September 1964, SIGMA I-65 in May 1965, and SIGMA II-65 in August 1965. These games were conducted by the Politico-Military Branch, Cold War Division, Joint War Games Agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. For SIGMA I-63, see pt. II of this study, p. 354, fn. 27. (There is an error in the footnote. The date was 1963 rather than 1964.) The report on SIGMA I-64 is available at the Johnson Library, NSF Agency File, JCS. For SIGMA II-64, see pt. II of this study, p. 353 and the article by Harold P. Ford cited below. The report on SIGMA II-65, declassified for the author by the JCS, is in the author's files.

The purpose of these games was to help those involved in policymaking in the executive branch, primarily the White House, the State and Defense Departments and the military services, together with the CIA, to gain a better understanding of the outcomes and consequences of U.S. actions in the context of those of other parties or countries involved in the conflict. In the words of the final report on SIGMA II-65, "The purpose of SIGMA II-65 is to explore current problems in Southeast Asia using an interagency United States/Republic of Vietnam team as well as selected teams of area experts representing other nations and influences concerned. It is hoped that examination of familiar problems and constraints from several national viewpoints under conditions of simulated crises will lead to: a. New perspectives on the overall politico-military situation. b. Better insight into potential problems or windfall opportunities. c. Ideas to enhance current plans and programs. d. An array of realistic scenario concepts against which current and future contingency plans can be evaluated." *SIGMA II-65 Final Report*, Aug. 20, 1965, p. H-1.

Each game involved 50 or so participants from the executive branch offices mentioned above. In SIGMA I-63, SIGMA I-64 and SIGMA I-65, played by working-level officials, senior or cabinet-level officials participated as members of policy review teams. In SIGMA II-64, senior officials participated as players. In SIGMA II-65, senior officials met after the game was completed to review and discuss a video-summary. (For the list of those on the SIGMA II-65 teams and in the senior review group see pp. A-4-A-8 of *ibid.*)

In each game, teams were designated by color. For SIGMA II-65, for example, there were the following: Blue—U.S. and South Vietnam, Red—North Vietnam, Black—the "Vietcong" (Communists of South Vietnam), Yellow—China, Green—U.S.S.R. There was also a control team for each of the games which helped to establish the framework for the game by providing the opening scenario as well as subsequent scenarios for the game as it progressed. Control, which was neutral, also handled all communications between national teams, answered substantive and

In the 1963 game (SIGMA I-63), according to former Ambassador William H. Sullivan, one of the participants, who was very closely associated with Southeast Asian affairs during his career in the State Department, by 1970, when the scenario of the game ended, the U.S. would have 500,000 troops in Vietnam and would be faced with a military stalemate and with draft riots at home.⁵¹

In the case of the August 1965 game, SIGMA II-65,⁵² according to the final report,

There was a marked asymmetry in the objectives of the opposing teams. The Blue team [U.S.-South Vietnam] assumed a significant commitment by the Viet Cong to major military victories in the short term and attached principal importance to the short term objective of preventing such victories. The Red [North Vietnam] and Black [Vietcong] teams in fact, however, discounted the importance of an early military victory and were unperturbed at the prospect of decreasing military activity in the short-run in the face of the U.S. build-up. Their attention was focused on the longer term results of their efforts to disrupt the economy, terrorize the opposition, and destroy political order and they read the results in these areas as pointing to eventual victory for their side.

The Red and Black teams, the report added, "were thinking in terms of the 1968 U.S. elections, ten and even twenty years beyond, and they did not think they needed early victory."⁵³

With respect to the use of large-scale U.S. ground combat forces, "there was considerable feeling among SIGMA II-65 participants that Viet Cong adoption of the strategy of avoiding major engagements with U.S. forces *would* make it extremely difficult to find and fix enemy units. . . . Viet Cong experience in the jungles, guerrilla warfare, intelligence capabilities would pose serious problems, even for well-equipped and highly mobile U.S. regulars." (emphasis in original)⁵⁴

With respect to bombing North Vietnam, "there was considerable feeling among *all* of the Communist teams that punishment being imposed could and would be absorbed by the Hanoi leadership. This thought was based on the fact that the country is basically a subsistence economy centering on the self-sustaining village. Isolation and disruption of the Hanoi-Haiphong-complex transport systems would pose serious urban and military problems but the DRV still had its ports and although electric power and petroleum were becoming critical [according to the scenario there had been U.S. attacks on power plants and petroleum supplies], major industry had not been hit. Industrial activities constitute such a limited portion of the total economy that even this disruption seemed an acceptable price."⁵⁵

procedural questions, and attempted to guide the game toward the achievement of game objectives.

⁵¹ William H. Sullivan, *Obbligato, 1939-1979* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), pp. 178-181.

⁵² *SIGMA II-65 Final Report*, B-4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. C-2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. D-4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. D-5.

In a memorandum to William Bundy on August 5, W. W. Rostow, head of the Department of State's Policy Planning Council, who had participated in SIGMA II-65, commented on the game:⁵⁶

What I draw from this afternoon's critique of Sigma 2-65 is the following:

1. An indecisive engagement of large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground, for a protracted period, with rising casualties, could produce political frustration in the U.S. and in South Vietnamese politics.

2. Air and other direct pressure on the North is a critical variable, notably if the gamesters are correct that Peiping can't think of anything useful to do if we up the ante—and, by and large, I believe they are right.

3. The development of political unity, momentum, and a sense of direction in South Vietnamese politics is as important as we're all saying it is. We've got to start running right now for that supervised election which, after all, represents for us an optimum outcome of the war; and winning elections takes the political organization we don't now have.

The conclusions of SIGMA II-65 participants closely paralleled intelligence findings. (There were CIA and other intelligence officials participating in the game, of course, and other participants had read the intelligence estimates.) In SNIE (Special National Intelligence Estimate) 10-9-65, July 23, 1965,⁵⁷ the U.S. Intelligence Board (composed of representatives from the intelligence offices of relevant agencies and departments) concluded that if the U.S. sent large-scale troop deployments to South Vietnam, as the President was then in the final stages of deciding to do, the Communists would respond by augmenting their own forces, including sending more North Vietnamese troops to the South, and by avoiding direct confrontation with U.S. forces. In response to heavier bombing of the North, the North Vietnamese would ask the Russians for greater air defense assistance, but even with heavier bombing of military and industrial targets their will to persist would not be significantly affected.

The strategy of the Communists, the intelligence estimate concluded, would depend upon the course of the war. If it appeared that they were going to be defeated, they would probably show some interest in negotiating. Otherwise, they would wait, in the belief that the U.S. would not have the will to persist.

Responses to the President's Decision to Send Large-Scale U.S. Forces to Vietnam

The response to the President's decision to send large-scale U.S. forces to Vietnam was generally favorable, both in and out of the government. In the small circle of Presidential advisers, only George Ball, the Under Secretary of State, and Clark Clifford, a

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of State, S/P Chron File.

⁵⁷ Johnson Library, NSF NSC History, Deployment of Forces. For a summary of twelve intelligence estimates during 1974-1965, see pt. III of this study, pp. 463-467. See also the excellent article by Harold P. Ford, who at the time of the July 1965 decision was a senior CIA officer, "The U.S. Decision to Go Big in Vietnam," *Studies in Intelligence* (Spring 1985), pp. 1-15, which concludes with a very thoughtful analysis of why national intelligence had made "so slight an impact" on the decision. *Studies in Intelligence* is a classified in-house publication of the CIA, but this article, which was kindly provided by Mr. Ford, has been declassified.

Washington lawyer who was very close to the President and was serving at the time as the non-paid chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, expressed disagreement, but both men said that they would support the President's decision. In the case of Ball, although the President appeared to respect his views and usually accorded them a full hearing, Ball was performing a role as "devil's advocate"—according to Rusk, Ball had been "named" by the President to play that role⁵⁸—and his viewpoint was judged in that context. In addition, the President gave more weight to Rusk's views, partly because of his greater respect for him, and because Rusk was the Secretary of State and Lyndon Johnson generally tended to respect rank and position.

In the case of Clark Clifford, although the President had great respect for Clifford, and looked to him and to Washington lawyer Abe Fortas for a wide range of personal advice, he did not consider Clifford a foreign policy or military expert, nor did Clifford have the kind of information and current knowledge of the situation that was possessed by the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.

Another dissenter was the Vice President, Hubert H. Humphrey, but the President had limited respect for his knowledge and judgment in foreign policy and military matters. Humphrey's role as Vice President, with no significant operational responsibility or access to information except from his statutory membership on the NSC, also tended to remove him from policymaking and the operations of the White House, and Johnson, like most Presidents, including Kennedy when Johnson was Vice President, treated Humphrey as something of an outsider, especially with respect to the making of foreign policy. Johnson also expected his Vice President to be loyal, and when Humphrey objected to escalating the U.S. role in the war in February 1965 Johnson reacted by excluding him from any involvement in Vietnam policymaking until 1966, when Humphrey became more supportive.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Pt. III of this study, p. 90, fn. 121.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 95–96. It is not clear how Humphrey felt about the July 28 decision. For whatever reasons, he did not attend the meetings which preceded it except for one meeting on July 26 and a Cabinet meeting on July 27. The notes of those two meetings do not indicate that he made any comments during either meeting.

In "The Mythology Surrounding Lyndon Johnson, His Advisers, and the 1965 Decision to Escalate the Vietnam War," *Political Science Quarterly*, 103, No. 4 (1988), pp. 637–664, and subsequently in *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisers* (Lawrence, Kans.: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1993), David M. Barrett argues that President Johnson "was not a victim of groupthink and that he received and listened to significant advice warning him against sending troops to Vietnam." Although the article and the book provide a useful summary of the views of six men who gave the President such advice—Ball, Clifford, Humphrey, Mansfield, J. William Fulbright (D/Ark.), and Richard B. Russell (D/Ga.), Barrett fails to demonstrate either that the President was not a "victim of groupthink" or that he "listened" to the arguments of the six men.

Barrett seems to conclude that Johnson's "insecurity vis-à-vis the 'intellectuals'" from the Kennedy administration, namely, Rusk, McNamara and McGeorge Bundy, led him to be "unduly influenced" by them. Even accepting Barrett's characterization of these three men as "intellectuals" (would he argue that, by comparison, Ball, Fulbright, Clifford, Mansfield, Russell and Humphrey were not?), it also happens that Rusk, McNamara and McGeorge Bundy were the President's three principal advisers and the members of the small group to which, by virtue of their positions as well as his respect for them, he turned for advice. Was the President "unduly influenced" by them because they were "intellectuals," or was he influenced by them because they were the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Adviser? And if the President was "unduly influenced" by them—and Barrett does not attempt to define what he means by that expression—could it be that he was, to use the concept employed by Barrett, a "victim of groupthink" rather than a victim of his own insecurity?

Barrett also describes at length the views of each of the six men who advised against sending troops, but he does not analyze the relationships of the President with the six to ascertain

There were several dissenters among staff-level officials in the White House and the State Department who were involved in Vietnam policymaking,⁶⁰ but the President, if, in fact, he knew about it, paid little if any attention to their doubts and criticism.

There was also considerable dissent in the CIA, as might be expected given the agency's estimates about the prospects for U.S. success. One example was the position taken by Harold P. Ford, a very experienced and sagacious CIA officer, who had been the agency's representative on the inter-agency task force that developed the graduated pressure plan in November 1964. On April 8, 1965, Ford, who was Chief of the Estimates Staff of the Office of National Estimates, sent a memorandum, "Into the Valley," to the Director of the CIA that read in part:⁶¹

This troubled essay proceeds from a deep concern that we are becoming progressively divorced from reality in Vietnam, that we are proceeding with far more courage than wisdom—towards unknown ends, and that we are perhaps about to compound our already difficult predicament if we indeed commit several divisions of U.S. ground troops to combat in South Vietnam.

We do not have the capability to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves in Vietnam, yet we think and act as if we do.

In view of the enemy's power in the Vietnam countryside and of the narrow and fragile political base we have in the GVN, we are asking a steep price indeed of the enemy in asking him to call off the VC and to cease DRV support and direction of it.

There seems to be a congenital American disposition to underestimate Asian enemies. We are doing so now. We cannot afford so precious a luxury. Earlier, dispassionate estimates, war games, and the like, told us that the DRV/VC would persist in the face of such pressures as we are now exerting on them. Yet we now seem to expect them to come running to the conference table, ready to talk about our high terms.

The chances are considerably better than even that the U.S. will in the end have to disengage in Vietnam, and do so considerably short of our present objectives.

Within the military, there was strong support for the President's action. The decision not to invoke a national emergency and to mobilize and call up the Reserves, however, was bitterly criticized by military leaders, especially in the Army, the service which would be most deeply affected by the decision. It is reported that General Johnson, Chief of Staff of the Army, was so incensed, and so convinced that the Army should not be asked to go to battle under such a handicap, that he considered resigning.⁶²

After the [President's July 27] speech, he [General Johnson] closed the door of his office and put on his best dress uniform. When he emerged he ordered his driver to get his car; he was

whether he was likely, in fact, to "listen" to their advice. Nor does he analyze the President's attitudes toward taking advice from persons who were not members of his official advisory group and who were not, except for Ball, experienced in the conduct of national security policy or privy to information which was available to his advisers.

⁶⁰ See pt. III of this study, pp. 96, 449–450.

⁶¹ Harold Ford, "The U.S. Decision to Go Big in Vietnam," cited above, pp. 10–11.

⁶² Mark Perry, *Four Stars* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), p. 156.

going to talk to the president, he told his staff. On the way into Washington, Johnson reached up and unpinned the stars from his shoulders, holding them lightly in his hands. When the car arrived at the White House gates, he ordered the driver to stop. He stared down at his stars, shook his head, and pinned them back on. Years later he reflected on the incident, regretting his own decision. "I should have gone to see the President," he reportedly told one colleague. "I should have taken off my stars. I should have resigned. It was the worst, the most immoral decision I've ever made."

In Congress, the reaction to the President's July 1965 decision was mixed. Although some Members praised it and only a few Members were publicly critical, many Members appeared to be apprehensive about the situation and were relieved that the President had not called up the Reserves, declared a national emergency, or asked for large new appropriations. At a meeting of 11 congressional leaders with the President the day before the decision was announced, the only dissenter was Senate Majority Leader Mansfield, (although Bourke B. Hickenlooper (R/Iowa), the senior Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, appeared to be very dubious), but the lack of enthusiasm for using large-scale U.S. forces in the war was also apparent. The mood, as Senator Hickenlooper expressed it, was one of supporting the President rather than approving what he had decided to do.⁶³

A few senior Members of the Senate, including three prominent Democrats in key roles—Mansfield, Richard B. Russell (D/Ga.), the powerful chairman of the Armed Services Committee who had been Lyndon Johnson's mentor in the Senate, and J. William Fulbright (D/Ark.), the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, who also had been close to the President—had also met on the day before the President's decision was announced, and, according to Mansfield's summary for the President of the group's conclusion, "there was full agreement that insofar as Vietnam is concerned we are deeply enmeshed in a place where we ought not to be; that the situation is rapidly going out of control; and that every effort should be made to extricate ourselves."⁶⁴

A few days later, Russell was interviewed on the CBS television program "Face the Nation." In commenting on the mistakes the U.S. had made he said, "Our greatest mistake there has been in overemphasizing the military and not putting sufficient emphasis on the civilian side." "The people there don't have much sense of nationalism to start with," he said, "and no cause can ever win that hasn't got a champion that the people admire." He thought it would be "highly likely" that in a free election the South Vietnamese would choose Ho Chi Minh in preference to the existing South Vietnamese Government officials. "One of the vital things there," he added "is getting a stable civil government and unless we get that basis the war can run on there interminably."

⁶³ See pt. III of this study, p. 429.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 435. See also Caroline F. Ziemke, "Senator Richard B. Russell and the 'Lost Cause' in Vietnam, 1954-1968," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, LXXII (Spring 1988), pp. 30-71.

For a general commentary on Russell and Vietnam, see the chapter on Vietnam in Gilbert C. Fite, *Richard B. Russell, Jr., Senator From Georgia* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1991).

Russell was also asked whether a defeat in Vietnam would be a "strategic blow" for the U.S. He replied that it "would be a worse blow to our world prestige and to our reputation for keeping our word under all conditions than it would be from either a strategic or a tactical or an economic standpoint. I don't think it has any value strategically. . . . I am fairly familiar with the domino theory that if South Vietnam falls that all the other falls. I don't think that is necessarily true. I don't agree with that completely."⁶⁵

Outside the Government, there was also a mixed reaction to the President's decision. Among prominent leaders with experience in foreign policy and military affairs as represented by the "Wise Men,"⁶⁶ as well as among the "defense intellectuals" who served as civilian strategists for the Pentagon, there was widespread support for the decision.⁶⁷ (The Wise Men, otherwise known as the President's Consultants on Foreign Affairs, consisted at that time of Dean G. Acheson, Eugene R. Black, Omar N. Bradley, John Cowles, Arthur H. Dean, Allen W. Dulles, Roswell Gilpatric, Paul G. Hoffman, George B. Kistiakowsky, Arthur Larson, Morris I. Leibman, Robert A. Lovett, John J. McCloy, Teodoro Moscoso, James Perkins and James J. Wadsworth.)⁶⁸ In private meetings with Rusk and others shortly before the decision was made, the Wise Men concluded that the stakes were so high that the U.S. had to use whatever combat forces were required to prevent the Communists from taking control of South Vietnam.⁶⁹

The "defense intellectuals" from major American universities and research centers such as Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the RAND Corporation, also supported the decision. One of the principal strategic theorists of the period, Bernard Brodie, said later that he knew of no one among the civilian strategists (he included himself) "who by the end of 1965 had manifested any misgivings about the course that President Johnson had embarked upon." On the contrary, he said, for some of them

⁶⁵ Transcript of "Face the Nation," Aug. 1, 1965.

⁶⁶ See pt. III of this study, pp. 347-350.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 452-453.

⁶⁸ All of these distinguished men had been very active in public affairs, and most of them had served in high positions in the Government. Acheson, a Washington lawyer, had been Secretary of State in the Truman administration; Black had been president of the World Bank; Bradley had been an outstanding military leader, serving as Army Chief of Staff and Chairman of the JCS; Cowles was the publisher of the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* and the *Des Moines Register*; Dean, a partner in the New York law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell, had held a number of Government posts; Dulles was Director of the CIA in the Eisenhower administration; Gilpatric, a member of the New York law firm of Cravath, Swaine and Moore, was Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy administration; Hoffman, a former automobile company executive and Director of the Marshall Plan, was managing director of the U.N. Special Fund; Kistiakowsky, former science adviser to President Eisenhower, was a professor of chemistry at Harvard University; Larson, Director of the U.S. Information Agency in the Eisenhower administration, was head of the Rule of Law Center at Duke University; Leibman was a prominent Chicago lawyer who had active connections with the White House and the Defense Department; Lovett, who, among other things, had been Secretary of Defense in the last two years of the Truman administration, was a partner in the New York investment firm of Brown Brothers, Harriman; McCloy, who had held a number of government posts, was a partner in the New York law firm of Milbank, Tweed, Hadley and McCloy; Moscoso, a businessman and former government official in Puerto Rico, had been director of the State Department program for Latin America, the Alliance for Progress, in the Kennedy administration; Perkins, a former foundation executive, was president of Cornell University; Wadsworth was a government consultant who had held many posts, especially in the U.S. Mission to the U.N.

⁶⁹ See pt. III of this study, pp. 347-350. Larson was not fully convinced, and preferred greater emphasis on diplomacy.

"... it was precisely the kind of application of their ideas which they could not help but relish."⁷⁰

The President's decision was also generally well-received by the press. "Few Americans," the *New York Times* said in an editorial, "will quarrel with President Johnson's determined conclusion to hold on in Vietnam."⁷¹ The reaction of the public is difficult to gauge. There were no polls on public attitudes toward the President's July 28 decision. The results of a Gallup poll in late August on the question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Johnson Administration is handling the situation in Vietnam?" could be interpreted as indicative of stronger public support for the administration's position after the President's decision:⁷²

[In percent]

	Late-August 1965	Mid-July 1965	Mid-June 1965
Approve	57	52	48
Disapprove	25	26	28
No Opinion	18	22	24

A question of this kind tends, however, to evoke a partisan response, thus affecting its reliability as an indicator of general public opinion.⁷³

⁷⁰ Bernard Brodie, "Why Were We So (Strategically) Wrong," *Foreign Policy* 5 (Winter 1971-72), pp. 151-163 at 158.

⁷¹ *New York Times*, July 29, 1965. The *Times* warned, however, that the war could last for years or decades (as the President himself had said in response to a question at the July 28 press conference), and stressed the importance of using the minimum force necessary to prove to the North Vietnamese and Chinese "that military aggression is not worthwhile and never will be."

⁷² *Washington Post*, Aug. 27, 1965. For a breakdown of the responses to the Poll in late August by sex, race, education, occupation, age, religion, politics, region, income and community size, see *Vietnam War, A Compilation: 1964-1990*, Public Opinion and the Vietnam War, National and International Opinion, 3 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Gallup Poll, n.d.), vol. 1, no pagination. This very useful compilation reprints the Gallup press releases on polls, which frequently contained more detailed information than appeared in newspaper accounts, or *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972).

⁷³ See John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: Wiley, 1973), p. 116. The following table (*ibid.*, p. 271, from Gallup Poll data), shows the effect of partisanship on support for the war. For each group, the numbers represent the percentages in support of the war, in opposition and no opinion. (Note: These data indicate support for the war, not for the way Johnson was handling the war.)

	Republican			Democrat			Independent		
May 1965	54	27	19	54	25	21	46	29	25
August 1965	57	28	16	62	22	16	60	26	14
November 1965	61	25	14	65	18	17	67	21	12
March 1966	56	27	17	60	24	16	59	27	14
May 1966	47	42	11	50	32	18	49	37	14
September 1966	43	42	15	49	32	19	51	32	17
November 1966	52	34	14	52	28	20	50	32	18
May 1967	45	43	12	55	31	14	47	41	12
July 1967	41	51	8	55	33	12	43	46	11
October 1967	37	54	9	48	41	11	44	48	8
Early February 1968	39	53	8	45	41	14	40	47	13
March 1968	39	53	8	46	43	11	39	54	7
April 1968	39	52	9	43	43	14	38	52	10
August 1968	31	58	11	37	50	13	37	54	9
Early October 1968	35	57	8	40	52	8	38	53	9
February 1969	36	54	10	44	47	9	35	59	6
September 1969	35	57	8	31	59	10	30	60	10
January 1970	36	53	11	32	56	12	30	64	6
April 1970	38	49	13	33	49	18	33	57	10
March 1970	38	54	8	33	58	9	37	55	8
January 1971	32	61	7	30	59	11	31	60	9
May 1971	31	58	11	27	64	9	29	60	11

Also in August, Gallup asked for the first time a question that was asked 24 additional times between then and 1971—the only question on the war to be asked in the same wording and over an extended period of time—the so-called “mistake” question:⁷⁴

“In view of developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?”

[In percent]

	August 1965
Not a mistake	61
Mistake	24
No opinion	15

The percentage in this poll of those who thought it was not a mistake to send troops was the highest of the entire war.⁷⁵

According to a Harris Survey taken in late August and released in mid-September 1965,⁷⁶ “the American people are nearly 70–30 behind the proposition that Vietnam should be the ground on which the United States should take its stand against communism in Asia.” Moreover, there was apparently general recognition that the war could last for a long time. “Only a relatively small minority any longer expects a quick settlement of the war. More than twice as many, in fact a majority of the public, believe that the Vietnam fighting will go on for several years. . . . There is little doubt now that most Americans appear ready for a long haul in Vietnam, as distasteful as the sacrifice and suffering might be.”

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁷⁵ These are the results from all of the “mistake” questions asked by Gallup during the war (*ibid.*, pp. 54–55):

[In percent]

	Not a mistake	Mistake	No opinion
August 1965	61	24	15
March 1966	59	25	16
May 1966	49	36	15
September 1966	48	35	17
November 1966	51	31	18
Early February 1967	52	32	16
May 1967	50	37	13
July 1967	48	41	11
October 1967—Bunker, Westmoreland visit to Washington	44	46	10
December 1967	46	45	9
Tet offensive—Early February 1968 ...	42	46	12
March 1968	41	49	10
April 1968	40	48	12
August 1968	35	53	12
Early October 1968—Nixon elected	37	54	9
February 1969	39	52	9
September 1969	32	58	10
January 1970	33	57	10
March 1970	32	58	10
April 1970—Cambodia invaded	34	51	15
May 1970	36	56	8
January 1971	31	59	10
May 1971	28	61	11

It should be noted, however, that data from the “mistake” question, while useful, are not a reliable index of support for and opposition to the war because of the wording of the question and the lack of follow-up questions. For an explanation, see pt. III of this study, p. 142.

⁷⁶ *Washington Post*, Sept. 12, 1965.

In this poll, Louis Harris used a question which he had used several times before, beginning in November 1964:⁷⁷

"What course do you feel the United States should follow in the Vietnam fighting—carry the ground fighting to North Vietnam, at the risk of bringing Red China into the war, negotiate a settlement, or hold the line to keep the Communists from taking over South Vietnam?"

[In percent]

	September 1965	July 1965	May 1965
Hold the line	49	45	42
Negotiate	25	30	36
Carry the war north	26	25	22

Harris gave this explanation of the results of this poll: "The bulk of Americans—the 49 percent who want to hold the line in South Vietnam—feel almost as strongly about that view [as the 26 percent who wanted to carry the war north]. Ninety-five percent of them say they are willing to give up last year's tax cut to maintain that position. Seventy-three percent say they are for holding the line even if it means a land war as in Korea. Sixty-nine percent say they are for holding the line even if it means Russia and China join with North Vietnam. And 58 percent are for staying in South Vietnam even if it means the eventual use of atom bombs against China.

"In sharp contrast, the 25 percent of the public who want to end the fighting in Vietnam with the best settlement we can get is far less solid in its views. Seventy percent of these people say they would change their minds about our course in Vietnam if it means that Communists would use similar tactics on other continents. Almost two-thirds say they would change their minds if negotiating our way out of Vietnam means that the Communists would take over all of southeast Asia or that Americans would be fighting against Communist 'wars of liberation' in other places in the next 15 years."

In the same survey Harris also asked a question on U.S. military tactics, the responses to which also tended to support the Johnson administration (although there was a large percentage of "not sure"):⁷⁸

"I want to read off to you a number of positions the Johnson Administration has taken on Vietnam. For each, I wish you would tell me if you think the Administration is more right or more wrong."

[In percent]

	More Right	More Wrong	Not Sure
Not using tactical atomic ground weapons	67	14	19
Not bombing the China mainland	65	13	22
Not bombing Hanoi	47	20	33
Not blockading North Vietnam ports	31	38	31

⁷⁷ It should be noted that, unlike earlier surveys in which this question was asked, this survey does not provide the percentage of "Not sure" answers. For earlier surveys, see pt. III of this study, pp. 145, 353.

⁷⁸ *Washington Post*, Sept. 13, 1965.

The Reaction of Antiwar Groups

Peace and antiwar groups responded to the President's decision by creating the first national end-the-war organization and by increasing the number of teach-ins and demonstrations. On August 6-9, 1965, a demonstration was held in Washington at the instigation of some of the older leaders of traditional peace groups, including the Reverend A. J. Muste, the 81-year old head of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Committee for Nonviolent Action, and David Dellinger, editor of *Liberation* magazine, together with younger antiwar leaders such as Professor Staughton Lynd of Yale University.⁷⁹ Civil rights leaders were also involved as were students in the antiwar and civil rights movements, but the "new left" Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) did not participate directly. In its national meeting in June, the group had been unable to agree on what it should do about the war, although it did agree that local SDS chapters could give it priority in their own programs.

During the demonstration, the 1,000 protestors who had gathered in Washington, calling themselves the "Assembly of Unrepresented People," discussed the need for developing a broad national program for coordinating antiwar activities, and agreed to establish a National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam in which 23 organizations, including the SDS, would be represented.⁸⁰ Those present at the meeting also agreed to engage in civil disobedience as a way of showing their opposition to the war. Accordingly, on August 9, when they marched toward the Capitol, the demonstrators refused to stop at police lines and 350 were arrested.⁸¹ Clearly, many antiwar activists were becoming impatient with less confrontational methods such as the teach-ins, and, based on experience in the civil rights movement, wanted to take direct action to express their opposition to the war.

On August 12, 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who was opposed to the war, called on President Johnson to agree to negotiate with the National Liberation Front, and announced that he was considering making an effort to end the fighting by appealing directly to gov-

⁷⁹ For general treatments of antiwar organizations and activities see Charles DeBenedetti (with Charles Chatfield, assisting author), *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1990). Also useful are Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up? American Protest Against the War in Vietnam, 1963-1975* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), Thomas Powers, *The War at Home: Vietnam and the American People, 1964-1968* (New York: Grossman, 1973) and Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994). For the August 1965 demonstration and subsequent protests, see, among other personal accounts by antiwar activists, David Dellinger's *From Yale to Jail: The Life Story of a Moral Dissenter* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

⁸⁰ By the end of 1966, this was replaced by the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, which, in the fall of 1967, became the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, known as the Mobe. In 1969-70, as the SDS became more radical, the name was changed to the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (it was still called the Mobe). By the spring of 1970, it had become defunct.

⁸¹ See Powers, *The War at Home*, pp. 81-82.

On August 6, several representatives from the group met at the White House with Chester Cooper, McGeorge Bundy's deputy for Asian affairs to discuss Vietnam. In an August 9 weekly report on Asia to Bundy (from Cooper, and NSC staffers James C. Thomson, Jr. and Donald Ropa, who was on detail to the NSC from the CIA) Cooper said that he had "... spent Friday afternoon coping with the Reverend Muste, Joan Baez and some very limp young men. So far as he [Cooper] knows, no crockery was broken." Johnson Library, NSF Name File, Cooper Memos.

ernments on both sides.⁸² He dropped the idea, however, after pressure from other civil rights leaders and his staff not to "confuse" the civil rights issue with the war.⁸³

Starting in early August 1965, and continuing periodically into September, antiwar protestors in the San Francisco-Berkeley area, many of whom were students at the University of California (Berkeley), also began to take more direct action by attempting to stop trains carrying U.S. troops to the Oakland Army Terminal for embarkation to Vietnam, as well as demonstrating at ports where ships were being loaded for Vietnam.⁸⁴ Several U.S. Senators, led by Senator Frank J. Lausche (D/Ohio), responded by introducing legislation (which was not enacted) to establish criminal penalties for interference with troops or supplies.⁸⁵

Draft card burning as a form of protest, a practice which had begun during the spring of 1965, was also increasing, and Congress, spurred by the march on the Capitol during the August demonstration in Washington and by the incidents in Oakland, vented its feelings by enacting by a vote of 393-1 in the House of Representatives and a voice vote in the Senate a new law imposing a fine of up to \$10,000 and imprisonment for up to 5 years for the willful or knowing destruction or mutilation of a draft card.⁸⁶

The bill was passed by the House on August 10, the day after the arrests during the march on the Capitol. Republican William G. Bray of Indiana, the ranking minority member of the House Armed Services Committee, probably expressed the attitude of many Members of Congress when he said:⁸⁷

The need of this legislation is clear. Beatniks and so-called "campus-cults" have been publicly burning their draft cards to demonstrate their contempt for the United States and our resistance to Communist takeovers. Such actions have been suggested and led by college professors—professors supported by taxpayers' money. . . .

Just yesterday such a mob attacking the United States and praising the Vietcong attempted to march on the Capitol but were prevented by the police from forcibly moving into our Chambers. They were led by a Yale University professor [Staughton Lynd]. They were generally a filthy, sleazy beatnik gang; but the question which they pose to America is quite serious. . . .

⁸² *New York Times*, Aug. 13 and 14, 1965. The White House replied to King through Robert C. Weaver, an African-American who was Secretary of Labor. Weaver said that criticism of U.S. policy by prominent civil rights leaders might lead to miscalculations by the Communists. *Ibid.*, Aug. 20, 1965.

⁸³ See Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 271-274.

⁸⁴ *New York Times*, Aug. 7, 8, 24, 1965.

⁸⁵ For Lausche's speech, in which he included the text of one of the statements being handed out at the protest, see *Congressional Record*, vol. 111 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off.), pp. 22316-22317 (hereafter referred to as *CR*). A similar bill passed the House of Representatives in 1966, but was not acted on by the Senate.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 19871-19872, 20433-20434. The only Member of the House to be recorded against the bill was a Republican from New York, Henry P. Smith. On Oct. 15, 1965, David Miller, a pacifist, after a brief speech at a demonstration against the war, burned his draft card. He was arrested and sentenced to five years in jail (he served two). For his account, see Joan Morrison and Robert K. Morrison, *From Camelot to Kent State: The Sixties Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It* (New York: Times Books, 1987), pp. 107-111.

⁸⁷ *CR*, vol. 111, p. 19871.

The Communists are planning to use the "Judas goats" to lead those who are free to defect from freedom. So-called "students" and Communist stooges here and abroad, by demonstrations of anti-American feeling, by belittling, and by vilification are to downgrade the United States in the eyes of the world and shake the confidence and faith of our citizens in our democratic way of life. They hope to attain victory over freedom by subversion within the United States and by erosion of our national pride and confidence in the greatness of America and our national heritage. . . .

On September 2, the National Student Association (NSA), an organization of student governments from about 300 colleges and universities, "overwhelmingly" adopted a resolution at its national conference calling on the U.S. Government to stop the bombing of North Vietnam and other offensive actions, and to seek negotiations, in which representatives of the "Vietcong" should be included.⁸⁸ Ironically, at the time NSA was actively and secretly cooperating with the CIA in various ways, including receiving CIA funding for U.S. student representatives to international student conferences.⁸⁹

The White House Mounts a Campaign to Support U.S. Policy

Meanwhile, a number of steps were being taken by the Johnson administration to justify the President's decision to the public and to develop public support for U.S. policy in Vietnam.

In a luncheon meeting on August 19 at the State Department with the Secretary and senior department officers, the President talked at length about the state of public opinion. He said that support for the administration's policy in Vietnam was "generally satisfactory at present, but that this would become more doubtful if the conflict were prolonged another year or more." He urged the group to be "as active as possible in getting the Administration point of view fully expressed in public forums, and also in dealing with critical segments of the press such as the *New York Times* and, occasionally, the 'Kennedy Columnists.'"⁹⁰ As a part of this

⁸⁸ *New York Times*, Sept. 3, 1965. Working through the American Friends of Vietnam, an organization of prominent public figures founded in 1955 which advocated an active U.S. role in Vietnam (for background, see pts. I and III of this study), the White House attempted to influence action on the resolution, and a memorandum to McGeorge Bundy on September 7 from Cooper, Thomson, and Ropa (Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam) reported: "Ropa was on the phone several times during the week to monitor the effort of the American Friends of Vietnam to blunt the strong momentum at the NSA convention for condemning present policies in Vietnam. The resolution that passed was critical and not too helpful; it would have been an even more serious indictment of present policies had the American Friends not proselytized there."

In an earlier memorandum (July 12) to Presidential Assistant Douglass Cater, who was a former president of the NSA, Cooper said that the NSA was preparing to consider and would probably adopt such a resolution, and that such a move could "add appreciably to the momentum building up for a more extensive array of hostile teach-ins next fall." He suggested that Cater, Senator Walter F. Mondale (D/Minn.) and others in the government who had been active in NSA should appear before the convention to explain and justify the Vietnam policy of the Johnson administration. Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam.

⁸⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Final Report, *Foreign and Military Intelligence*, Book I, S. Rept. 94-755, April 26, 1976, 94th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1976), p. 184 (hereafter this will be referred to as Final Report, Book I of the Senate Select Committee to Study Intelligence Activities).

⁹⁰ U.S. Department of State, Lot File 85 D 240 (William Bundy Papers), William Bundy notes, Aug. 26, 1965, on points discussed by the President during the meeting.

promotional campaign, the White House issued on August 20, 1965 a compilation of statements on the background and reasons for the role of the United States in Vietnam, beginning with Eisenhower's statements in 1954. (There was no reference to the initial commitment by Truman in 1950.) James C. Thomson, Jr., of the NSC staff, who had become opposed to the war, was assigned the task of preparing the booklet, *Why Vietnam*. "In a gesture toward my conscience," he said later, "I fought—and lost—a battle to have the title followed by a question mark."⁹¹

On September 9, announcement was made of a new public group, the Committee for an Effective and Durable Peace in Asia, chaired by Arthur Dean, one of the Wise Men, the purpose of which was to help promote the administration's case.⁹² In its statement, the committee, which had been organized at the initiative of the White House,⁹³ declared:

In order to meet the increased aggression against South Vietnam and to convince the Government of North Vietnam that such aggression cannot be successful, it has become necessary for the President of the United States to increase defense expenditures and to commit large American forces to supplement the forces of the South Vietnamese. At the same time the President has given ample evidence of his willingness to commit the United States to serious negotiations designed to bring about a cessation of bloodshed and Communist aggression.

The Committee believes the President has acted rightly and in the national interest in taking these steps and that he is entitled to the support of the responsible citizens of this country. The Committee intends to do what it can to assist the President to achieve his objectives of peace and the ending of aggression.⁹⁴

The President's assistants, primarily Douglass Cater and Chester L. Cooper, Bundy's deputy for Vietnam on the NSC staff, as well as Press Secretary Bill D. Moyers, and Special Assistant Jack J. Valenti, were also working with the State and Defense Departments to develop ways of promoting public support.

On August 3, 1965, there was a dinner meeting at the White House on the Government's "information problem" organized and chaired by Cater and attended also by McGeorge Bundy, Cooper, Joseph A. Califano, Jr., an assistant to the President who worked

⁹¹ James C. Thomson, Jr., "How Could Vietnam Happen?" *Atlantic* (April 1968), p. 50.

⁹² Of the 48 members listed in the initial announcement, 6—Dean Acheson, Eugene Black, John Cowles, Arthur Dean, Roswell Gilpatric, and John McCloy—were Wise Men. The others were also prominent persons in American life, both Democrats and Republicans, including James B. Conant, C. Douglas Dillon, Oveta Culp Hobby, James R. Killian, Jr., Benjamin E. Mays, Lewis F. Powell, David Rockefeller.

McCloy at first objected to the establishment of the committee, saying that the President was doing well and did not need that kind of support, and that it might lead to formation of an opposing group. He relented, however, after conferring with McGeorge Bundy and others. See McCloy memoranda and letters of Aug. 2, 10, 11, 20, 1965, in the Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam.

⁹³ See pt. III of this study, pp. 397–398 for background on the origins of the committee. For documentation of the role of the White House and the State Department in the organization of the group and the development of its statement of purpose see the folder "Arthur Dean Committee" in the Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam, Box 195.

⁹⁴ *New York Times*, Sept. 9, 1965. In the advertisement in which this statement and the list of members appeared there was also a more detailed statement of principles by the committee.

largely on domestic affairs, Leonard H. Marks, a Washington lawyer and lobbyist and friend of President Johnson, who was Director of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), John Chancellor, a newsman serving as Deputy Director of USIA, James L. Greenfield, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, William J. Jorden, a member of Greenfield's staff, Morris Leibman, a Chicago attorney who was one of the "Wise Men," and Gordon Chase, a member of the NSC staff.⁹⁵

In advance of the meeting, Cater sent each participant a list of questions as well as a copy of a memorandum drafted by Leibman on the broad problem of developing and maintaining public support for the conduct of "twilight wars" such as Vietnam. These were Leibman's "assumptions":⁹⁶

1. That we are going to have a 10 to 20 year period of "twilight war."

- a. Caveat: We could have 2 or 3 Vietnams or Dominican Republics at once.

- b. Caveat: Situations like South Korea, South Vietnam or the Dominican Republic will not be "finally resolved."

2. The President of the United States will have to have *great* flexibility and discretion.

3. This will require a basic and sophisticated consensus of the American people.

- a. How do you avoid polarization and extremism?

- b. How do you communicate complexity as against simplicity?

- c. How do you establish "partial mobilization" on the home front over long periods of time?

- d. How do you avoid the syndrome of frustration, hostility, etc. (emphasis in original)

The next day (August 4), there was another meeting that was attended by Cater, Chester Cooper, Greenfield, Jorden, Chase, and Leibman. The group agreed that there were four basic questions with respect to the information problem: "First, how can we get the private sector to take some of the information burden with respect to U.S. policy on Vietnam? Second, how can we do a better job of creating an image of a President who has something besides Vietnam on his mind? Third, how do we convey to the American people the concept of a twilight war and of the U.S. role in it? Fourth, how do we coordinate and manage more effectively our information effort?"⁹⁷

During the meeting, Cooper mentioned the usefulness for public information purposes of the American Friends of Vietnam (AFV), the organization founded in 1955 to support an active U.S. role in Vietnam. "While we have been careful to keep our hand fairly hidden," Cooper said, "we have, in fact, spent a lot of time on it and have been able to find them some money." The group agreed that efforts should be made to raise more money for the AFV. In a

⁹⁵ Gordon Chase summarized the meeting in a memorandum to the President on Aug. 4, 1965, Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam.

⁹⁶ Leibman's memorandum is attached to the memorandum on July 28, 1965 from Cater to participants in the August 3 meeting.

⁹⁷ Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam, Memorandum for the Record Aug. 4, 1965, "August 4 Luncheon Meeting on the Information Problem."

memorandum to McGeorge Bundy on August 9, Cooper said that he intended "to exploit Leibman for the American Friends of Vietnam," and in a memorandum on August 16 he reported that Leibman had agreed to buy and distribute 5,000 copies of a new journal, *Vietnam Perspectives*, being issued by the AFV, one of the purposes of which was to counteract the *Viet-Report*, an anti-war newsletter.⁹⁸

Following the meeting on August 4, a decision was made to create a Public Affairs Policy Committee for Vietnam, chaired by McGeorge Bundy, with about 10 representatives from the White House (Cater and Cooper) the State and Defense Departments, and the U.S. Information Agency. For at least the next several months the committee met about once a week, primarily to discuss relations with the media, but it did not take on operational responsibilities.⁹⁹

Cooper, particularly, continued to be involved in operations, however, including such activities as arranging for briefings of public officials and groups, assisting various persons seeking to support the President, meeting with teach-in groups and representatives of various groups opposed to the war, and countering anti-war activities.¹⁰⁰

Congress Supports the President and Approves New Funds

As noted, Congress generally supported the President's decision to send U.S. forces to Vietnam, although several prominent leaders and a few other Members were opposed to further U.S. involvement and a number of Members were apprehensive. Broadly speaking, at the time there were 10-12 Senators and 35-40 Representatives who were actively and openly opposed to the use of large-scale U.S. forces.

Once U.S. forces were committed to battle, and patriotic feelings were aroused, even the strongest critics of U.S. involvement were put in the position of having to approve the necessary funds or suffer the political consequences. This had been demonstrated the pre-

⁹⁸ Johnson Library, NSF Name File, Cooper Memos, and Cooper memorandum, "Financial Support to the American Friends of Vietnam," Sept. 10, 1965, Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam. Historian Melvin Small, who has used the AFV archives, concludes that, "... the White House apparently did not pull out all of the stops for the AFV. The organization was in constant difficulty trying to make ends meet and almost was unable to raise the rather modest \$58,000 it needed to operate in 1965." Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1988), p. 47.

Viet-Report, first issued in July 1965, was published for three years. Staughton Lynd was a member of its advisory board. Sponsors included the University Committee to Protest the War in Vietnam (the group which, among other things, was promoting the Vietnam teach-ins), and Benjamin Spock, a nationally known New York pediatrician who was becoming very active in the anti-war movement.

⁹⁹ Material pertaining to the committee is located in the Johnson Library, NSF Country File, file folder labeled "Public Affairs Policy Committee." Notes on meetings of the committee cease after December 1965.

In addition to the Public Affairs Policy Committee for Vietnam, the Interdepartmental Vietnam Coordinating Committee, chaired by the State Department, had a Public Affairs Subcommittee that was active in recommending ways of promoting U.S. policy.

¹⁰⁰ There are brief reports of Cooper's public affairs activities, as well as those of Donald Ropa, a member of the NSC staff on detail from the CIA, and Thomson, in weekly reports on "The Asian Week" to McGeorge Bundy from Cooper, Ropa and Thomson which are in the Johnson Library, some in NSF Name File, Cooper Memos, and others in the NSF Country File, Vietnam. One of the projects on which Cooper worked during the fall of 1965 was the unsuccessful effort to establish an American-Southeast Asia Foundation to assist with programs in Vietnam conducted by U.S. voluntary agencies, both to promote such efforts, and, through such programs, to gain greater public support for U.S. policy. At Cooper's urging, Dr. Howard Rusk of New York City agreed to sponsor such a move, but for various reasons the idea was eventually abandoned.

vious May when Congress, after only two days of consideration, had approved the President's request for new funds for the war with only seven dissenting votes in the House and three in the Senate. Likewise, a request from the President in early August 1965 for a supplemental appropriation of \$1.7 billion, the "Southeast Asia Emergency Fund," to cover the additional cost of the war until the end of 1965, at which time there would be a request for additional funds, was quickly approved by Congress by an even wider margin than in May. Senator Wayne Morse (D/Ore.), a very vocal critic of U.S. military involvement in the war, who voted for the appropriation, explained why: "As long as they [U.S. forces] are there, they must have every possible bit of protection than can be given to them. . . ." ¹⁰¹

On August 4, 1965, Secretary McNamara accompanied by General Wheeler, Chairman of the JCS, testified on the \$1.7 billion request in an executive (closed) session of the Defense Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee, chaired by Senator John C. Stennis (D/Miss.), who was also the ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee. ¹⁰² "What is at stake," McNamara said, "is the ability of the free world to block Communist armed aggression and prevent the loss of all of Southeast Asia, a loss which in its ultimate consequences could drastically alter the strategic situation in Asia and the Pacific to the grave detriment of our own security and that of our allies." North Vietnam and China, he said, had chosen to make South Vietnam the test case for a "war of national liberation." If this were successful, the Chinese not only would be in a better position "to seize control of the world Communist movement," but their prestige and power would be enhanced in other countries, thus increasing the likelihood of other wars of national liberation.

In South Vietnam, McNamara explained, the Communists had decided "to wage an all-out attempt to bring down the Government." Greater U.S. assistance was needed to meet the threat, he said, but U.S. objectives would remain the same:

We have no desire to widen the war. We have no desire to overthrow the North Vietnamese regime, seize its territory, or achieve the unification of North and South Vietnam by force of arms. We have no need for permanent military bases in South Vietnam or for special privileges of any kind. What we are seeking through the planned military buildup is to block the Vietcong offensive, to give the people of South Vietnam and their Armed Forces some relief from the unrelenting Communist pressures—to give them time to strengthen their Government, to reestablish law and order, and to revive their economic life which has been seriously disrupted by Vietcong harassment and attack in recent months.

¹⁰¹ CR, vol. 111, p. 21732.

¹⁰² U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1966*, Hearings, 89th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1965), pp. 731 ff. On August 5, McNamara also testified before the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, but the testimony, taken in executive session, was not printed or released.

Although the hearing was rather perfunctory, there were some significant questions and answers.¹⁰³ In response to one question about the bombing of North Vietnam, McNamara stated that there was only a "very small" difference between what the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended and the program that was being carried out. General Wheeler was invited to comment but his response was deleted. Senator Stennis then asked, "Is the Secretary substantially correct?" to which General Wheeler replied: "Yes. Any difference is primarily one of tempo."

At least two Senators on the committee, A. Willis Robertson of Virginia and Allen J. Ellender of Louisiana, both conservative Democrats, expressed their opposition to further U.S. involvement in the war, a position both men had begun to take in preceding months.¹⁰⁴ Senator Stuart Symington (D/Mo.) a member of the Armed Services Committee (as well as the Committee on Foreign Relations), continued to argue that the U.S. should apply greater military pressure in order to "win," or that it should "get out."

In a meeting of the NSC the next day (August 5), McNamara told the President that in the Senate and House Armed Services Committees "there is broad support, but this support is thin. There is a feeling of uneasiness and frustration."¹⁰⁵ "The Republicans," he added, "are making political capital by overstating the effect on the U.S. economy of the cost of the Vietnam war."

Rusk, however, said that in his testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee a few days earlier there appeared to be good support for U.S. policy.

In an effort to placate congressional critics and to maintain Congress' support for the war, the President invited all of the Members of the Senate and the House to off-the-record White House briefings on Vietnam in mid-August. At the meetings, attended by 74 Senators and 336 Representatives, the President made brief statements, followed by remarks by Taylor, Rusk, and McNamara. In addition, Ambassador at Large W. Averell Harriman reported on his talks with the Russians and U.N. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg discussed his visit with U.N. Secretary General U Thant. Eugene Black, former head of the World Bank, who had been appointed by the President to develop plans for a large Mekong River aid project, discussed that initiative.¹⁰⁶

On August 10, the day after he attended one of these briefings, Senator Wayne Morse, who for many years had been the Senate's strongest critic of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, declared in a Senate speech: "Yesterday the White House sponsored another of its attempts to disguise the war in Vietnam to make it palatable to Members of Congress."¹⁰⁷ "All the same dogmas were repeated," he said, "just as though nothing had changed since Mr. McNamara went over to Vietnam in October of 1963, and told us when he re-

¹⁰³ Unfortunately, most of the answers as well as parts of some of the questions were deleted by the Defense Department before the printed hearings were made public by the committee.

¹⁰⁴ For the position taken earlier by Robertson and Ellender see pt. III of this study, pp. 135, 305.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson Library, NSF NSC Meetings File.

¹⁰⁶ This information was taken from notations in the President's Daily Diary. There are partial transcripts of the meetings of August 10 and 11 in the Johnson Library, Transcripts of Vietnam Briefings.

¹⁰⁷ *CR*, vol. 111, p. 19840.

turned that things looked so good the boys would all be home by 1965."

"Thanks to General Taylor and Secretary McNamara," Morse added, "the Communists have proved to the world that the United States cannot cope with insurgency on its own terms, but can only fight it by turning a guerrilla war into a conventional war fought by American forces." He continued:

The recitation of how things are improving in Vietnam is a depressing thing to hear when a comparison with a year ago, or 2 years ago, or 4 years ago, or 10 years ago, shows only that the American position and the position of the South Vietnam Government have steadily eroded and deteriorated. It is a remarkable thing to be able to go up to the White House periodically and hear how things are improving when each visit is occasioned by a new step the United States has had to take in order to stabilize a deteriorating situation. It is an Alice-in-Wonderland exhibition of how the unpleasant can be evaded and the failures ignored.

In light of this most recent exhibition, I have no hope or confidence whatever that the conventional war we are now undertaking in Vietnam under the same men who failed to win a guerrilla war, will have any more favorable result. For another element in the so-called briefings of the administration is a total vacuity in the political surroundings of the struggle itself.

It has been the ignorance of the politics of war that has brought us into this situation. . . .

To the administration, the war in Vietnam is a matter of military tactics. That is the sad but plain truth. We have based our policy there on nothing more than military tactics and we have been losing. We are continuing to base our policy there on military tactics and we are going to continue to lose.

The President was apparently interested in what Morse had to say—Morse had, after all, raised the subject of impeachment following the President's July 28 announcement—judging by the fact that he received a summary of the speech the next day from McGeorge Bundy and Thomson of the NSC staff.¹⁰⁸

A comment by former President Eisenhower a few days later caused considerably more consternation in the White House, however. In a news conference on August 17, Eisenhower said that the Communists must be stopped in Vietnam, but, contrary to President Johnson's frequent assertion that U.S. military actions in Vietnam resulted from the commitment made by Eisenhower's October 1955 letter to President Ngo Dinh Diem, Eisenhower said there had been no commitment of a military nature at that time.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Johnson Library, Presidential Chron File, 7/65-8/65, James Thomson. For Morse's comments on impeachment, see pt. III of this study, p. 447.

¹⁰⁹ *New York Times*, Aug. 18, 1965.

Eisenhower, who, at President Johnson's direction, was being briefed frequently by Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, special assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, took the position that, having decided to go to war, the U.S. should use overwhelming force against the enemy. He was opposed to "dribbling" forces into Vietnam. He was also opposed to detailed control of military operations by Washington, saying that tactical decisions should be made by the field commander. Johnson Library, NSF Name File, President Eisenhower, Goodpaster Memorandum for the Record, "Meeting with General Eisenhower, 3 August 1965."

Johnson's reaction was conveyed in a 9:50 p.m. memorandum on August 18 from Presidential Assistant Bill Moyers to McGeorge Bundy, the President's National Security Adviser, after Bundy had submitted to the President the staff work he had requested:

The President asked me to tell you that this is not enough.

He wants—"by the time I get up in the morning"—everything "that was pertinent in the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty] debates, everything every Republican Senator and Congressman—and Democrats alike—said which indicates that SEATO requires us to give arms to SEATO countries or Protocol states—the whole debate—everything Eisenhower said in office that builds our case—the full text of his letter to Churchill and Diem. I want the kind of brief Abe Fortas would prepare on Gideon [a famous Supreme Court case argued by Fortas]. It's got to be full and convincing.

"Then, I want Mac to get Goodpasture [*sic*] [Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] to helicopter up to Gettysburg tomorrow. I want him to go 'to brief the General on the battle we have just had out in Vietnam,' but I want him to take this letter to Ike and I want him to take a copy of all the material that Mac Bundy is going to get overnight.

"Tell Mac to get that fellow Tom [Thomas L.] Hughes [the State Department's Director of Intelligence and Research] out of bed over at State and make him do all this research tonight, and his people."

And that, my unfortunate friend, is almost all verbatim.¹¹⁰

Goodpaster, who had served on Eisenhower's White House staff, met with Eisenhower the next morning, and in his report to McGeorge Bundy he said that Eisenhower "stressed strongly that there is no question in any of this about his support for what the President is doing. . . . The real point is that action has now taken a different form from that of ten years ago, while the policy aim of course remains the same." Goodpaster added: "I suggested as a summary that there has been continuity of purpose and policy, together with evolution of means and action. General Eisenhower added that there has also been an evolution in the situation and in what is needed, in view of what the enemy has done."¹¹¹

After meeting with Goodpaster, whose visit to Gettysburg was not publicly announced, Eisenhower told the press that he continued to support the President's position on Vietnam. As he and Goodpaster had agreed, Eisenhower also said that the circumstances had changed. In 1954 it was hoped that the Com-

In a conversation with Ambassador Lodge, who was asked by the President to see Eisenhower before leaving for Saigon, Eisenhower also stressed, as Lodge reported to the President, the "overriding importance of Viet Nam wanting to be free. We should do everything to inculcate such a desire. They must have 'heart' or, after we have achieved a successful outcome, they will slump right back. It would be tragic if a successful outcome were followed by an election in which the people voted for the Viet Cong. I told him our plans regarding [Edward G.] Lansdale were aimed precisely at such a contingency." (Same location, Memorandum from Lodge to the President, Aug. 11, 1965.) Lansdale was Lodge's assistant for pacification activities.

¹¹⁰ Johnson Library, NSF Memos to the President—McGeorge Bundy. The letter attached to this memorandum is not in the file. For the 1955 letter from Eisenhower to Diem, see pt. I of this study, p. 286.

¹¹¹ This and a number of other Goodpaster memoranda on his discussions with Eisenhower, as well as a folder containing the material which Goodpaster took to Gettysburg on August 19, are in the Johnson Library, NSF Name File, President Eisenhower.

munists could be defeated without recourse to U.S. arms, but this hope was not realized, and he supported Johnson's decision to send U.S. forces. "When our country is in a position of crisis," he said, "there is only one thing a good American can do, and that is to support the President."¹¹²

In Congress, however, Republicans in the House continued their efforts to place the onus of the war on the Democrats. On August 24, 1965, the House rejected, 139-263, a Republican move to send a supplemental appropriations bill for domestic programs back to committee.¹¹³ Melvin R. Laird (R/Wisc.), who made the motion, argued that "the large-scale needs of a war situation are now upon us. To attempt to finance them by additional deficit financing without first bending every effort to tighten the Nation's belt in the nondefense spending area is to court an economic situation that will further erode the value of the dollar, more deeply threaten the economic well-being of low and middle-income citizens, and the economic health of the Nation." He added that in order to act responsibly on the budget, and to prevent inflationary spending, Congress should be given estimates of the cost of the war during the fiscal year then underway (FY 1966, ending on June 30, 1966), and, in view of predictions that the administration would be returning to Congress in January 1966 to ask for an additional \$10-12 billion for the war, that Congress should not act on separate, smaller requests.

Laird's motion was supported by most of the Republicans and a few Southern Democrats, but was opposed by most Democrats, including all of the liberals.

The next day (August 25), House Republicans issued a "white paper," "Vietnam: Some Neglected Aspects of the Historical Record," which asserted that the crisis in Vietnam had occurred since 1960 under the Democrats. These were its conclusions:¹¹⁴

The policy of the Democratic administration has too often been uncertain, providing a basis for miscalculation by the Communists. Policy has been altered abruptly. Conflicting statements have been issued. Deeds have not matched words. Among the specific features of policy subject to this criticism have been the whole handling of the problem of Laos, the reversal of the position of the United States toward the Diem regime, the cover-up of the gravity of the desperate dangers of the situation in Vietnam, President Johnson's campaign victory of 1964, and the progressive dilution of official statements of the Nation's objectives in Vietnam.

Later that day, McGeorge Bundy told the President that it was the unanimous view of McNamara, Ball, William Bundy, and Presidential Assistant Bill Moyers that the Republican white paper "is a pretty feeble effort and that it does not deserve top level reply." Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen (R/Ill.), Senate Republican leader, he said, had already disavowed it, and Eisenhower had repeated his support for the President. "In sum, this document imports into

¹¹² *New York Times*, Aug. 20, 1965.

¹¹³ *CR*, vol. 111, pp. 21549-21571. The bill provided funds for the Departments of Labor, and Health, Education and Welfare.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 21838-21844.

the discussion of foreign affairs the very spirit of narrow partisanship which you have been trying to exclude.”¹¹⁵

That same day (August 25), the Senate approved the \$1.7 billion request for additional funds for the war (as an amendment to the FY 1966 Department of Defense Appropriations bill) by a vote of 89-0.¹¹⁶ On September 17, the House, which had passed the appropriations bill in June before the supplemental request was made, approved the conference report, which provided for the \$1.7 billion, by a vote of 382-0.¹¹⁷

Fulbright Despairs of Persuading the President

Meanwhile, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Fulbright, disillusioned about Vietnam, and disturbed about Johnson's handling of the Dominican Republic situation in May 1965, which had been the subject of Foreign Relations Committee hearings during July, was considering making a public statement on the conduct of the Dominican Republic affair that would also be a touchstone for more general criticism of the handling of major U.S. foreign policy issues, including Vietnam. In a memorandum on August 17, Carl Marcy, chief of staff of the Foreign Relations Committee, proposed to Fulbright that he consider making a speech on the changes in the past two years that had led to a situation in which “the United States is feared today as the nation most likely to precipitate a nuclear war.”¹¹⁸ “What has happened in the past two years to thrust the hopes of the world for peace into the abyss of fear of world war? What has happened to turn the liberal supporters of President Kennedy into opponents of the policies of President Johnson? What has happened to turn the right wing opponents of Eisenhower and Kennedy into avid supporters of the policies of the present Administration?” The principal cause, Marcy said, was that the U.S. had “tried to force upon the rest of the world a righteous American point of view. . . .” Another reason was the American penchant for demanding immediate results.

“Such a speech,” Marcy told Fulbright, “would break you with the Administration and make Borah and Hiram Johnson and Cabot Lodge, Sr. [Senators who had challenged the President on foreign policy issues in the early 1900s], look like pikers. But it is a line of action that you should consider.” He added, however, “I don't know whether I would do this if I were you!”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Johnson Library, NSF Memos to the President—McGeorge Bundy.

¹¹⁶ Senator Ernest Gruening (D/Alaska), who had voted with Morse against the request in May, but who supported the \$1.7 billion request, had, at the President's request, which was “quickly agreed to by the President,” talked about Vietnam with Johnson on August 19. *New York Times*, Aug. 20, 1965.

¹¹⁷ *CR*, vol. 111, p. 24262.

¹¹⁸ A copy of Marcy's memorandum is in the University of Arkansas Library, Fulbright Papers, series 48, box 16.

¹¹⁹ Two days earlier (August 15), Fulbright had invited McGeorge Bundy to meet with the Foreign Relations Committee at an informal “coffee.” Bundy declined, saying that on the instructions of “higher authority”—the President—he could not meet with the committee. In a memorandum to Fulbright reporting on Bundy's reaction, Marcy said, “The higher authority suggested that he did not want to get into the habit of sending Presidential aides to the Hill.” National Archives, Record Group (hereafter referred to as RG) 46, Marcy Chron File. Instead, Bundy said, the President had suggested that the committee meet with Bundy for a drink in his office or at his home. There is no record of what further action, if any, may have been taken on this matter, but the committee did not accept the offer from the President and Bundy. Several years later, as will be seen (pt. V of this study, forthcoming), Henry A. Kissinger, who was then serving as President Richard M. Nixon's National Security Adviser, held a couple of informal meetings with the Foreign Relations Committee at private locations in Washington.

By the end of August, Fulbright after receiving a strong indictment of the administration's role in the Dominican Republic affair from Pat M. Holt, who handled Latin America for the Foreign Relations Committee, and Seth Tillman, another committee staffer who worked closely with Fulbright, debated whether to communicate privately with the President or to make a public statement. Action by the Foreign Relations Committee was almost out of the question. As Tillman said in a later interview, "It seemed certain at the time that the committee itself would not go on record criticizing the administration. This was just not something you did in those days."¹²⁰

Holt and Tillman were in favor of a public statement. Marcy and Lee Williams, Fulbright's administrative assistant and the principal political adviser on his personal staff, were concerned about the effect on Fulbright's relationship with Johnson and on Fulbright's role. As Williams said in a later interview:¹²¹

I felt I knew something about the nature of the man, Johnson, and I think I said at the time, "Look, do you understand that if you do this, it's over between you and Johnson. He'll never let you in the door again. I mean that's over. And I think you have to weigh whether if you give this speech at this time the value of it is going to be enough that you're willing to give up the kind of relationship you've enjoyed with Johnson and the opportunity to have the kind of input to him that you've had before." . . . I thought Johnson was getting a lot of poor advice at that time, and I wanted him to have Fulbright available to be a balance wheel . . . to terminate that kind of relationship was bad for the country, in my opinion . . . and by Fulbright, I don't mean Fulbright alone; I mean the voice of Fulbright as he represented the views of a significant segment of this country and of Congress, as a spokesman for that point of view.

Marcy told Fulbright that he, too, thought such a speech would lead to a break with the President. Fulbright replied that he would take care of the politics; he wanted to know if the speech was accurate. Marcy said that it was.

¹²⁰ Congressional Research Service (CRS) Interview with Seth Tillman, Feb. 9, 1979.

¹²¹ CRS Interview with Lee Williams, Mar. 13, 1979.

Fulbright decided to make the speech. "In September of '65," he said later, "I gave up hope of persuading him [the President]." ¹²² This was Tillman's explanation: ¹²³

I think it was in large part because of his feeling that he just wasn't getting anywhere with them through private channels of communication; that the personal relationship with Johnson, which had been very serviceable during the Senate years, had ceased to be so; and that he, Fulbright, was not bringing to bear any significant influence on these central issues through the private means of communication.

After the speech, according to one description, there was "No more access. No more phone calls. No more warmth. No more Air Force One." ¹²⁴ (This situation changed somewhat in June 1966, however, as will be seen.) Marcy was also shunned. In an interview some years later he recalled that he went to a meeting at the White House soon after the speech, "and as I sought to shake hands Lyndon looked at me, right through me, and said: 'What are you doing here?' I was never invited back." ¹²⁵

Johnson's aides immediately began supplying him with material critical of Fulbright. On the day after the speech, Presidential Assistant Douglass Cater sent the President, apparently at his request, a sampling of Fulbright's votes since 1961 and a note saying that earlier votes were being compiled. In a separate memorandum, Cater said that Fulbright's speech "contains this inexcusable sneer: 'We are not, as we like to claim in Fourth of July speeches, the most revolutionary nation on earth; we are, on the contrary, much closer to being the most unrevolutionary nation on earth.'" Cater suggested that, in a speech he was drafting for Johnson to give at a celebration at the Smithsonian Institution in which the American Revolution was to be mentioned, these words be added: "a revolution not always supported by some who lament our lack of revolu-

¹²² CRS Interview with J. William Fulbright, Feb. 18, 1983.

In the speech, which he delivered in the Senate on Sept. 15, 1965, Fulbright said that the U.S. had intervened in the Dominican Republic not to save American lives, as the President had contended, but out of fear that the Communists were behind the revolution and the result would be "another Cuba." (CR, vol. 111, pp. 23855-23861.) In its handling of the Dominican crisis, he said, the U.S. had allied itself with a "corrupt and reactionary military oligarchy" rather than seeking to understand and support the non-Communist revolutionaries who, as in other countries in Latin America, could provide the alternative to a Cuban-type Communist revolution. In addition, U.S. armed intervention in the Dominican crisis was illegal, based on treaty provisions that prohibit intervention in the affairs of any country in the Americas, or the use of force by one country against another except, based on agreement of the members of the Organization of American states, for actions to maintain peace and security.

Fulbright was also critical of the "bad advice" which he said U.S. officials had given President Johnson about the degree of Communist influence among the rebels, as well as exaggerated reports of atrocities and the danger to American lives.

On the morning of the day he delivered the speech, Fulbright sent a copy of it to Johnson with an accompanying note which said:

"Public—and I trust, constructively—criticism is one of the services that a senator is uniquely able to perform. There are many things that members of your administration, for quite proper reasons of consistency and organization, cannot say, even though it is in the long term of interests of the administration that they be said. A senator, as you well know, is under no such restrictions. It is in the sincere hope of assisting your administration in this way, and of advancing the objective of your policy in Latin America, that I offer the enclosed remarks." (Haynes Bonner Johnson and Bernard M. Gwertzman, *Fulbright, The Dissenter* [Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1968], p. 218.

¹²³ CRS Interview with Seth Tillman, Feb. 9, 1979.

¹²⁴ David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 502.

¹²⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Office of the Senate Historian, Oral History Interview with Carl Marcy, Oct. 5, 1983, conducted by Dr. Donald Ritchie.

tionary spirit." "This would be interpreted," Cater said, "as a dig at Fulbright's hypocrisy on racial matters."¹²⁶

When Johnson was hospitalized for an operation a short while later, Fulbright sent a letter expressing his hopes for recovery, and added these words:¹²⁷

I sense from various sources that you were displeased by my recent speech. I regret this. I sincerely believe that in the long run it will help you in your relations with the countries of Latin America. I admit, of course, that my judgment could be wrong, but there is already a very considerable response from here and abroad which supports my basic premise.

Regardless of the validity of my judgment in this instance, I have done in the past, and shall continue to do in the future, what I can to help you to the best of my ability. I make no secret of the fact that I think you were the best Majority Leader the Senate has ever had, and that I believe you are and will continue to be a great President. It does not seem to me that I can be of any help to you by always agreeing with every decision or every opinion of your Administration. These are necessarily, in many cases, collective opinions, and like all others may sometimes be in error. As I understand the function of a senator, especially one who is deeply interested in the success of his President, it is his duty whenever there is any question about a policy to raise the matter for clarification and for correction if the resulting discussion reveals the need therefor. Subservience cannot, as I see it, help develop new policies or perfect old ones.

As you know, I have been in the Congress a long time. I desire no other office. I only wish to contribute whatever I can in my present position to the success of your Administration and, thereby to the welfare of the people of my State and Country.

Fulbright never received a reply to the letter, and he continued to be criticized for taking issue with the administration. Even though some public figures came to his defense, he said privately that he could not encourage other Senators to speak out: "I can't advise them to speak out, because if you do then everyone jumps down your throat. This country has gotten to where you are not supposed to speak out."¹²⁸

Several weeks later, Fulbright is said to have confided to a colleague, "My God, I feel so alone. No one seems to give a damn. I feel at times that I am walking among the blind and the deaf."¹²⁹

This incident helped to pave the way for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's hearings on Vietnam early the following year,

¹²⁶ Cater's memorandum is in the Johnson Library, WHCF, Fulbright.

¹²⁷ Johnson and Gwertzman, p. 220.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* In another Senate speech on Oct. 22, 1965 (CR, vol. 111, pp. 28372 ff.) Fulbright defended his public criticism of the President, saying, among other things: "A consensus is a fine thing insofar as it represents a genuine reconciliation of differences; it is a miscarriage of democratic procedures insofar as it represents the concealment of differences. I think we Americans tend to put too high a value on unanimity, as if there were something dangerous and illegitimate about honest differences of opinion honestly expressed by honest men. Probably because we have been united about so many things for so long, we tend to be mistrustful of intellectual dissent, confusing it with personal hostility and political disloyalty."

¹²⁹ Tristram Coffin, *Senator Fulbright: Portrait of a Public Philosopher* (New York: Dutton, 1966), p. 264.

as well as to create doubts about the President's credibility and his handling of the Vietnam situation. As Pat Holt, later the chief of staff of the committee explained several years later:¹³⁰

There were doubts in the Senate about the wisdom of U.S. policy in Vietnam even during the Kennedy administration, but before the Dominican intervention there was a predisposition to give the President the benefit of those doubts. Afterward, this predisposition was reversed. . . . An increasingly common view on Capitol Hill was, as one senator expressed in privately at the time, "If we know the President was impetuous in the Dominican Republic and exaggerated the situation there to the point of falsifying it, how can we trust him anywhere else?"

¹³⁰ *Washington Post*, May 2, 1977, Pat M. Holt, "Residue from the 1965 Dominican Intervention."

CHAPTER 2

FORMULATING U.S. STRATEGY AND PLANS

After the President's decision in July to send large-scale forces, American troops began streaming into South Vietnam during August and September.¹ According to a plan of operations developed by Westmoreland and his staff, U.S. forces, together with other third country forces (largely South Korean and Australian) and South Vietnamese forces (which would be responsible primarily for the area around Saigon and in the delta—IV Corps), were to exert military pressure on the Communists to compel them to accept a settlement—to “grind down the enemy,” while at the same time building up the South Vietnamese, militarily and politically.²

The newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, disagreed with Westmoreland's proposed plan of operations. In a memorandum to McGeorge Bundy on July 7, 1965, (as well as in a memorandum to the President on July 20 in connection with McNamara's report of that date),³ Lodge argued against a large-scale deployment of U.S. forces and against “search-and-destroy” (attrition), and in favor of smaller forces and what he called a “coastal strategy” (“enclaves”). In his unpublished “Vietnam Memoir,” he said, summarizing the July 7 memorandum, that there were, “broadly speaking,” two possible strategies:⁴

A. One strategy is that of “seek-out-and-destroy.” To this there are very heavy objections

1. It might not achieve a true victory in a situation which is still essentially a political movement.

2. It would tie down the U.S. troops which might be needed elsewhere and which could not be quickly extricated.

3. The climate, terrain, etc., are about the worst in the world for American soldiers.

4. To put an army of this size into the field might create a violently bad reaction in U.S. public opinion and this in turn might compromise the ability of the U.S. Government to carry out any kind of intelligent or farsighted policy.

¹ By the end of October 1965, 35 combat battalions (about 215,000 men, including support forces) had been deployed or approved for deployment—an increase of about 130,000 over the number in Vietnam at the time of the President's decision in July. These included the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, which were sent to II Corps in the Central Highlands, the 1st Infantry Division and the 173rd Airborne Brigade, which were sent to III Corps in the area around Saigon, and the 3rd Marine Amphibian Force (which consisted of the 3rd Marine Division and elements of the 1st Marine Division), which was given responsibility for I Corps in the northern part of South Vietnam. In addition, a South Korean division arrived in II Corps in early November.

² Center for Military History (CMH), Westmoreland Papers, History File, Presentation by Westmoreland to a group of U.S. Army officers, Nov. 9, 1968.

³ See pp. 386-387 of pt. III of this study.

⁴ Massachusetts Historical Society, Lodge Papers, unpublished “Vietnam Memoir,” pt. IV, ch. I, p. 7.

Basically, the only purpose of military activity is to provide the opportunity for the Vietnamese to carry out their revolution for a new and better life. The strategy of "seek-out-and-destroy" only reaches that aim indirectly, if at all.

B. Alternative is neither to extend or to withdraw, but to operate differently by what may roughly be called coastal tactics. Under such a scheme, United States troops would do the following:

1. Help the Government of Viet-Nam in pitched battles against large units of the Viet Cong and the PAVN;
2. Guard the perimeters—be they seaports or airfields or both;
3. If necessary, help to hold Saigon;
4. Make occasional forays to attractive targets which can be reached from these places;
5. And thus, free the ARVN for the work for countersubversion-terrorism in the hamlets which it alone can do.

This must be accompanied by a new, lively, professional political campaign so that we can work out from the secure areas. But the accomplishments of this political campaign must be solid and enduring and not series of flashy quickies.

On September 1, 1965, a concept paper, "Concept of Operations in the Republic of Vietnam," was issued by Westmoreland's headquarters.⁵ The U.S. objective in Vietnam, it declared, was "To end the war in Vietnam by convincing the Viet Cong and the DRV that military victory is impossible, thereby forcing an agreement favorable to the RVN and the United States." There were three assumptions with respect to U.S. operations:

- (1) That the VC will continue to fight and will continue to be supported by the DRV until the conviction that military victory is impossible makes the absorption of further punishment unendurable.
- (2) That Communist China will continue military aid and advice but will not actively intervene.
- (3) That friendly forces will maintain control of the air and lines of communication in RVN.

In addition, the achievement of the U.S. objective "presupposed the removal of restrictions, delays and planning uncertainties. . . ."⁶ The paper did not state what, specifically, should be removed.

⁵National Archives, Westmoreland-CBS Papers, "Concept of Operations in the Republic of Vietnam," Sept. 1, 1965, 535 pp. On Sept. 17, 1965, Westmoreland's headquarters issued more detailed guidance for the use of U.S. forces: "Tactics and Techniques for Employment of U.S. Forces in the Republic of Vietnam," MACV Directive 525-4 (a revision and expansion of the July MACV statement), CMH, Westmoreland Papers, History File.

⁶In pointing out the importance of lifting some of these limitations and restrictions, Westmoreland's concept paper was consistent with and followed the line of reasoning of the special study (Goodpaster Report) in July 1965 by the staff of the JCS, at the request of McNamara for the President, of the question, "Can we win if we do everything we can?" (See pt. III of this study, pp. 359 ff.) The JCS study had concluded that the U.S. could win if the following assumptions held true:

"a. China and Russia will not intervene with armed forces, overtly or covertly, so long as there is no US/SVN land invasion of NVN.

"b. Restrictions on US/SVN use of force do not exceed the following:

"(1) No land invasion of NVN by US/SVN forces.

"(2) No use of nuclear weapons or chemical weapons.

According to the MACV paper, there would be two and possibly three phases: first, stopping the Communist offensive; second, resuming the offensive against Communist forces and reinstituting rural reconstruction (pacification) programs in high-visibility areas. If the insurgency continued, there would then be a third phase in which U.S. and other forces would apply greater military pressure on Communist forces "to destroy or render militarily ineffective the remaining organized VC units and their base areas," together with pacification of all of South Vietnam.

The timetable for the three phases was to be:

Phase I—September 1, 1965-December 31, 1965

Phase II—January 1, 1966-June 30, 1966

Phase III—July 1, 1966 to July 1 or December 31, 1967.

After the Communists had been compelled to end the war, U.S. forces could be "gradually removed, consistent with the capability of GVN to maintain internal order and protect its own boundaries."

Although U.S. forces would play the leading role in offensive military operations, "For political and psychological reasons," the concept paper stated, "the conflict must retain primarily a Vietnamese character at all times."

While Westmoreland was issuing the concept paper for operations containing these guidelines for the employment of U.S. forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were seeking approval of the Secretary of Defense and, through him, of the President, of an overall "concept" (strategy) for the conduct of the war. In a memorandum for the Secretary of Defense on August 27, 1965, "Concept for Vietnam," the JCS discussed the U.S. objective and the proposed plan for achieving it.⁷ The memorandum began with a statement that seemed to suggest the after-the-fact nature of the request for approval of strategic planning: "In the light of the introduction of major U.S. combat units into Southeast Asia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider it essential that we further formalize our concept for the future conduct of the war."

The U.S. "objective" in Vietnam, the memorandum said, as stated by NSAM 288 (March 1964), was a "stable and independent noncommunist government."⁸ It went on to explain, however, that although this was the stated objective, there was much more at stake:

The RVN [Republic of Vietnam—South Vietnam] is a politico/military keystone in Southeast Asia and is symbolic of U.S. determination in Asia as Berlin is in Europe—to prevent Communist expansion. The United States is committed to the de-

⁽³⁾ No mass bombing of population per se.

^c Once the concept envisaged in this study is approved by higher authority, operations within the scope of the proposed strategy will not be subject to restriction, delay or planning uncertainties. This implies that the GVN will cooperate as necessary to this end.

^d Operational coordination between US and SVN forces meets minimum acceptable professional standards of effectiveness.

^e Neither the government nor the population of SVN turns against the US and demands withdrawal."

Another assumption, which was not included in this summary of "major assumptions," but which was stated subsequently and appears to have been one of the most important assumptions of the study, was that while American forces along with some South Vietnamese and third country forces were conducting offensive military operations against main force units, the South Vietnamese would provide local security against Communist guerrillas.

⁷ Johnson Library, NSF NSC History, Deployment of Forces, JCSM-652-65, Aug. 27, 1965.

⁸ For NSAM 288, see pt. II of this study, p. 238.

fense of the RVN in order to assist a free people to remain free. In addition to the freedom of the RVN, U.S. national prestige, credibility, and honor with respect to world-wide pledges, and declared national policy are at stake. Further, it is incumbent upon the United States at this stage to invalidate the communist concept of "wars of national liberation."

According to the JCS memorandum, "The war in Vietnam is the single most critical international problem facing the United States today, and it portends the most serious immediate threat to continued U.S. world leadership and national security."

These were the "major problems to be dealt with in the conduct of the war":

(1) The continued direction and support of Viet Cong operations by the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam—North Vietnam], infiltration from the north, and the apparent attendant Viet Cong capability to provide materiel support and to replace heavy personnel losses.

(2) The continued existence of a major Viet Cong infrastructure, both political and military, in the RVN.

(3) The greater growth rate of Viet Cong strength as compared to that of the South Vietnamese ground forces.

(4) The continued loss of LOCs [lines of communication], food-producing areas, and population to Viet Cong control.

(5) The lack of a viable politico/economic structure in the RVN.

(6) The threat of CHICOM [Chinese Communist] intervention or aggression in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the Western Pacific.

The basic military tasks, of equal priority, are:

(1) To cause the DRV to cease its direction and support of the Viet Cong insurgency.

(2) To defeat the Viet Cong and to extend GVN control over all of the RVN.

(3) To deter Communist China from direct intervention and to defeat such intervention if it occurs.

The JCS memorandum went on to discuss the strategy the U.S. should employ to deal with these problems:

The US basic strategy for accomplishing the above tasks should be: to intensify military pressure on the DRV by air and naval power; to destroy significant DRV military targets, including the base of supplies; to interdict supporting LOCs in the DRV [this would include the mining of ports]; to interdict the infiltration and supply routes into the RVN; to improve the combat effectiveness of the RVNAF [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces]; to build and protect bases; to reduce enemy reinforcements; to defeat the Viet Cong, in concert with RVN and third country forces; and to maintain adequate forces in the Western-Pacific and elsewhere in readiness to deter and to deal with CHICOM aggression. By aggressive and sustained exploitation of superior military force, the United States/Government of Vietnam would seize and hold the initiative in both the DRV and RVN, keeping the DRV, the Viet Cong, and the PL/VM [Pathet Lao/Viet Minh] at a disadvantage, progres-

sively destroying the DRV war-supporting power and defeating the Viet Cong. The physical capability of the DRV to move men and supplies through the Lao Corridor, down the coastline, across the demilitarized zone, 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. Finally, included within the basic U.S. military strategy must be a buildup in Thailand to ensure attainment of the proper U.S.-Thai posture to deter CHICOM aggression and to facilitate placing U.S. forces in an advantageous logistic position if such aggression occurs.

"Our strategy for Vietnam should not allow the communists to keep pace with or more than match our military efforts," the Chiefs said. Yet, as they also pointed out, "For the most part, the Viet Cong have sought to avoid a large-scale restrained battle with US/GVN forces. Instead their tactics have been to maximize the advantages of initiative and surprise and to strike at weakness with overwhelming strength, 'fading away' when the combat strength ratio is unfavorable to them." For this reason, the Chiefs said, it was essential to have the support of the people and the control of resources in those areas of South Vietnam—the Saigon area, the Mekong delta, the coastal plain, and the central highlands—which were of major military significance.

The JCS memorandum was less explicit, however, with respect to how U.S. forces could be effectively used in South Vietnam in a guerrilla warfare situation in which, as the JCS recognized, the support of the people was required in order to wage a successful counter guerrilla campaign. According to the memorandum, the strategy to be used in the South would be to establish secure areas on the coast and elsewhere, and then to enlarge and expand those areas through "search and destroy operations" conducted by the U.S. and other third country forces, while providing support to South Vietnamese forces responsible for "clearing and securing operations" for "rural reconstruction." There was no explanation in the JCS memorandum as to how U.S. forces could accomplish their assigned tasks. It seemed to be taken for granted that the "Viet Cong" could and would be "defeated."

This JCS strategy paper of August 27, 1965 was never approved by civilian authorities. A copy of the paper was sent to McGeorge Bundy on August 30 by Col. Richard C. Bowman, the NSC liaison officer with the JCS, with a memorandum that said merely "The attached JCSM contains the most recent JCS views on military strategy in Vietnam."⁹ There is no record that Bundy sent the report to the President or that any other action with respect to the report was taken at the White House.

After receiving the JCS paper, McNamara asked that it be reviewed by the Office of International Security Affairs of the Department of Defense, headed by Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton. In a memorandum to McNamara on September 8, 1965, McNaughton said that the plan proposed by the JCS, while generally acceptable, contained a number of suggestions that were "clearly controversial and raise far-reaching policy issues (e.g.,

⁹ Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam.

blockade and mining of DRV, U.S. buildup in Thailand, intensified RT (ROLLING THUNDER))." "In my judgment," McNaughton said, "an over-all approval of the concept proposed by the JCS is not required at this time and would not significantly increase U.S. capabilities and planning in dealing with the situation in SEA [South-east Asia] in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, I recommend that the concept proposed not be specifically approved at this time. Instead I recommend that you indicate to the Chairman, JCS, that you have studied the referenced JCSM and agree to the use of the proposed concept in the formulation of specific recommendations for future operations in SEA."¹⁰ Copies of the JCS memorandum, McNaughton said, were being sent to McGeorge Bundy and to William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East.

In a memorandum on September 11 to JCS Chairman Wheeler, McNamara said merely, "I agree that recommendations for future operations in SEA should be formulated. Such recommendations should be submitted for individual consideration as they are developed."¹¹ He added that he had sent a copy of the JCS memorandum to the State Department and the White House "for use in future deliberations."

The lack of approval by civilian authorities of the JCS strategy paper for Vietnam—the most definitive statement of its kind during the entire course of U.S. involvement in the war—"left Westmoreland," as General Bruce B. Palmer, Jr. (who served as the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations during the early part of 1965), has suggested, "to invent his own strategic concept . . . a war of attrition."¹²

In an interview several years later, General Palmer said, "Basically, the strategy of attrition was wrong. . . . And I blame myself as much as anybody. I thought for a while that the attrition strategy ought to make them get awful tired of what was happening and change their strategy, their objectives, but they never did."¹³ Palmer adds that after he became Westmoreland's Deputy Commander of U.S. Army forces in Vietnam, he, Westmoreland and Gen. Creighton Abrams, who, as will be seen, also was critical of attrition, (Abrams became Commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam in the spring of 1967), "had many, many conversations about whether we were doing the right thing. Nobody really knew the answer."

¹⁰National Archives, RG 330, JS ISA/EAP, Vietnam 381, Memorandum from McNaughton to McNamara, "Concept for Vietnam," Sept. 8, 1965.

¹¹Same location, McNamara Memorandum for the Chairman of the JCS, "Concept for Vietnam," Sept. 11, 1965.

¹²Commentary by Gen. Bruce B. Palmer, Jr., in *The Second Indochina War*, John Schlicht (ed.) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1986), p. 155.

According to Herbert Y. Schandler, a retired Army colonel who had served in Vietnam and helped to write the *Pentagon Papers*, "Left with no guidance from their civilian superiors, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to formulate recommendations for future operations along the same lines. Throughout the war their recommendations continued to take the form of requests for additional American troops in South Vietnam and for expanded operational authority outside South Vietnam. Since Secretary McNamara, or higher civilian authority, had failed to provide them with any national objectives, missions, or strategic concepts other than the very general ones of 'resisting' or 'insuring a non-Communist South Vietnam,' the military leaders virtually were forced to adopt their own concept for conducting their war and to continue to press for its approval." Herbert Y. Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), p. 35. See also Schandler's paper, "America and Vietnam: The Failure of Strategy, 1964-67," in *Vietnam as History*, Peter Braestrup (ed.) (Washington, D.C.: Univ. Press of America, 1984), pp. 23-32.

¹³U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pa., Oral History, Bruce Palmer, Jr., 1975.

For his part, Westmoreland has argued that he had no choice, especially after his civilian superiors declined to act on the JCS strategy paper:¹⁴

What alternative was there to a war of attrition? A grand invasion of North Vietnam was out, for the U.S. national policy was not to conquer North Vietnam but to eliminate the insurgency inside South Vietnam, and President Johnson had stated publicly that he would not "broaden" the war. Because the number of American troops at my disposal would for long be limited, attacking the enemy inside Laos and Cambodia would be beyond my means for months, even years; I would grapple with restrictions on those operations when the time came, although I was destined never to overcome the restrictions. Meanwhile I had to get on with meeting the crisis within South Vietnam, and only by seeking, fighting, and destroying the enemy could that be done.

Andrew F. Krepinevich argues, however, that Westmoreland "simply developed a strategy to suit the Army's preferred *modus operandi*, force structure, and doctrine." "The Army," Krepinevich says, "being denied the opportunity to win a decisive battle of annihilation by invading North Vietnam, found the attrition strategy best fit the kind of war it had prepared to fight." "The Army's attrition strategy," he adds, "was nothing more than the natural outgrowth of its organizational recipe for success—playing to America's strong suits, material abundance and technological superiority, and the nation's profound abhorrence of U.S. casualties."¹⁵

¹⁴ William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 153.

¹⁵ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 164, 196. Krepinevich's major point is that the failure of the Army to adapt its doctrine, force structure, and strategy to the circumstances of the Vietnam war caused it to fail in its mission (*ibid.*, p. 259):

"MACV's strategy of attrition represented a comparatively expensive way of buying time for South Vietnam, in human and material resources. The strategy's great reliance on large amounts of firepower did not in the long run serve, as in previous wars, to reduce U.S. casualties and wear down the enemy. . . . The nature of insurgency warfare . . . made such a strategic approach a high-cost, high-risk option for MACV by mandating a quick victory before the American people grew weary of bearing the burden of continuing the war."

He adds: "In developing its Vietnam strategy to use operational methods successful in previous wars, the Army compromised its ability to successfully combat lower-phase insurgency operations at anything approaching an acceptable cost. In focusing on the attrition of enemy forces rather than on defeating the enemy through denial of his access to the population, MACV missed whatever opportunity it had to deal the insurgents a crippling blow at a low enough cost to permit a continued U.S. military pressure in Vietnam in the event of external, overt aggression. Furthermore, in attempting to maximize Communist combat losses, the Army often alienated the most important element in any counterinsurgency strategy—the people."

Eric M. Bergerud argues, however, that the war—to oversimplify his analysis—was probably unwinnable no matter what military strategy or tactics or political or economic programs might have been used by the U.S. "The United States did not fail in Vietnam because of tactical errors that were open to remedy," he says. "The errors made were on a much higher level. The American military seriously underestimated the difficulties involved in dealing with enemy forces. And the civilian leadership, particularly under Johnson, underestimated the strength and tenacity of the enemy and overestimated the willingness of its own people and soldiers to continue the struggle indefinitely. In short, American leaders, both civilian and military, committed a strategic blunder that has brought many a general to grief: They chose the wrong battlefield." *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), p. 335.

Gen. Phillip B. Davidson, who served as Westmoreland's chief of intelligence, has criticized U.S. strategy in his study, *Vietnam War: The History, 1945–1975* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1988). In a chapter on "Why We Lost the War," he says (pp. 796–797) that the primary reason for the Communists' victory was that "they had a superior ground strategy . . . the strategy of revolutionary war." U.S. strategy, "in theory, at least . . . should have been to avoid a protracted war and to strike the Viet Cong and North Vietnam as soon as possible with enough military force to bring the war to a quick and satisfactory solution." Having chosen not to wage

Gen. William E. DePuy, who was Westmoreland's J-3 (Operations) officer and his principal strategist during 1965, says that the U.S. "eventually learned that we could not bring them [the Communists] to battle frequently enough to win a war of attrition." "We thought probably we could. We were arrogant, because we were Americans and we were soldiers or Marines and we could do it, but it turned out that it was a faulty concept, given the sanctuaries, given the fact that the Ho Chi Minh Trail was never closed, it was a losing concept of operation."¹⁶

Westmoreland as well as DePuy and other key military leaders argue, however, that the "strategy of attrition" was, as Westmoreland has said, "an interim situation pending a change in policy." Westmoreland says he hoped "that in due time political authority would grant the flexibility required" for a strategy that would allow U.S. forces to conduct operations against the sanctuaries and against the Communists' logistical pipeline—the Ho Chi Minh Trail.¹⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have been criticized for not taking a stronger stand with civilian authorities on behalf of the military's preferred strategy. General Palmer, among others, argues that the Chiefs failed "to articulate an effective military strategy that they could persuade the commander-in-chief and secretary of defense to adopt." Moreover, Palmer adds, "Not once during the war did the JCS advise the commander-in-chief or the secretary of defense that the strategy being pursued most probably would fail and that the United States would be unable to achieve its objectives." "The only explanation of this failure," he says, "is that the chiefs were imbued with the 'can do' spirit and could not bring themselves to make such a negative statement or to appear to be disloyal."¹⁸

In a later interview, General Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, commented that "among the sins of omission he regretted committing during the course of the war, the one he would emphasize was his failure to insist that McNamara take some formal action on that concept of the Joint Chiefs [the strategy paper of August 27, 1965] and forward it to the President."¹⁹

For his part, President Johnson apparently believed that he would be better able to perform his role and carry out his purposes if strategy and plans were not too specific or explicit, at least with respect to what was Presidentially approved. He tended to prefer not to make advance commitments that might affect his freedom of

that kind of warfare, the U.S., Davidson says, was in the position of having to develop a counterstrategy to revolutionary war. But leaders of the U.S. Government did not understand revolutionary war, and even if they had, they could not "for political, psychological, institutional, and bureaucratic reasons," have developed any effective counterstrategy. Thus, he concludes (p. 811), "the United States lost the war in the way all wars are lost—to a superior strategy which availed itself of our political and psychological vulnerabilities while negating our great military strength."

¹⁶ CRS Interview with Gen. William E. DePuy, Aug. 1, 1988. See also his article, "Our Experience in Vietnam: Will We Be Beneficiaries or Victims?" *Army* (June 1987).

¹⁷ CMH, Westmoreland Papers, letter from Westmoreland to Henry Kissinger commenting on a reference in Kissinger's memoirs (*The White House Years*, [New York: Little, Brown, 1979], p. 1004) to Westmoreland's "substitution of logistics for strategy." See also Westmoreland's chapter, "Evolution of Strategy," in his memoir, *A Soldier Reports*.

¹⁸ Gen. Bruce B. Palmer, Jr., *The 25 Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1984), pp. 45–46. A similar conclusion about the role of the JCS was reached by two other military analysts, Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President*, pp. 57–59, 336–338, and Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1981 and Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1982).

¹⁹ See Braestrup, *Vietnam as History*, pp. 38–39.

action at a future date, and he usually reacted strongly against any attempts to commit him to a course of action or to divulge what he planned to do.

Faced with the problem of maintaining his political support and gaining approval of his domestic program, the President also seemed to feel the need to minimize or to conceal actions that might have resulted in greater opposition, while keeping a tight rein on decisions that might have an adverse effect on his program and goals, either domestic or foreign.

Although there was no formally approved strategy for fighting the war, there was a prevailing assumption as to how the U.S. could make the most effective use of its power, how it could "win," namely, that through the application of graduated or measured pressure ("calibration" and "fine tuning" were terms used at the time) the U.S. could convince the Communists that they could not win, and they would then relent and fade away or agree to some kind of settlement.²⁰ As Bill Moyers, one of the President's prin-

²⁰ See pt. II of this study, pp. 211-214, 233-237 and 366 ff. and pt. III, pp. 6, 18-19.

One of the leading proponents of graduated pressure was Walt W. Rostow, who had been a professor and a member of the staff of a research center at MIT, and in 1961 had joined the Kennedy administration as the NSC staff member principally responsible for Vietnam, after which he served as Director of Policy Planning in the State Department and then returned to the White House in 1966 as the President's National Security Adviser. The graduated pressure concept was, in fact, dubbed the "Rostow thesis."

According to Rostow, "By applying limited, graduated military actions reinforced by political and economic pressures on a nation providing external support for insurgency, we should be able to cause that nation to decide to reduce greatly or eliminate altogether support for the insurgency." *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. IV, p. 337. The objective would not be to destroy the ability of that nation to provide support, but to affect its "calculation of interests" with respect to the consequences if it did not reduce or eliminate such support.

For an incisive analysis of the development of the "strategy of calibrated escalation" in relation to the doctrine of "flexible response," see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), especially chs. 7 and 8. Gaddis concludes that "calibration" strategy was a failure. "What strikes one in retrospect about the strategy of calibrated escalation," he says, "is the extent to which, as so often happened in Vietnam, the effects produced were precisely opposite from those intended." (p. 249) He continues (p. 254): "[The] central object of U.S. military policy is to create an environment of stability in a nuclear age." Rostow wrote in 1966: "this requires as never before that military policy be the servant of political purposes and be woven intimately into civil policy." To be sure, this had been the objective all along of the 'calibration' strategy: it reflected the immense confidence in the ability to 'manage' crises and control bureaucracies that was characteristic of 'flexible response,' the concern to integrate force and rationality, to find some middle ground between the insanity of nuclear war and the humiliation of appeasement. But it was also a curiously self-centered strategy, vague as to the objects to be deterred, heedless of the extent to which adversaries determined its nature and pace, parochial in its assumption that those adversaries shared its own preoccupations and priorities, blind to the extent to which the indiscriminate use of force had come to replace the measured precision of the original concept."

For theoretical treatments as well as critiques of graduated pressure as a function or instrumentality of "coercive diplomacy" see the references cited in pt. II of this study, p. 342, and pt. III, p. 118.

There has been remarkably little reassessment and reconsideration of the application of coercive diplomacy in Vietnam, or the use of graduated pressure, on the part of those who played leading roles in explicating these ideas, or who, like W. W. Rostow, were advocates while serving in the government. The best available critiques besides Gaddis are Alexander L. George, David K. Hall and William E. Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy: Laos, Cuba, Vietnam* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), and Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980).

Even more remarkable is the fact that the U.S. Government itself does not seem to have felt the need for a reappraisal of the use of coercive diplomacy and the use of graduated pressure in Vietnam. A large and expensive research project conducted in 1979-1980 by the BDM Corporation on *The Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam* for the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College (McLean, Va.: 1980), for example, scarcely touches the subject. The only relevant studies by persons associated with the government are Krepinovich, *The Army and Vietnam*, and Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989), both written by career military officers. (Krepinovich has since retired.) Both are very useful, but Clodfelter's deals more directly with the question of co-

Continued

cipal assistants during 1964–1966, said about the mood of the President and his associates: “There was a belief that if we indicated a willingness to use our power, they would get the message and back away from an all-out confrontation. . . . There was a confidence . . . that when the chips were really down, the other people would fold.”²¹

A similar assessment was given by Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance:²²

I think that a lot of us felt that by the gradual application of force the North Vietnamese and the NLF would be forced to seek a political settlement of the problem. We had seen the gradual application of force applied in the Cuban missile crisis, and had seen a very successful result.²³ We believed that if this same gradual and restrained application of force were applied in South Vietnam, that one could expect the same kind of result; that rational people on the other side would respond to increasing military pressure and would therefore try and seek a political solution.

What was President Johnson’s own view of the use of graduated pressure? This is difficult to discern from the available evidence, but his actions in approving plans based on this approach and in rejecting or postponing proposals for a more rapid and larger use of force, as well as the importance he obviously attached to such detailed controls on escalation as the approval of bombing targets, suggest that he was inclined to prefer “progressive squeeze and talk” to “full/fast-squeeze,” to use the terminology of Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton.²⁴ This was doubtless due in part to the President’s desire to keep the war limited in size, scope, and level of violence, and to keep it from interfering with his other programs and goals, but he also seems to have felt that this was the preferred method for responding to the threat—that it was more likely to produce the desired result with fewer adverse consequences than would a full/fast squeeze.

Graduated pressure was also a method of influencing behavior which was personally congenial to Johnson and compatible with his style of dealing with people and events. As Doris Kearns writes, “Johnson had grounded his actions all his life on the conviction that every man had his price. That must also be true of Ho Chi Minh. . . .”²⁵ In a meeting with Senator George S. McGovern (D/

ercive diplomacy/graduated pressure. See also the critical study by Earl H. Tilford, Jr., a retired Air Force officer who was one of the historians in the Office of Air Force History, *Crosswinds: The Air Force’s Setup in Vietnam* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A & M Univ. Press, 1992), and the monograph by Col. Dennis M. Drew, director of the Airpower Research Institute, *ROLLING THUNDER 1965: Anatomy of a Failure*, Airpower Research Institute Report No. AU-ARI-CP-86-3 (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air Univ. Press, 1986).

²¹ “Bill Moyers Talks About the War and LBJ, An Interview,” *Atlantic* (July 1968). Paul Hammond concludes that “the tone and outcome of Johnson’s Vietnam deliberations cannot be explained without employing hubris as an explanatory factor. I mean to say that Johnson’s advisors, and Johnson himself, in their failure to address from the outset the prospect of failure, particularly in the context of setting severe constraints on the employment of military force, assumed that failure was beyond serious consideration.” Hammond, *LBJ and the Management of Foreign Relations*, p. 197.

²² Johnson Library, Cyrus Vance Oral History, 1970.

²³ According to Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 231, the Kennedy administration regarded its handling of the Cuban missile crisis as, “a textbook demonstration of ‘flexible response’ in action, and, hence, as a model to be followed elsewhere.”

²⁴ See pt. III of this study, p. 18.

²⁵ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 266.

S. Dak.) in early 1965, after the U.S. began bombing the North as part of its graduated pressure plan, the President explained that he was "going up old Ho Chi Minh's leg an inch at a time."²⁶

Can the graduated pressure plan that had been developed in November-December 1964 and accepted, in principle at least, by the President (who also approved the beginning of operations carried out according to the plan), be considered to have been a strategy? In one sense, this plan, which comes as close to being a statement of strategy as any plan developed and used during the war, was at least the beginning of a strategy: it was directed to the pursuit of a specific national goal and prescribed the way in which national power could be used for the achievement of that goal. Yet it did not qualify as a strategy in other respects. As approved by the President's principal advisers and subsequently accepted if not explicitly approved by the President, it was not a statement of the problem facing the United States, of U.S. goals, of available and appropriate means, and of whether those means were sufficient to achieve the stipulated ends. Moreover, it failed to address the major question which confronted the U.S. in 1965, namely, whether and how U.S. ground forces should be used.

The plan also did not specifically address some of the major strategic questions with respect to how the war should be fought, especially whether it should be limited to South Vietnam, what restraints should be applied vis-à-vis China and Russia, what limits to place on bombing, whether the U.S. should use nuclear weapons. Other major questions which were not addressed were whether the U.S. should use its ground forces if the political situation in South Vietnam continued to be so unstable, what kind of a role the U.S. should play in the war if it decided to intervene more directly and extensively in the South, how American ground forces should be used if the U.S. decided to expand its role, and how and whether those forces could be used effectively under the conditions and circumstances which prevailed.²⁷

Although the graduated pressure plan as approved by the President provided for a possible diplomatic outcome, the questions of how negotiations might be facilitated and what U.S. tactics and goals might be were given even less attention than military aspects of the plan.

Above all, the plan was silent about what the U.S. should do if the North Vietnamese did not respond to pressure as expected and

²⁶ George McGovern, *Grassroots* (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 194.

²⁷ During the deliberations of the Working Group which developed the plan (see pt. II of this study, p. 375), there were papers on and discussions of a number of aspects, including such questions as whether to use nuclear weapons, whether and when to use U.S. ground forces, what kind of military operations to conduct in Laos, whether to conduct an amphibious landing in North Vietnam. Unfortunately, there apparently are no notes of most of these meetings or other sources from which to discern what was discussed and how and why the content of the final position paper presented to the President on Dec. 1, 1964 was determined.

Nor do the tabbed materials which accompany the position paper shed much light on the subject. Tab D states in very cryptic fashion the actions which would occur during the first 30 days (Phase I), the transition from Phase I to Phase II, and the next 2-6 months (Phase II). In Phase II, in addition to airstrikes, the plan called for deployment of additional U.S. forces "as necessary" as well as aerial mining of North Vietnamese ports coupled with a U.S. naval blockade.

Tab F, which dealt with possible Communist reactions and U.S. countermoves, stated that in the event of a ground attack by the North on the South, the U.S., in addition to using its forces to defend the South, would "consider seizing and occupying all of NVN." In the event of a ground attack by the Chinese, the U.S. would use its forces to attack China, with "nuclear strikes if necessary."

a different approach were required—either some form of settlement or withdrawal or another kind of persuasion/coercion.²⁸ Little if any consideration seems to have been given to the possibility that, rather than for the U.S. to succeed in coercing the Communists, the Communists, by protracting the war and attriting U.S. forces, could coerce the United States and force it to seek a negotiated withdrawal.

The graduated pressure plan, however, while coming as close as any other statement or plan during the war, was not intended to be a statement of strategy or even a general plan of action. William Bundy, who was in charge of developing the November-December 1964 plan, says that it had only “short-term validity, giving initial guidance for a bombing program. The group certainly did not think of itself as prescribing an overall strategy if the North Vietnamese kept coming, Saigon could not hold them, and large-scale U.S. forces were sent in.”²⁹

Although the graduated pressure plan did not stipulate any limits on the war, there were limits imposed by the Johnson administration. One very important limit was the *de facto* ceiling on manpower that resulted from the President’s rejection in July 1965 of the proposal by McNamara and the military to order national mobilization, which would have allowed the Reserves to be called up as well as invoking various economic controls.³⁰ There were also limits on the conduct of the war: no land invasion of North Vietnam, no serious encroachment on China, only limited covert operations in Laos and Cambodia, no use of nuclear or chemical weapons, no mass bombing of population centers or civilian targets, no mining of harbors.

The military, McGeorge Bundy said later in an interview, were allowed by civilian authorities to do “whatever they were not forbidden to do.” “It may have been quixotic to suppose that you could conduct a military campaign with an essentially political purpose. But, of course, that was what Vietnam was all about all the way.”³¹

²⁸ Douglas Pike says that the U.S. effort was afflicted by “strategic ambiguity,” which resulted from the fact that “we first committed ourselves to the war and then began to think about it comprehensively. The highest level leadership did not initially sit down and address in detailed and extended fashion its strategic position, did not discuss and analyze enemy strengths, weaknesses, and probable strategies, did not wrangle and argue and finally hammer out a fully articulated strategy.”

“There was in this behavior a sense of enormous self-confidence, indeed a kind of unconscious arrogance on the part of the Americans.”

Moreover, he notes, “we entered the war without fully appreciating the enemy’s strategy. Worse, we never made a serious effort to correct this shortcoming. The highest leadership never devoted itself to systematically learning about Hanoi’s strategic thinking and doctrine.” Pike, “Conduct of the War: Strategic Factors, 1965–1968,” in *The Second Indochina War*, John Slight (ed.), p. 112.

²⁹ Communication from William P. Bundy to the author, July 1993.

³⁰ As Gen. Douglas Kinnard has observed, “This [the 500,000 limitation], rather than any specific strategic or tactical plan, was the basis of the manpower goal which the Military Assistance Command [Westmoreland’s headquarters] sought.” Kinnard, *The War Managers* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992, 3d. ed., 1977), p. 36. General Kinnard served in Vietnam in 1966–1967 as Chief of Operations Analysis in Westmoreland’s J-3 (Operations), and 1969–1970 as Commanding General of the II Field Force Artillery and then as Chief of Staff of the II Field Force Vietnam.

See also Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President*, p. 56, and Summers, *On Strategy*, p. 74, and John Stuckey and Joseph H. Pistorius, “Mobilization for the Vietnam War: A Political and Military Catastrophe,” *Parameters* (Spring 1988).

³¹ CRS Interview with McGeorge Bundy, Jan. 8, 1979.

Finally, as suggested by Bundy's comments, there is the relationship of political policy and strategy (national policy) and military strategy and plans—of military means and political ends. Military leaders in the American system of political control operate within an uncertain environment that can—and did in the case of Vietnam—produce confusion and frustration in carrying out politically determined policy. Based on a survey of U.S. generals with command positions in Vietnam during 1965–1972, Douglas Kinnard concluded:³²

Apparently, translating the overall United States objectives into something understandable to the general officers of the war was not successfully accomplished by policymakers. It is possible for lower-level soldiers and officials to fight a war without being sure of their objectives, but that almost 70 percent of the Army generals who managed the war were uncertain of its objectives mirrors a deep-seated strategic failure: the inability of policymakers to frame tangible, obtainable goals.

The President and perhaps others responsible for the political direction of the war, however, apparently did not feel the need to frame "tangible, obtainable goals," in the sense of providing written directives that would be considered adequate by the military in translating political policy and strategy into military strategy, plans and operations. In part, as reinforced by the President's own penchant for not becoming committed in advance, this resulted from concern about approving statements of strategy and plans that went beyond what those in political authority were willing to approve, or which could be construed by the military to convey authority or justify actions that might be contrary to politically determined policy. Rather, the President and his associates seem to have believed that the general statements of policy that were approved, together with limitations on operations that were stipulated, were adequate for the understanding on the part of the military as to what was being required of them. Beyond that, because it was being fought as a limited war and in a highly political/military context involving the U.S.S.R. and China, especially the risk of Chinese military intervention, as well as sensitive relations with the South Vietnamese, close control by political policymakers was thought to be essential in order to keep the war limited, and, through graduated pressure, to employ military means effectively in securing political ends. Such controls were also important to avoid domestic consequences if the public became aroused because of the apparent lack of success of U.S. efforts or the cost in men and money, or through an excess of patriotic zeal.³³

Preparing for the "Other War": Pacification and Development

While the military buildup was taking place in August-October 1965 and plans for the use of U.S. forces were being proposed, new efforts were also underway with respect to the nonmilitary side of the war. Recognizing that the war could not be "won" and U.S. ob-

³² Kinnard, *The War Managers*, p. 25.

³³ For a very cogent analysis of the expectation of U.S. military leaders regarding the availability of resources needed to "win" the war, and the effect of this innovation on military strategy and tactics, see Hammond, *LBJ and the Presidential Management of Foreign Relations*, pp. 186 ff.

jectives achieved unless and until national and local governments became more viable, the U.S. and the South Vietnamese began taking steps to strengthen the institutions of government and to promote the security and well-being of people, especially in the rural areas where the Communists held sway.

In his unpublished memoir, Lodge said that upon arrival in Saigon in early August 1965 he took several steps along these lines. He told the CIA station chief that he was depending on him to have a current list of South Vietnamese commanders "who might be eligible for diplomatic recognition as head of a government in the event that the Communists subverted the then government of Viet-Nam." He told Philip Habib, chief of the Political Section of the U.S. Embassy, to prepare a study on what would constitute a "satisfactory outcome" of the war. And he told his new assistant, Edward G. Lansdale, to advise Nguyen Cao Ky "so that he would become a true political leader," and to use his staff to protect Ky's physical safety and to advise him about possible coup attempts.³⁴

State Department policy planners also stressed the need for political development. In "Politics and Victory in South Vietnam," W. W. Rostow, chairman of State's Policy Planning Council (formerly on the NSC staff), argued that unless there could be "some effective political expression of South Vietnamese anti-Communist nationalism," military and diplomatic successes could come to naught.³⁵ "Thus," the paper said, "we must turn to the problem of the political life of South Vietnam with a seriousness which matches that now accorded to military and diplomatic aspects of the crisis; and with far more creative imagination, because our margin of influence is less and the techniques of operation less familiar." The "greatest single weakness of the U.S. Government in dealing with developing nations is our weakness in doing this kind of job on a systematic high-priority basis."

The "working hypothesis" of the paper, as had been suggested earlier by, among others, George A. Carver, Jr. of the CIA, was that a revolutionary process was occurring in South Vietnam in which, according to the paper, "the trend is toward the emergence of a rather typical proud and assertive young nationalism. . . ." The paper quoted Carver's argument that if this process, which was represented by the rise of the Buddhists and the younger military officers like Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu, could produce a political balance arrived at by the Vietnamese themselves—"a balance embodied in an institutional framework adopted to Vietnamese needs and realities and supported by the rising emotions of Vietnamese nationalists," and if this regenerated government could then enlist the support of people in the provinces, the counterinsurgency program "would be well launched on the road to genuine progress."³⁶

³⁴Massachusetts Historical Society, Lodge Papers, unpublished "Vietnam Memoir," pt. IV, ch. IX, pp. 1-2.

³⁵There is a copy of the paper, dated August 1965, with a cover memorandum from W. W. Rostow, Chairman of the Policy Planning Council, dated August 2 and 3 respectively, in the Johnson Library, NSF Name File, Chester Cooper Memos, and in the State Department, Lot File 72 D 139.

³⁶Carver's article, "The Real Revolution in South Vietnam," in which he was not identified as working for the CIA, appeared in *Foreign Affairs* (April 1965). Frances FitzGerald, whose father had been a leading CIA official, called the article "a sublime example of American official scholarship," and said that the rise of the young officers was merely "a change of men," and

Rostow's paper suggested a "working agenda" for this new program. First, it was essential for the South Vietnamese military to have a common view of the future of the country, and to play a role in preventing a Communist takeover while helping with the establishment of civilian leadership. But it should not continue to exercise such leadership directly. Second, "It may be time for South Vietnam to develop a modern revolutionary party which would seek to embrace within it all the major groups in the society except the Communists and those irreversibly discredited by their past association with French colonialism, appeasement of Hanoi, etc. . . . a political organization to focus the authentic nationalism which suffuses the country into an instrument capable of coping with Communist organizational techniques. . . ." This would require the development of a political program around which the major groups could rally, which would involve: "a stance of independence towards all foreigners; national unity in the South, with all Vietnamese unity as a long-run objective; an end to corruption; rapid industrial development; land reform and other measures which would ease the burden on the farmer; anti-Communism; etc."

Work should be started, the paper said, on a five-year "reconstruction development program," which would include the strengthening of local institutions to encourage citizen participation in development, specifically community development programs, trade unions, farmers' associations and cooperatives.

In order for this program to succeed, the paper concluded, "the whole of the U.S. Government, from the President down, [must] accept this kind of effort as equivalent in priority to what we do in Vietnam in the military and diplomatic fields," and the U.S. Mission in Saigon would have to be organized for such a campaign and "equipped with men who command the rare skills necessary for this kind of enterprise."

The paper did not question whether such an agenda could be implemented in a country disrupted by war, and whose culture was so very different from that of the United States on which the political concepts and the proposals of the paper were based. Just as the military assumed that U.S. forces could fight effectively in Vietnam, so the Chairman of the State Department Policy Planning Council appeared to have assumed that the U.S. should help to bring about this kind of political change ("development") in South Vietnam and other "developing" nations, and to have assumed implicitly that this could and would be done successfully.

These views about the importance of political development in South Vietnam were widely shared throughout the U.S. Government, both in the Executive and in Congress.³⁷ President Johnson himself appears to have been very concerned about this aspect of the war. Partly as a result of the Diem coup, which he had opposed, he was determined to secure and maintain a stable and effective government.

that, "Probity, a desire for social justice and equal opportunity for all—such virtues might more reasonably be expected in the heads of a Mafia ring than in those generals who had spent their formative years struggling to the top of the corrupt, inefficient, and demoralized army of the Diem regime." *Fire in the Lake* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), pp. 251–253.

³⁷ For some expressions of congressional views, see pt. III of this study, pp. 263–265.

Moreover, the new team in the U.S. Mission in Saigon was committed to political development. Ambassador Lodge viewed the war as a politico-military struggle,³⁸ as did Lansdale, a CIA officer known for helping to suppress the Communists in the Philippines and for his experience and skill in dealing with the Vietnamese.³⁹ During his previous term as Ambassador, Lodge, as a way of focusing U.S. and South Vietnamese counterinsurgency programs, and in order to demonstrate how an important area dominated by the Communists could be pacified, proposed that the seven provinces adjacent to Saigon, which had long been a Communist stronghold, be singled out for attention. This program, called Hop Tac (the words mean "cooperation"), began in September 1964, but little progress had been made by the time Lodge was reappointed Ambassador in July 1965.

In a "working paper" on "Solving the 'Politico' Part of the 'Politico-Military' Vietnam Problem," Lodge told Lansdale that he would be responsible for getting the Hop Tac program and those in other areas "moving—always with solid, durable growth; never with bogus statistics."⁴⁰ This task, Lodge said, "entails nothing less than starting a true political movement with all the requisite practical and ideological aspects for a new and better life for the Vietnamese people. It means real—and not pretend—social revolution and social justice."⁴¹ "This," he added, "would be the ultimate body blow to the Viet Cong and would guarantee U.S. success."

³⁸ For Lodge's views see pt. III of this study, pp. 153–262, 386–387, and *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. II, pp. 527 ff.

³⁹ For Lansdale, see the entries under his name in the index of pts. I and II of this study, his memoir, *In the Midst of Wars* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), and his article "Viet Nam: Do We Understand Revolution?" *Foreign Affairs* (October 1964).

In the summer of 1964, Lansdale, apparently hoping and possibly anticipating that his original team would be reactivated, prepared two long memoranda, one on the development of the South Vietnamese political system, and the other, "Concept for Victory in Vietnam," June 8, 1964. Copies are in the Massachusetts Historical Society, Lodge Papers.

See also the biography by Cecil B. Currey, *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1988), especially pp. 279–282. There are also some valuable insights with respect to Lansdale in Zalin Grant's interesting and provocative book *Facing the Phoenix* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

Early in his first appointment to Vietnam in 1963–1964, Lodge had requested that Lansdale be assigned to be the head of the CIA station in South Vietnam where he could be "a sort of 'Lawrence of Arabia' to take charge under my supervision of all U.S. relationships with the change of government here." This was not approved. (Lodge Papers, "Vietnam Memoir," pt. II, p. 6.) See also U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, vol. IV, Vietnam, August–December 1963 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1991), pp. 205, 240, 753.

⁴⁰ Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam. This paper was originally prepared in May 1965 as instructions for John McNaughton, Lodge's choice for the post of Chief of Staff in the Embassy (according to Lodge, the President also preferred McNaughton). In a discussion with the President on May 27, Lodge said that "this was the one man I was asking for and that it was clear that the job in Vietnam was far more important than the job which McNaughton held in Washington." (Lodge's memorandum on this conversation, as well as the conversation on March 25 in which the President mentioned his preference for McNaughton are in pt. III of Lodge's "Vietnam Memoir.") On June 22, however, Lodge talked to McGeorge Bundy, who said that William Bundy thought McNaughton was "too inflexible," and preferred William Sullivan, who subsequently held the post for a few months prior to taking up his new position as Ambassador to Laos. (The memorandum on this conversation is also in pt. III of Lodge's "Vietnam Memoir.") William Bundy, however, says that while Sullivan was well qualified, that he preferred William Porter (who subsequently was appointed to the post, after Sullivan became Ambassador.) (Communication from William Bundy to the author, July 1993.)

⁴¹ In their practical application, Lodge's lofty ideas tended at times to become quite prosaic and to reflect American concepts of promoting social and political satisfaction—especially when the situation seemed to call for prompt action—through steps to improve the material conditions of life. In a cable to President Johnson Lodge said, for example, that Saigon "contains more examples of grinding and desperate poverty than ever before. This is objectionable on humanitarian grounds. It is also extremely dangerous. The ability to cope basically with the overcrowding, the undernourishment and the filth would take years. But I am studying things which we could do quickly, one of which assuredly is keeping the price of rice under control. Another is

"We have had everything in Vietnam except good practical politics," Lodge said. "Only by working at the grass roots—militarily, politically and socially—is victory in Viet Nam possible. The effort must start in the 12,000 hamlets, among the real hamlet people who owe their position to their fellows and not to government appointment. From them a 'People's Force' must be created."⁴²

Such a "competitive political movement," Lodge said, also was needed for success against the Communists worldwide: "There is clearly a limit to our ability to meet force with force. If we send troops to enough places, we—not the Communists—will be con-

cloth, another is the feasibility of putting in latrines and electric lights in the many places where both are lacking." U.S., Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S, Saigon to Washington 621, Aug. 26, 1965.

⁴²On September 27, Lodge held a meeting at which he presented a working paper for purposes of illustrating the steps which should be taken, as he reported in a cable to the President on September 30 (U.S. Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S, Saigon to Washington 1100) "in order to hasten the day when a true precinct organization exists which will destroy the Viet Cong in small groupings." This was the text of the paper:

"In each city precinct and each rural hamlet immediately adjacent to a thoroughly pacified city (i.e. the smallest unit from a public safety standpoint) the following program should be undertaken in the following order:

"A. Saturate the minds of the people with some socially conscious and attractive ideology, which is susceptible of being carried out.

"B. Organize the people politically with a hamlet chief and committee whose actions would be backed by the police or the military using police-type tactics. This committee should have representatives of the political, military, economic and social organizations and should have an executive who directs.

"C. With the help of the police or military, conduct a census.

"D. Issue identification cards.

"E. Issue permits for the movement of goods and people.

"F. When necessary, hold a curfew.

"G. Thanks to all those methods, go through each hamlet with a fine tooth comb to apprehend the terrorists.

"H. At the first quiet moment, bring in agricultural experts, school teachers, etc.

"I. The hamlet should also be organized for its own defense against small Viet Cong external attacks.

"J. When the above has been done, hold local elections."

Progress along military lines, Lodge said, was considerably ahead of progress along civil and political lines. "Yet civil-political progress is utterly indispensable to a successful outcome. For one thing, the majority of Viet Cong are probably still in small groups rather than in main force units and will thus not be reached by the planned military offensives. These small VC groups cannot be overcome without the support of the population, organized on a precinct basis. If these VC are not overcome, the worst of the aggression will still be going on, requiring continuing presence of American ground troops.

"It seems clear that U.S. military can prevent the Viet Cong from taking over the state, can destroy or neutralize main force units, and can destroy hitherto impregnable redoubts. These are very big achievements indeed. But they do not prevent the Viet Cong from continuing to have a disruptive and debilitating effect on the country which would mean that as soon as we left, the Viet Cong would take over again. In other words, a durable result would not have been accomplished."

In another cable to the President Lodge described what he and members of the U.S. Mission Council would consider to be a "satisfactory outcome" of the pacification program (U.S. Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S, Saigon to Washington 1377, Oct. 21, 1965):

"1. The area around Saigon and south of Saigon (all of the Delta) must be pacified. . . . 'Pacified' is defined as the existence of a state of mind among the people that they have a stake in the government as shown by the holding of local elections. It also means a proper local police force. . . .

"2. The thickly populated northeastern strip along the coast . . . would be completely pacified.

"3. The GVN would retain its present control of all cities and all provincial capitals.

"4. All principal roads would be open to the Vietnamese military day and night.

"5. Those areas not pacified would not be safe havens for the VC but would be contested by energetic offensive forays to prevent consolidation of a communist base.

"6. The VC disarm; and their weapons and explosives are removed from their hands. Their main force units would be broken up.

"7. North Vietnam stops its infiltration.

"8. North Vietnam stops its direction of the war.

"9. Chieu Hoi rehabilitation would be extended to individual Viet Cong who are suitable. . . .

"10. Hardcore VC to go to North Vietnam.

"11. GVN to approve."

tained [a reference to the "containment" of communism]. A competitive political movement is the answer."⁴³

Lansdale replied in a memorandum, a portion of which Lodge, who had done so with his own memorandum, sent to the President.⁴⁴ This was Lansdale's response to Lodge:

The military can suppress the Communist forces, even keep them suppressed by continued military action, but cannot defeat them short of genocide unless our side puts the war on a political footing in Viet Nam.

The enemy in Vietnam understands thoroughly the political nature of the war he is waging. The enemy sees his every act as a political act, and uses psychological, military, and socio-economic weapons to gain his political goals. This is a strict rule the enemy borrowed from Clausewitz. Lenin, Mao, Ho, and Giap have been clear and firm on this basic rule. The Viet Cong have obeyed it amazingly well. Our side has broken this rule over and over again. It is being broken daily right now.

Thus, when you ask my help to get a Counter Subversion/Terrorism program moving, you really are asking me to help you to get our side to start obeying and applying the prime rule of the war in Vietnam. It isn't separate from the other programs. It is the basis upon which the war in Vietnam will be won or lost. The psychological, military, and socio-economic programs are its instruments, not ends in themselves. Political bankruptcy in Vietnam and the direct use of U.S. combat forces complicate your task vastly. (A U.S. commander, tasked to attack a suspected enemy position, is going to clobber it first by bombing or artillery to cut his own U.S. casualties to a minimum when they attack; casualties of Vietnamese noncombatants must be secondary to his responsibility to his own command and mission.) I point this out to underscore the fact that something brand new, perhaps of considerable difference from anything previous, will have to be worked out in Vietnam to put the war on the essential political footing. It might require heroic measures, such as moving noncombatants out of Central Vietnam into the far South, to permit the military threat to be resolved conclusively in Central Vietnam by military means while non-combatant refugees get a real chance at a new life. Again, this could be a wrong move. You are going to need some exceptionally expert help to solve this vital problem; for many reasons, it's your biggest.

When McGeorge Bundy gave this memorandum to the President he said in his cover note: "Lansdale appears quite ready to take

⁴³In 1984, shortly before he died, Lodge sent a letter to his old friend and former classmate at Harvard University, Corliss Lamont. In a letter in November 1965 which Lodge apparently had never answered, Lamont had urged him to "stop abetting President Johnson's evil actions and design in Vietnam," and to resign as Ambassador and "help transform the Republican Party into the great American Peace Party." In his letter to Lamont in 1984, thanking him for a copy of his autobiography, Lodge said regarding Lamont's 1965 letter: "You were right—we were wrong and we failed—I should have resigned sooner." *Harvard Magazine*, November-December 1985, "The Lamont-Lodge Letters."

⁴⁴Johnson Library, NSF Memos to the President—McGeorge Bundy. Lansdale's memorandum is in the Massachusetts Historical Society, Lodge Papers, memorandum to Lodge from Lansdale, "Your Working Paper on the 'Politico' Part of the Vietnam Problem," July 29, 1965.

over MACV—and yet he's not all wrong. Can we afford some creative tension?"⁴⁵

Lansdale's official position was Senior Liaison Officer, and his team of about ten, primarily members of his earlier teams in the Philippines in the late 1940s-early 1950s and his 1954 Vietnam team, was known as the SLO team. He was given the title of chairman of the U.S. Mission Liaison Group, a position in which, as Lodge said in a cable to the President, Lansdale would be "the spokesman [for pacification] for the whole U.S. Mission" in relations with the Government of South Vietnam.⁴⁶ His role was never well defined, partly because neither he nor Lodge saw the need for it, and partly because of the amorphous nature of the task he had been assigned, based on the idea that the U.S. could and should seek to bring about major political change and development in South Vietnam.⁴⁷

Shortly after he arrived in Saigon on August 20, 1965, Lodge was contacted by another advocate of the idea of waging a counter revolution to defeat the Communists, John Paul Vann, a former U.S. Army officer and military adviser in Vietnam, who had returned as a civilian representative for pacification programs in Hau Nghia Province, located between Saigon and the border of Cambodia. During his service as a military adviser, Vann became convinced that the struggle could be won only if there were a government with popular support through which the goals of the "social revolution," which he felt was occurring in South Vietnam, could be realized. This, he argued in a paper which he wrote in the summer of 1965, required U.S. intervention in the affairs of South Vietnam "to insure the emergence of a government responsive to a majority of its

⁴⁵ Johnson Library, NSF Memos to the President—McGeorge Bundy.

⁴⁶ *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. II, pp. 530-531, Lodge to the President, Saigon to Washington 716, Sept. 2, 1965.

⁴⁷ For Lodge's memorandum to Lansdale describing Lansdale's role, see the Lodge Papers, Lodge to Lansdale, Aug. 9, 1965. According to the memorandum, Lansdale and his staff would be responsible only to Lodge.

There is very little public information on the activities of Lansdale and his team. He sent copies of many of his reports to William Bundy, beginning with the report on Sept. 17, 1965, Saigon to Washington 333, and there are copies of these in the Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S.

Frances FitzGerald, (*Fire in the Lake*, p. 269), depicts the problems faced by Lansdale:

"Again at the behest of the CIA, Lansdale returned to Vietnam at the end of 1965 with a team of enthusiastic young men and the general mission of injecting some new ideas into the counterinsurgency program. This vague definition of role did not serve him as it once had. Lansdale's zeal for political conversion and his disapproval of the very scale on which the American operations were now conducted made him an uncomfortable neighbor for the 'regulars' at the mission. In a series of careful jurisdictional maneuvers, the bureaucrats narrowed his 'area of responsibility' to the point where they had effectively cut him off from the mission command and from all work except that of a symbolic nature. For the next few years Lansdale would spend most of his time in talk with Vietnamese intellectuals, a few ex-Viet Minh officers, and his own American devotees. Living in his grand villa, isolated from the press, he would become an American counterpart to the elusive Vietnamese 'Third Force,' a hero to idealistic young American officials who saw the failure of American policy as a failure of tactics. Lansdale's bureaucratic defeat was only an indication of the general shift in emphasis of American policy. With the commitment of American troops Washington began to look upon the war as an American affair. The Vietnamese seemed to recede into the background, and along with them those Americans who had spent years in Vietnam and believed in the regeneration of a non-Communist nationalism. The romantic warriors, such as Frank Scotton and Jean Sauvageot, who, like Lansdale, spoke and thought Vietnamese, who loved the exoticism of the villages and believed with fervor in a non-Communist liberation front—they were to remain merely the 'characters' in a generally faceless enterprise. With all the civilian infighting, the talk of political strategies and 'winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people,' the American war was to be a conventional military operation."

people.”⁴⁸ The existing government exploited the people. “It is, in fact, a continuation of the French colonial system of government with upper-class Vietnamese replacing the French.” Moreover, the system was inefficient and should be simplified and made less cumbersome in order to provide better service to the public.

Vann proposed that there should be a three-year pilot project in three provinces in which authority would be decentralized to the provinces from the central government. Provincial officials would be given control over programs, personnel, and the allocation of resources. All U.S. assistance programs in each province would be unified under a single American adviser. There would be “political indoctrination and motivational training” of all South Vietnamese governmental personnel in the provinces as well as American advisers. South Vietnamese military units in the province would also be trained for civic action and psychological warfare.

In the paper, Vann was critical of the way in which the war was being fought: “Emphasis is placed upon the use of physical obstacles to provide population security rather than the fostering of a spirit of resistance.” “Gadgetry, air power, and artillery continue to be substituted for the discriminate ground actions required to prosecute the military side of this war without unduly alienating the civilian population.”

Vann said that every effort should be made to “sell” the proposed program to the Government of South Vietnam, but that, “If this cannot be done without compromising the principal provisions of the proposal, then GVN [Government of Vietnam] must be forced to accept U.S. judgment and direction.” (emphasis in original)

Vann submitted his proposal to a number of U.S. officials, including Ambassador Lodge (with whom he had become acquainted after leaving the Army and before returning to Vietnam when he helped with the Lodge for President campaign in Colorado). In a letter to Lodge in July 1965, Vann proposed that Lodge appoint him as his assistant for pacification to keep himself personally informed about the situation. Lodge saw Vann briefly in September, after Lansdale and some members of his team had visited Vann in Hau Nghia Province, but nothing came of the meeting nor did Vann receive the expected invitation to join Lansdale’s team.⁴⁹

One of the members of Lansdale’s team was Daniel Ellsberg (later an antiwar activist who achieved notoriety when he made public the Defense Department’s internal history of the Vietnam war, the *Pentagon Papers*). Ellsberg, who at the time was a strong supporter of the war, had just come from Washington where he had been special assistant to John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of

⁴⁸ John Paul Vann, “Harnessing the Revolution in South Vietnam,” Sept. 10, 1965, U.S., Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S. See also Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), pp. 535–539, and Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province*, pp. 107–110.

Vann’s paper was prepared in collaboration with three of his associates, Douglas Ramsey, (a CIA officer who was then acting under the cover of a Foreign Service officer) who was Vann’s Assistant Provincial Representative in Hau Nghia Province and was later captured in 1966 by the Communists and imprisoned until the end of the war, Everet Bumgardner, who had been in Vietnam with the U.S. information program in 1954 and returned in 1965 as head of the program’s field operations (propaganda and psychological warfare), and Frank Scotton, Bumgardner’s principal field operative. In 1964, Scotton and others had organized 45-man propaganda/paramilitary teams in Quang Ngai Province. For more information on these men and their relationships with Vann, see Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 544–548, 552–553.

Defense for International Security Affairs.⁵⁰ He had been with Lansdale on his visit to Vann, and returned alone for a three-day visit in October 1965. In a report, "Visit to an Insecure Province," he described the situation in Hau Nghia Province and explained Vann's ideas.⁵¹ Vann, he said, believed that it was necessary to find a way of infusing the South Vietnamese system with greater efficiency, honesty, and sense of purpose, and that to do so "we should be exerting very heavy American influence (not 'heavy-handed,' but 'effective'), by intervening in specific cases where necessary, to change the Vietnamese administrative pattern of ignoring talent, experience and competent performance in handing out jobs and promotions in favor of political and family associations, conservatism and payoff." Initially, the U.S. should intervene in selected provinces in an effort to shift responsibility from the older, ensconced leaders to "new, younger, competent leadership with roots in the provinces and with social consciousness and energy." (emphasis in original) This should be done gradually and without publicity. "[M]aximum effort should be taken throughout to preserve 'face' and the facade of Vietnamese authority and control, and to gain the acquiescence of present incumbents. . . ."

Ellsberg said that there were some "obvious objections" to Vann's proposal, especially the charge of "colonialism"—"the closest analogy would be that of a 'good' colonialist power" such as the British in Malaya—but Vann's proposal "has the merit of being relevant to some profoundly serious problems of implementation, and its radical nature is appropriate to the urgency and intractability of these problems."

Ellsberg added:

The familiar postulate that "The war must be won by the Vietnamese" usually conceals the hidden assumption that the war must be won by "*these*" Vietnamese, the ones who head and run the system right now, in Saigon, Corps and provinces. It is not logically guaranteed that this particular set of Vietnamese—with their constricted backgrounds and orientation (quite apart from their competence or dedication, which may be considerable)—will or can win this war. It may be that new leadership is, very simply, a requirement: as one analyst puts it, "leaders who came from, think like, and are responsive to the majority of the population." If so, is the present leadership class going to allow these new leaders to emerge, in time, without considerable U.S. intervention?

We may believe the present leadership group *can* reform itself, and that our best course is to help it do so. Or, we may pin our hopes on starting an evolutionary process in motion—perhaps by the beginnings of representative government—that will eventually transform the nature of the government, its personnel and its elan. In either case, it is still important to

⁵⁰When he went to Vietnam in 1965 Ellsberg volunteered to become a Marine combat infantry officer—a post he had held during three years in the Marines in the 1950s—but he was barred from doing so because his position in the Pentagon had exposed him to highly sensitive information that would be of value to the enemy if he were captured. See the comments in Currey, *Edward Lansdale*, pp. 295–296. McNaughton apparently was not unhappy to see Ellsberg go—see Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 593.

⁵¹A copy of Ellsberg's report is in the Kennedy Library, James Thomson Papers. See also Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat*, pp. 79–81.

see clearly what the natural workings of the present system are, and how they must change. It is no longer sound to hope that all difficulties will dissolve eventually in the friendly atmosphere engendered by Candide-like "optimism" and self-maintained ignorance of realities. . . .

Ellsberg continued:

To say, as Vann does, that the present leaders, bureaucrats and province and district officials *do not* come from or think like the majority of the population, do not know much at all about rural majority, and for the most part are not very interested in making government responsive to the wishes of the majority, may be unpleasant. But it is to say something that is very important about the nature of the problems here.

To say, as Vann does, that ARVN/RF/PF forces [Army of the Republic of Vietnam, Regional Forces, Popular Forces], with relatively rare exceptions, abandon the countryside to the VC every night; do not use recon patrols to develop or check intelligence; do not seek ground contact with the VC, and do not maintain it or pursue when the VC are encountered; do not control by observers the artillery fire by which (along with air) they produce most casualties (enemy and friendly); do not take steps to maintain the security of their operations; do huddle in static, defensive positions and take nearly all their casualties on the defensive; is to say a lot of nasty things, not only about the ARVN but about the effective influence of U.S. advisors, who have harped on these matters for four years. It is also to say some true and important things about the reasons for VC military growth and success, and to suggest the need for putting teeth in the advisory system or else finding an alternative to it. . . .

Vann played a very important role in the pacification program until his death in 1972 in a helicopter crash, but although his ideas about winning the war were well-received by some, and proposals such as that for unifying U.S. operations in each province may have had some influence,⁵² there was less support for his proposal for pressuring the South Vietnamese to accept American direction,⁵³ and after several months Daniel Ellsberg himself concluded that it was not possible for the U.S. to bring about the development of an American-style representative government in South Vietnam.⁵⁴

By the fall of 1965, the American presence and role in Vietnam were becoming so dominant, and the use of military force so paramount, that "nation building" was becoming an adjunct to military operations and the "Americanization" of the war was, as William Bundy and others had feared, proceeding apace. As James Reston said in a series of articles he wrote for the *New York Times* during a trip to Vietnam in August 1965, "When Uncle Sam moves in, somebody has to move over."⁵⁵ According to Bui Diem, then Ky's

⁵² Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 552.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 557.

⁵⁴ A copy of Ellsberg's memorandum to Vann, "Some Vietnamese Thoughts on Representative Institutions in Vietnam," July 26, 1966, is in the files of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, National Archives, RG 46.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, Aug. 29, 1965.

assistant, "The Americans came in like bulldozers," and the war "was now undisputably an American enterprise."⁵⁶

In Washington, there was some concern that the large increase in nonmilitary personnel and activities projected for the coming months could have an adverse effect on "nation-building."⁵⁷ One of the principal Foreign Service Officers dealing with Vietnam was Robert H. Miller, the State Department's desk officer for Vietnam and head of the East Asia Bureau's Vietnam Working Group who was also a State Department representative on the interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee. On October 20, 1965, the committee met to consider a paper prepared by Miller on the future course of the nonmilitary program. In the paper, during the discussion, and in a subsequent memorandum, Miller questioned whether the nonmilitary program was accomplishing its intended purpose or whether changes should be made.⁵⁸ The nonmilitary program consisted, he said, of an accumulation of projects "developed in a crisis atmosphere over the past few years. . . . Each project has been conceived as an urgent requirement demanding priority effort until the point has been reached where all projects are urgent, all are high priority." "This atmosphere," Miller said, "is conducive to the development of massive programs but not to a careful appraisal of programs in Vietnam."

Moreover, Miller said, nonmilitary programs had not had any "measurable success." "The Vietnamese peasant has an infinite capacity to absorb economic and social benefits without returning an ounce of loyalty. This is primarily because, without security, the program impact on the peasant's heart and mind is virtually nil." He concluded that the first priority of nonmilitary programs should be to help provide security, but that this was "a problem that has never been licked, and a problem that in the last analysis must be dealt with by the Vietnamese."

Miller questioned whether the expansion of U.S. nonmilitary programs was hurting rather than helping the South Vietnamese in their efforts to strengthen their institutions and their services to the public:

I cannot escape the conviction that the general thrust of our present effort in Vietnam is increasingly in the direction of assuming governmental functions for ourselves and pushing the GVN aside because of its general inadequacy and incom-

The problem posed for the political program by the increasing role of the military can be seen in the decision in the fall of 1965 to provide for joint civilian-military participation in the administration of the program of rural development, the key to Lodge's concept that the Communists would eventually fade away. Lansdale was responsible for liaison with the new South Vietnamese Ministry of Rural Construction. The U.S. military command, which Lansdale proposed should be an observer in this process, successfully insisted on sharing the role of representation, however, and Lansdale's role was thereby weakened from the outset. This decision, in turn, tended to subordinate the use of political means to the military means then in ascendancy.

See William E. Colby and Peter Forbath, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), pp. 230-236, and Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era* (New York: Free Press, 1977), ch. 7.

⁵⁶Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 153.

⁵⁷Plans for the next fiscal year (July 1, 1966-June 30, 1967) provided for large increases in projects and in personnel. Total "direct hire" staff—U.S. Government employees—would increase from 1,000 to a proposed 3,000. Personnel employed under contracts with private companies and organizations would also expand.

⁵⁸Miller's paper of Oct. 20, 1965 is located in U.S. Department of State, Lot File 72 D 207. His subsequent notes of the meeting and his memorandum of October 25 are in Lot File 71 D 88.

petence. At the same time, our effort is not attacking what remains the essential Communist challenge—gaining control of the country through erosion and subversion at the village and hamlet level. I fear that our present course could lead increasingly to something resembling a U.S. occupation of South Vietnam without our getting at this real, long-term Communist challenge. Under these conditions, I fear that the U.S. could in fact become an occupation force faced with the need to pacify not just the Viet Cong controlled areas but a growing proportion of the total population.

The proposed program for 1966–1967, Miller said, “raises real questions as to whether U.S. nonmilitary programs are rapidly reaching the point where they are beyond both the economic and administrative capacity of South Vietnam to absorb, and whether, if this apparently spiralling situation continues, it could lead to an upsurge of popular feeling against the American presence to the point of undermining our entire effort.”

On the other hand, Miller said that he was encouraged by the efforts of Lansdale and his team to stimulate Vietnamese leaders to develop “*Vietnamese solutions*” (emphasis in original) which could contribute to the “real nation-building process needed to defeat the Viet Cong.”⁵⁹

During the discussion by the Vietnam Coordinating Committee of Miller's paper, there was, as Miller reported in his subsequent memorandum, some support for his analysis, but several members, particularly those from AID and the Department of Defense, “stressed that the U.S. had to undertake many tasks because the GVN was incapable of undertaking them effectively, that Mission programs require our full support, and that it would be wrong to think of changing or redirecting our effort when the new U.S. team in Saigon has only begun to take hold.”

During the ensuing months, as the U.S. presence in South Vietnam continued to grow and the problems essayed by Miller became more severe, there were, from time to time, recurrent expressions of doubt about the effectiveness of such large-scale intervention, and some efforts were made to limit the U.S. role. More extreme proposals, such as that of John Paul Vann noted earlier, were rejected as unworkable. By and large, however, U.S. nonmilitary programs in South Vietnam continued to expand rapidly in scope and

⁵⁹In part, this was a reference to a proposal being developed by Lansdale and his team for creating a “National Revolutionary Movement,” based on a “revolutionary village” program, representatives of which would comprise a “National Council” of village elders to advise the government and, as soon as a majority of villages were considered “revolutionary,” to elect a group to draft a constitution for the country. In order for a village to be designated as a revolutionary village it would have to inform the government that it was “free of the VC” and ready to receive a government inspection team which could live safely in the village. The inspection team would certify that the report was correct, and would help the village elect its leaders and its delegate to the National Council. (Massachusetts Historical Society, Lodge Papers, Memorandum to Lodge from Lansdale, “A National Council,” Oct. 30, 1965, enclosing the draft of the plan, “Proposal: A True Vietnamese Revolution,” Oct. 30, 1965, prepared by George Melvin and Daniel Ellsberg.)

Of the 2,685 villages and city villages (districts) officially listed, it was estimated that 765 (which included 129 districts in Saigon and other major cities), most of which were controlled by Catholics or by political sects, were eligible to be designated as revolutionary villages.

As conceived by the Lansdale team, this proposal would provide a mechanism for developing a form of self-government that would give people a voice in determining their own affairs while also enabling the choosing of representatives from rural areas “at a time when a large proportion of the individuals in the countryside are subject to coercion by Communist political agents, backed up by terrorists, guerrillas and regular troops.”

size during the U.S. buildup. The results, it could be argued, were similar to those on the military side, as Miller had predicted; that is, that large U.S. programs did not create loyalty among the peasants or help significantly in developing the kind of self-government which the country needed to survive after American withdrawal.

September 1965: Washington Begins to Worry

By early September 1965, only six weeks after the United States had confidently begun to prepare for major military and non-military offensives, key Washington policymakers were expressing concern about the lack of progress and were raising some basic questions about U.S. assumptions, plans and expectations.

On the military side, despite reports of the beneficial effects of the presence of U.S. troops on South Vietnamese forces,⁶⁰ there were disturbing signs that Communist forces, despite superior U.S. firepower, could adapt their strategy and tactics to take advantage of U.S. limitations and weaknesses and the constraints that had been placed on U.S. military operations. Rather than yielding, either to ROLLING THUNDER or to the escalation of the ground war, the Communists were increasing their own efforts—recruiting more troops in the South, strengthening their air and other defenses in the North, and increasing the infiltration of men and supplies into the South, including North Vietnamese regulars. They showed no serious interest in negotiations.⁶¹

On the nonmilitary side, it was estimated that little if any progress was being made toward pacification and reconstruction. Although the Ky-Thieu government was still in power, it seemed to have made little headway, and there was some renewed discontent among the Buddhists and others who were opposed to the continuation of military rule.⁶²

Initially, the news from the military front had been encouraging as U.S. forces claimed to have won a significant victory in their first major engagement. The battle occurred on August 18–21, 1965, when the Marines, acting on intelligence from a Communist deserter, made an amphibious/heliborne assault (Operation STAR-LITE) against a Communist regiment on the Batangan Peninsula in Quang Ngai Province south of the Marine base at Chu Lai. The Marines reportedly killed 623 of the enemy against their own loss

⁶⁰According to Ambassador Lodge in a cable to Washington on Sept. 13, 1965, (PP, Gravel ed., vol. II, p. 366, Saigon to Washington 888), "All reports indicate that the American troops are having a very beneficial effect on VN troops, giving them greater confidence and courage. I am always mindful of the possibility that the American presence will induce the VN to slump back and 'Let George do it.' But there seems to be no sign of this.

"I wish I could describe the feeling of hope which this great American presence on the ground is bringing. There can no longer be the slightest doubt that persistence will bring success, that the aggression will be warded off and that for the first time since the end of W W II, the cause of free men will be on an upward spiral."

⁶¹For a highly secret U.S. diplomatic probe beginning in July 1965, which seemed at first to interest the North Vietnamese but which they ultimately rejected, see pt. III of this study, pp. 442–443.

⁶²In a cable to President Johnson on September 22, Ambassador Lodge said that the continuing existence of the Ky-Thieu government was due "in large part to the conviction that the U.S. is truly committed to staying as long as is necessary and to doing whatever is necessary to ward off the Viet Cong aggression. . . . In other words, your decision on troops is not only a great thing militarily, but is paying big dividends politically." U.S. Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S, Saigon to Washington 991, Sept. 22, 1965. "Let us hope that this stability continues," Lodge added, "and I try to leave no stone unturned to see that it does. I have made it clear in strategic places that a coup would be most unwelcome. I also am taking steps to make sure we are organized to hear about coup plotting in time to do something about it."

of 51 dead and 203 wounded.⁶³ In a cable to President Johnson on August 26, Ambassador Lodge said that the attack "could be a milestone which has not only blunted the Viet Cong's pickaxe in this particular place, but appears to show that the U.S. can with relative certainty prevent the Viet Cong from ever becoming a regular army. It is a maxim of guerrilla warfare that, as Che Guevara [a Cuban Communist guerrilla leader] and other authorities have said, 'Triumph will always be the product of a regular army, even though its origins are with a guerrilla army.' If the Viet Cong cannot somewhere, sometime, transform themselves into a regular army, they cannot reasonably hope militarily to conquer the country. The victory at Chu Lai, therefore, may constrain them seriously to call into question the tactics which they have been following."⁶⁴

The Communists, on the other hand, claimed that the battle was proof of their ability to withstand American forces, and at least one American commander on the scene was said to have been surprised by how well they fought.⁶⁵

In Operation STARLITE, as well as in other military actions during these early weeks of fighting by U.S. forces, it was apparent that, besides stirring up U.S. public opinion, the destructive effects of such operations could adversely affect pacification. In Operation STARLITE, according to a history prepared by the Marine Corps, "Civilians in the combat zone presented complications. The first attempts to evacuate them were difficult; the people were frightened and did not trust the Marines. Eventually most of the local populace were placed in local collective points where they were fed and provided with medical attention. Although attempts were made to avoid civilian casualties, some villages were completely destroyed by supporting arms [artillery or aircraft] when it became obvious the enemy occupied fortified positions in them."⁶⁶

In an earlier incident, which received considerable publicity when shown on American television, U.S. Marines had virtually destroyed the hamlet of Cam Ne near the American air base at Danang in an area controlled by the Communists. The scene of a U.S. Marine setting fire to a house in Cam Ne with a Zippo lighter while an old woman pleaded with him not to was filmed by a CBS crew headed by reporter Morley Safer and was telecast in the Unit-

⁶³ Jack Shulimson and Maj. Charles M. Johnson, USMC, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup*, 1965, Marine Corps History and Museums Division (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1978), pp. 69-83. For a good description of this and other major battles during the war, see Shelby L. Stanton (a retired Army Captain who was a Special Forces adviser and combat infantry platoon leader in Vietnam), *The Rise and Fall of an American Army, U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1985).

⁶⁴ U.S. Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S, Saigon to Washington 621, Aug. 26, 1965.

⁶⁵ Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 537; William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War, A Short Political and Military History, 1954-1975* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986); and *The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation, 1954-1975: Military Events*, prepared by the War Experiences Recapitulation Committee of the High Level Military Institute (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1980), p. 79, translation by the U.S. Government's Foreign Broadcast Information Service, and published by the Joint Publications Research Service.

⁶⁶ Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup*, 1965, cited above, p. 82.

ed States on the night of August 5, 1965.⁶⁷ In his commentary, Safer said, among other things:⁶⁸

The day's operation burned down 150 houses, wounded three women, killed one baby, wounded one Marine and netted them four prisoners. Four old men who could not answer questions put to them in English. Four old men who had no idea what an I.D. card was. Today's operation is the frustration of Vietnam in miniature. There is little doubt that American firepower can win a victory here. But to a Vietnamese peasant whose home means a lifetime of backbreaking labor it will take more than presidential promises to convince him that we are on his side.

Safer says that the Marines were very upset about his report and "were quick to retaliate. First with direct threats at the press center. A drunken major stood outside our room a few nights later screaming 'Communists Broadcasting System' as he emptied his pistol in the air. Had the place not been filled with other reporters, I genuinely believe that Ha Thuc Can [Safer's cameraman] and I would have been killed. Then Marine Corps headquarters in Washington claimed that the film of a Marine setting fire to a roof with a Zippo lighter had been faked: that I had given the Marine the lighter and had asked him to burn down the house. This was quickly squelched when the private in question could not be produced to repeat the story."⁶⁹ The only time in Vietnam that I carried a weapon," Safer says, "was on my visit back to Danang following the broadcast of the Cam Ne incident. I had been told that there might be 'a little accident.'"⁷⁰

When the film was received in the U.S., CBS network executives, aware of its sensitivity, reviewed and discussed it before broadcasting it. The next day, CBS President Frank Stanton received a harsh telephone call from President Johnson asking "how could CBS employ a Communist like Safer, how could they be so unpatriotic as to put on enemy film like this?"⁷¹ A few days later, according to Safer, the President "summoned" Stanton to the White House, where he and Press Secretary Bill Moyers "continued the harangue." "Johnson," Safer says, "threatened that unless CBS got

⁶⁷ For a description of the incident and reaction to it, see Morley Safer, *Flashbacks* (New York: Random House, 1990), pp. 88-97, and the *New York Times* for this period. See also William M. Hammond's account of the incident and its aftermath, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968*, a volume in the series, *The United States Army in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1988), pp. 185-193.

Secretary of the Navy Paul H. Nitze defended the burning of the houses (the Marines were under his jurisdiction) as a necessary component of military action in a guerrilla warfare situation. See the *New York Times*, Aug. 15, 1965.

The Marine Corps' own history says that the Marines were particularly sensitive to the need to win the support of the people, but contends that the hamlet was occupied and fortified by the Communists, and that the Marines had come under fire when they entered it previously. See Shulimson and Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965*, p. 64.

See also the hearings of the U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *News Policies in Vietnam*, Hearings, August 17 and 31, 1966, 89th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1966).

⁶⁸ Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), p. 132.

⁶⁹ Safer, *Flashbacks*, p. 93.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷¹ See Halberstam, *The Powers That Be*, p. 490.

rid of me and 'cleaned up its act,' the White House would 'go public' with information about Safer's 'Communist ties.'" ⁷²

Safer, a Canadian, was subjected to a full investigation by the U.S. Government, and the President told the JCS to investigate the officer in charge of the patrol "to make sure that he had not been bribed by a Communist reporter. . . ." ⁷³

The Cam Ne incident and its impact on the U.S. and international public opinion were discussed at the White House on September 12 at an hour-long meeting, chaired by Moyers, of the group that was considering public affairs aspects of the war and formulating plans for the creation of the Public Affairs Policy Committee for Vietnam. ⁷⁴ James Greenfield, head of public affairs in the State Department, said that Cam Ne and other such incidents were causing "very serious problems here and abroad. . . . Alleged mistreatment of Vietnamese civilians and civilian facilities is a moral and humanitarian concern for many Americans. We must recognize this as a serious, long-run problem." Arthur Sylvester, the Defense Department's press secretary, replied that the problem was "unfriendly correspondents" in Vietnam who "appear to miss no chance to embarrass us." He said that the Cam Ne incident "was not typical" and that it "conveyed an inaccurate impression." He thought steps should be taken to get better information officers in Vietnam and "to inform our personnel of the press problem stemming from such pictures and stories, so that they don't lend themselves to this kind of coverage. . . ." Greenfield retorted that "we couldn't pull a curtain on the problem. There were too many reporters covering this war. It isn't just a problem of a few bad apples. We have to get used to fighting in the open. This is a new kind of war, a war in which the basic goal is people, not territory. You can't win the people in Vietnam by burning their villages. . . . We have to take steps to prevent these things from happening, not just to make sure reporters don't see them."

Chester Cooper agreed, saying "at issue here is how the war should be fought." "We should examine carefully the usefulness of such actions as bombing raids by the Vietnamese Air Force and our own planes against Vietnamese villages. Our object is not so much to destroy an enemy as to win a people. . . ."

In a memorandum to Moyers the next day (August 13), Greenfield discussed the various public affairs problems of the war, and recommended a "thorough review of military actions and techniques . . . such things as the use of artillery against occupied villages, serial bombing and the use of napalm in populated areas, military attacks on villages, etc. . . . We are not making progress

⁷² Safer, *Flashbacks*, p. 95.

⁷³ *Ibid.* James Reston says in his memoirs that when he returned from a trip to Vietnam in early September, during which, as noted, he did a series of reports for the *New York Times*, "The president called me to the White House and gave me 'the works.' He denounced my colleagues in Saigon in terms I could hardly bear after my trip [at the end of the trip, the Navy aircraft carrying Reston crash-landed and he was badly bruised], and he asked me, 'Why don't you get on the team? You have only one president.' I had heard it all before and said I thought he was trying to save face. He stood up and showed me to the door. 'I'm not trying to save my face,' he said, 'I'm trying to save my ass.'" James Reston, *Deadline* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 321.

⁷⁴ Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam, "Memorandum of Discussion on Meeting in Mr. Moyer's Office, The White House, August 10, 1965—5:30—6:30 p.m."

if we kill 50 Viet Cong but provide them with 150 potential recruits in the process."⁷⁵

In a cable to Westmoreland the next day (August 14), JCS Chairman Wheeler asked about the use of U.S. troops in village-clearing operations, saying, "I recall one of the concepts in your estimate of the situation was that US and GVN forces would be used against VC units, but that GVN forces would have to perform the pacification task." Wheeler also asked about the use of U.S. airpower against villages, and whether a clear distinction was made between villages controlled by the Communists and those which were not.⁷⁶ Westmoreland's response was that, to be effective, U.S. forces would have to be used in populated areas.⁷⁷ "The final battle," he said, "is for the hamlets themselves and this inevitably draws the action toward the people and the places where they live."⁷⁸ With respect to airstrikes, he said that villages in the areas controlled by the Communists were considered to be "fair game," but, at the same time, their future pacification had to be kept in mind. "In short," he concluded, "we have a genuine problem which will be with us as long as we are in Vietnam. Commanders must exercise restraint unnatural to war and judgment not often required of young men."

There were three steps, Westmoreland added, that must be taken to reduce the adverse publicity resulting from media coverage of damage suffered by noncombatants: (1) explanation in U.S. of the nature of the war, (2) "some control over press and photographic coverage so that we do not suffer from self-inflicted wounds," (3) intensification of indoctrination of U.S. commanders and troops on the "great importance" of minimizing non-combatant casualties.

This and other incidents prompted the U.S. Mission to hold a conference in Saigon in early September to discuss the psychological aspects of the war, at which U.S. commanders were told to consider psychological as well as military factors when conducting military operations. Westmoreland issued a new directive on minimizing noncombatant battle casualties and created an inter-service

⁷⁵ Same location, Memorandum for Moyers from Greenfield, "Public Affairs Problems in the Vietnam Conflict," Aug. 13, 1967.

⁷⁶ CMH, Westmoreland Papers, History File, JCS 3041-65, Wheeler to Westmoreland, Aug. 14, 1965.

⁷⁷ Same location, Message Files, MAC 4171 and 4382, Aug. 18 and 28, 1965.

⁷⁸ John Paul Vann argued that it was a tactic of the Communists to draw American forces into attacking hamlets, and that such attacks were usually a mistake (quoted in Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 103-104, from a memorandum by Vann):

"I have witnessed the enemy's employment of this tactic for the past 10 years. His specific objective is to get our friendly forces to engage in suicidal destruction of hard-won pacification gains. Invariably he is successful since in the heat of battle rational thinking and long term effects usually play second fiddle to short term objectives.

"In the last decade I have walked through hundreds of hamlets that have been destroyed in the course of a battle, the majority as the result of the heavier friendly fire. The overwhelming majority of hamlets thus destroyed failed to yield sufficient evidence of damage to the enemy to justify the destruction of the hamlet. Indeed, it has not been unusual to have a hamlet destroyed and find absolutely no evidence of damage to the enemy. I recall in May 1959 the destruction and burning by air strike of 900 houses in Chou Doc Province without evidence of a single enemy being killed. . . ."

Vann added: "The destruction of a hamlet by friendly firepower is an event that will always be remembered and practically never forgiven by those members of the population who lost their homes."

Tactical Air Firepower Board to recommend better ways of handling the problem.⁷⁹

Despite signs that U.S. forces were going to encounter greater difficulties than had been anticipated, and that there might be basic flaws in the U.S. plan of attack, McNamara, in a memorandum to the President on September 1, asked for the deployment of six additional maneuver (combat) battalions. Instead of asking for 50,000 men, as stipulated in July, the request was for 85,000–90,000 men which, if approved, would have brought the total of authorized U.S. forces to 210,000 or more by the end of 1965 rather than the 175,000 approved in July for the entirety of Phase I (1965).⁸⁰ On Saturday, September 11, in preparation for a meeting with the President on the following Monday, the three principal Presidential advisers—Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy—together with George Ball, met to review the situation in Vietnam and the request for deployment of the remainder of the Phase I forces. In a memorandum to the President the next day, McGeorge Bundy reported on the meeting.⁸¹ He said that the group's "most difficult and inconclusive discussions" turned on what the U.S. should do in response to avoidance by the Communists of major combat with U.S. forces. Rusk questioned "whether we really need to move up toward 200,000 men." "McNamara continues to feel that we do," Bundy said, "and I agree." "The problem is to make sure that the role of our troops is so understood that neither the country nor the troops themselves get frustrated if the scene of major action shifts toward smaller terrorist activities in which our troops cannot play the dominant role."

On the question of ROLLING THUNDER, Bundy said that McNamara was having a "running discussion with the Chiefs," and needed guidance from the President.⁸² McNamara, he said, felt that there should be a continuation of attacks on clearly defined military targets, while avoiding targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area that could lead to direct engagements with North Vietnamese

⁷⁹ According to the directive, "The use of unnecessary force leading to non-combatant battle casualties in areas temporarily controlled by the VC will embitter the population, drive them into the arms of the VC, and make the long range goal of pacification more difficult and more costly." CMH, Westmoreland Papers, History File, MACV Directive 525-3, Sept. 7, 1965. Guidelines were issued to commanders of all U.S. forces, who were told: "Commanders will consider both the military and psychological objective of each operation. Prestrikes in populated areas (airstrikes before ground attacks), reconnaissance by fire into hamlets [firing before entering to see if there is return fire] and poorly selected harassing and interdiction fire [indiscriminate shelling or bombing of areas controlled by the Communists—"freestrike zones"] are examples of military measures which will be counterproductive in the long run."

For Westmoreland's briefing of the Tactical Air Firepower Board on Sept. 15, 1965, see the Memorandum for the Record, serial no. 00884, Sept. 15, 1965, same location.

⁸⁰ McNamara's September 1 memorandum is in the Johnson Library Meetings Notes File.

⁸¹ Johnson Library, NSF Memos to the President—McGeorge Bundy.

⁸² As noted above, the JCS had proposed on Aug. 27, 1965 a military "concept" under which, the U.S. air war against North Vietnam would be increased for the purpose of "progressively destroying the DRV war-supporting power." This proposal was not acted upon. On September 2 the JCS recommended a program of increased U.S. airstrikes on North Vietnam on September 17–30 which would include such "lucrative" targets as airfields (including Phuc Yen, the major North Vietnamese air force base), power plants, and rail and highway routes. (JCSM-670-65, Sept. 2, 1965, described in *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. IV, p. 29.) For a summary and discussion of intelligence estimates of probable Communist reactions to such attacks see JCSM-686-65, Sept. 11, 1965, Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam. For McNamara's response on September 15 to JCSM 670-65, see below.

For the views of McNamara and McNaughton on the air war against North Vietnam see McNaughton's paper of Aug. 5, 1965, "Analysis of the Program of Bombing North Vietnam," (Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam), a revision of an earlier paper of July 30 (same location).

military aircraft. Rusk, he said, was opposed to extending the existing pattern of bombing into the area northeast of Hanoi (near China), and McNamara "accepted this advice."

The group also discussed the diplomatic situation, and in his memorandum to the President McGeorge Bundy said that the highly secret contact initiated in August by the U.S. with a North Vietnamese diplomat in Paris⁸³ was not proving fruitful, and the group agreed "that we ought not now to look as if we were very eager for more talks . . . we should adopt a public posture that our position on negotiations is now totally clear and that the next move is up to the Communists." He added: "I take it from our phone conversation yesterday that this is your [the President's] own general view."

The group also agreed on the primary importance of pacification: "We seem to have got past the big monsoon dangers, and we need to be sure that we have an agreed program for the continuing contest of pacification . . . all of us feel that this is the most important area of effort for the coming weeks and months."

On Monday, September 13, the President met from 1:16 p.m. to 2:20 p.m. with the four advisers—Rusk, McNamara, Ball and McGeorge Bundy.⁸⁴ CIA Director Raborn also attended, as well as Bill Moyers and Joseph Califano from the President's staff. According to the notes of the meeting, of those subjects included in McGeorge Bundy's memorandum on the September 11 meeting the only one raised in the September 13 meeting was the question of bombing. McNamara told the President that the JCS (JCSM 670-65, September 2) had recommended bombing (during September 17-30) surface-to-air missile (SAMs) sites, airfields where North Vietnamese fighter-bombers were located, and other sites in the Hanoi-Haiphong area as well as others closer to China. McNamara said he was opposed to such a "significant expansion" of the war. Rusk agreed. McNamara said he would have the issue studied by the CIA and would then raise it again with the President. The notes do not indicate that the President replied to McNamara's statement.

On September 15, McNamara responded to the JCS bombing request, saying, "At this date I am not persuaded by the reasoning of JCSM 670-65 that the military advantages the Joint Chiefs of Staff state would flow from the proposed strike efforts outweigh the military and political risks involved in implementing the proposal." Such attacks, he said, might lead to increased efforts by the North to aid forces in the South, and "would not at this time significantly injure the VC ability to persevere in the South or persuade the Hanoi Government that the price of persisting was unacceptably high." "More important," McNamara said, "is the risk of a US-Chinese confrontation . . . there is a substantial risk that a strike program of the weight recommended would induce the Chinese Communists to intervene in the air from Chinese bases." It had therefore been decided, he concluded, that the program proposed for September 17-30 would not be approved at that time, and that a new intelligence estimate would be obtained on the likely reaction of

⁸³ For an explanation of the Paris contact see pt. III of this study, pp. 442-443.

⁸⁴ Califano's notes on the meeting are in the Johnson Library, Diary Backup for Sept. 13, 1965.

North Vietnam, the U.S.S.R. and China to such a bombing program.⁸⁵

After the White House meeting on September 13, a cable was sent to Lodge on September 14 asking for his and Westmoreland's assessment of the situation.⁸⁶ "Informal high-level review over weekend [the meeting of Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy and Ball on September 11]," it stated, "leaves us with feeling situation has more major uncertainties, variables and possibly occasions for changes in our actions than for some time past." With respect to military operations, it "Seems likely increasing US ground strength is driving Hanoi/VC to avoid major unit actions and in effect revert to pattern of placing primary emphasis on small scale actions. Quite possibly we may be faced with VC tactics of prolonged small-scale struggle in which they will rely on international pressures and their doubtless exaggerated view of our internal political opposition to bring about eventual reduction in our effort, while they also hope and work for adverse internal political developments in GVN." This tactic raised the question of how best to use U.S. forces, including whether and how to use U.S. forces for pacification. Referring to the request of the military for 85,000 more troops, the cable said, "There is even a residual question whether further increases in strength at presently planned pace are wise, or whether we should in some small degree defer further increases. . . . In short, if we move rapidly up in force strength, question is bound to arise of effective employment [of] these forces and exactly what concept and strategy we should follow against VC lie-low tactics."⁸⁷

On ROLLING THUNDER, there was a need, the cable said, for better evaluation of results. One possibility would be to send to Saigon a survey group comparable to that which produced the bombing survey after World War II.

With respect to pacification/reconstruction, the cable suggested that, with South Vietnamese forces being assisted by U.S. deployments, there could be "far more steam" put into pacifying the area around Saigon (Hop Tac) and other key areas. Another possibility was to consider applying key elements of the "Acheson-Ball plan" to the entire country, or the entire plan in one or two areas (especially IV Corps—the delta).⁸⁸

The cable to Lodge added that "internal political progress" in the Government of South Vietnam "naturally remains basic to any lasting solution whether by negotiation or by course of events without any 'settlement.'" "We have impression," it said, "Ky Government

⁸⁵ National Archives, RG 330, JS IAA/EAP, Vietnam 381, Memorandum from McNamara to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Air Strikes Against North Vietnam," Sept. 15, 1965.

⁸⁶ U.S. Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S, Washington to Saigon 753, Sept. 14, 1965.

⁸⁷ According to his memoirs, (*A Soldier Reports*, p. 161) Westmoreland was irate: "By nobody's rule were matters such as that valid considerations for the Department of State. Even if they were, what did they think we were doing in Saigon? Did the military do no planning, never look ahead? Would I, a military man, presume to tell a team of surgeons how to operate? What special audacity prompted civilian bureaucrats to deem they knew better how to run a military campaign than did military professionals? Is no special knowledge or experience needed? Had the would-be strategists taken the trouble to examine my cable traffic with the Joint Chiefs or had they consulted General Wheeler, they would have had their answers many times over."

⁸⁸ The Acheson-Ball plan provided for social and political reconstruction leading to the establishment of a constitutional government, after which all foreign troops would be withdrawn. For details see pt. III of this study, pp. 260-263.

settling down somewhat and generally acting wisely, with your advice, to deal with possible threats from various quarters," but suggestions would be welcomed, especially with respect to "prospects for generating younger, more energetic, and more cohesive leadership group, and winning more positive popular support."

With respect to negotiations, the cable said, the Washington principals agreed with the feeling in the Saigon Mission that the U.S. should proceed with caution, and that "we do not need to add to the record or to state our position further except in response to clear need."⁸⁹

Lodge responded in a cable on September 18 that was coordinated with Westmoreland.⁹⁰ The Mission, Lodge said, agreed with the observations of the Washington principals that the situation "has more imponderables than usual," but took a much more optimistic view. "U.S. military presence," the cable said, "appears to have blunted VC offensive, improved Vietnamese morale and given us great opportunity. . . ."

The fact that the Communists were emphasizing small-scale military actions was considered a "big dividend" by Lodge and Westmoreland, who took the position that the Vietnamese were responsible for dealing with these kinds of guerrilla attacks, but that "the presence of U.S. forces does provide the opportunity for thorough pacification of the areas in which they are stationed and full advantage should be taken of this opportunity."⁹¹ "We are already discussing with the Vietnamese the possibility of singling out areas that look like good prospects . . . and then pacifying them so as to get a little smell of across-the-board success in the air."

With respect to the question of further troop deployment, Lodge's cable said, Westmoreland "feels strongly" about receiving on schedule the full complement of forces approved for Phase I. "We need sufficient strength to insure the success of our strategy and tactics.

⁸⁹ In a very private letter to the President on Aug. 26, 1965 (Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam) Lodge said that he was opposed to negotiations. Although he recognized the President's need to stress U.S. willingness to seek peace, he did not believe that the war would be ended by a diplomatic settlement. He thought that the emphasis should be on achieving a satisfactory "outcome," which he defined as either a decision by the Communists to stop fighting, or effective U.S. and South Vietnamese control over the more populous areas of South Vietnam. He told the President, "if you make a 'settlement' and diplomatic 'negotiations' as a symbol of success, you are really reaching for the moon."

⁹⁰ U.S. Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S, Saigon to Washington 953, Sept. 18, 1965. On September 23, McGeorge Bundy sent the President a memorandum summarizing the cables to and from Lodge. Johnson Library, NSF Memos to the President—McGeorge Bundy.

The draft which Lodge sent to Westmoreland for review and comment is in CMGH, Westmoreland Papers, History File.

⁹¹ In a cable to General Wheeler on September 22 (CMH, Westmoreland Papers, Message Files, CINCPAC 220725Z) Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Jr., Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), commented on the dual role of U.S. forces: "If the Viet Cong stay above ground in large formations, this will be to our advantage. With ARVN help we may be able to find, fix and destroy them. If the Viet Cong go underground and revert to small-scale actions, we should employ U.S. forces in coordination with the ARVN and proceed with securing and pacifying areas as fast as we can." "This is a counterinsurgency war . . . the primary object is to restore security to the population. . . . If we are to succeed we must do a number of things at the same time and do them differently than we did in past conflicts. . . . The Viet Cong must be cleared from an area and the area then held and secured. This must be followed by continuing actions to consolidate the gains achieved, develop the area and enlarge it." He added: "The performance and results achieved by U.S. forces in pacification operations came about from advantages we have the ARVN does not. U.S. forces possess an inherent faith and courage in this type of undertaking and understanding of it. They demonstrate their interest in the South Vietnamese people and provide a major incentive for them. Our professionalism in certain fields, technical qualifications and special equipment cannot be duplicated by the ARVN in pacification operations. . . . At the same time, we destroy Viet Cong main force units, kill or capture guerrillas and, alongside our ARVN compatriots, demonstrate how this can be done."

As we succeed it becomes more difficult for the Viet Cong to marshal main-force units and the pressure will be on them to withdraw such units to more remote areas and/or to transform themselves into small units. This is a considerable triumph for us, because it means that the U.S. presence has in effect fragmented the main force, prevented it from coming into being, or at least has forced it to play a lesser role."

With respect to the bombing of North Vietnam, Lodge replied that plans were being made to use air power more effectively and there was no need for a survey group.

On pacification, Lodge said that priority was being given to Hop Tac,⁹² and that, with respect to the Acheson plan, the development of the electoral process "from the rice roots up" was being emphasized.

On the political situation, Lodge said that the existing leadership was "sufficiently 'young and energetic,'" and that it was his hope that "with the passage of time and with our advice plus his own natural aptitude, General Ky can become a really effective political leader."

⁹² A report to Lodge on Sept. 10, 1965 from Richard Holbrooke, a member of his staff, concluded that the original goals of Hop Tac were "completely unrealistic and did not take into account the difficulty of the task." Moreover, "The GVN [Government of Vietnam] has never considered Hop Tac its own plan and it own number one priority. The staff planning for the plan was done almost entirely by the United States, and then translated into Vietnamese. It is, in the eyes of many Vietnamese, 'the plan of the Americans.'" Massachusetts Historical Society, Lodge Papers, Memorandum of Richard Holbrooke, "HOP TAC—Preliminary Thoughts," September 1965, cited also in *PP*, Gravel ed., vol. II, pp. 524–525.

Westmoreland and his associates, however, thought the plan could be revived and successfully implemented. See his Sept. 14, 1965 memorandum to Lodge, "Hop Tac," and the briefing on Hop Tac which MACV gave to the Mission Council on Sept. 21, 1965, both located in CMH, Westmoreland Papers, History File. The briefing, referring to Hop Tac as "a laboratory experiment" in pacification, noted that "If in the shadow of the flagpole [i.e., in Saigon] where we have ready access to top level ministerial talent we cannot successfully achieve pacification, how can we expect rural construction to succeed in the far reaches of the realm?"

CHAPTER 3

TRYING TO FIND A KEY

By the end of September 1965, there was a "twinge of optimism" in Washington as a result of Lodge's reports together with the leveling off since August of Communist military activity.¹ On September 29, 1965, the President met from 12:29 p.m. to 1:20 p.m. with McNamara, Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Raborn and Helms from the CIA, and Califano and Moyers from the White House staff, to consider the request for deployment of the remainder of Phase I forces and for the next phase in the bombing of North Vietnam.² McNamara reviewed the request, noting that the estimate of 175,000 troops for Phase I had been increased to 210,000. He said he would like to have authorization for 195,000, and that he would request the remaining 15,000 in November. The President approved the request, saying, according to the notes of the meeting, that "it was a situation in which he had no choice but to approve the increase." The brief notes, taken by Califano, do not contain any other reference to comments by the President that might help to explain this statement, or any comments on the question of troop increases by other participants.

McGeorge Bundy said he was "inclined to the view" that the President should make a public statement about U.S. nonmilitary efforts. The press tended to give substantial coverage to such effects, he said, only when the President drew attention to them, adding that it was important to obtain favorable press coverage "in view of the world opinion and forthcoming student demonstrations."

The group, with the exception of Raborn and Helms, then continued the meeting at a luncheon at 1:40 p.m. to discuss the bombing of North Vietnam. McNamara recommended a bombing program that provided for gradual escalation but excluded sensitive targets. He also discussed the question of the "hardening attitude" of the North Vietnamese. (The notes of the meeting do not explain what was meant by the term but it apparently referred to North Vietnamese resistance to negotiations.) He noted that, in response to the request he had made after the September 13 meeting with the President, the CIA's Board of National Estimates had prepared a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE 10-11-65) on the subject which, he said, concluded that "Hanoi's attitude was hardening largely because we were not rough enough in our bombing."³

¹ For this and subsequent observations which will be cited as Bundy MS, CRS is indebted to William P. Bundy for permission to quote from his unpublished manuscript, written in 1970-72, dealing with key decisions concerning Southeast Asia in the period from early 1961 to early 1966. The quotation here is from ch. 31, p. 31.

² For Califano's notes of the meeting see Johnson Library, NSF Memos to the President—W. W. Rostow.

³ SNIE 10-11-65, still classified, apparently concluded, among other things, that if targets were bombed in the Hanoi-Haiphong area the North Vietnamese would be more inclined toward a political and diplomatic initiative.

He pointed out, however, that the SNIE had been prepared without the help of key experts in the Government, and he urged the President to direct several of these to conduct a study of the reasons for Hanoi's hardening attitude. The President approved both the recommended bombing program and the proposed study.

Those selected for the study were William Bundy, John McNaughton, General Maxwell Taylor (who, after being replaced by Lodge in July 1965 as U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, had become a special consultant to the President), and Llewellyn Thompson, a highly respected Foreign Service Officer who was the Department of State's leading expert on the U.S.S.R. This became known as the Thompson group, and the study, completed on October 11, 1965, was called the Thompson study.⁴

The Thompson study, following its examination of the hardening of Hanoi's attitudes, recommended a course of action for bombing the North as well as touching on general questions of U.S. policy and strategy. The conclusions of the group closely paralleled the views expressed by Rusk, McNamara, Ball and McGeorge Bundy in September. Bombing should be leveled off. Escalation of the air war could produce a strong military reaction by the Russians and Chinese. Mining the harbor at Haiphong was rejected because it could lead to the sinking of Russian ships. It could also lead to increased dependence on overland transport from China, thereby increasing Chinese influence on the North Vietnamese.

As explained later by William Bundy, "the first rule in the [bombing] program was to avoid action that could lead China to conclude that it was the American objective to destroy North Vietnam or undermine its regime." A second point was "to do nothing that could impair Soviet leverage in Hanoi. The quiet hope that at some point this leverage would be exerted to ease the situation prevailed as a central point in American policy."⁵

Escalation of bombing could also adversely affect diplomatic efforts to end the war. There were already signs, the study stated, that bombing had increased the support of the North Vietnamese public for the war effort. Moreover, bombing may have been having the opposite effect from that intended. Rather than making the North Vietnamese more amenable to negotiations, there were signs that they were less willing to negotiate while under attack.⁶

⁴ A copy of the Thompson study, Oct. 11, 1965, is in the Department of State, Lot File 85 D 240 (William Bundy Papers).

⁵ William Bundy MS, ch. 31, p. 33. According to the biography by his associate, Thomas J. Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War: Dean Rusk in the Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 453, "Rusk believed that the Russians were the key to getting peace talks going. He had long private discussions with both [Andrei A.] Gromyko [Foreign Minister of the U.S.S.R.] and [Anatole] Dobrynin [Ambassador of the U.S.S.R. to the U.S.], and from these talks he became convinced that the Russians were trying to help and had little interest in seeing the United States bogged down in Vietnam."

⁶ A similar position was taken by the small group of U.S. intelligence officers who were monitoring events in China from their post at the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong. In a letter to Washington on Nov. 10, 1965, the Consul General, Edmund E. Rice, a veteran Foreign Service Officer and China specialist, said that he and the members of his China Mainland Section (other members of the Consulate General staff might have different opinions, he said) doubted whether air attacks on targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area would induce the North to negotiate. (U.S. Department of State, Central File Pol 27 Viet S.) The North Vietnamese, he said, were girding for a protracted conflict in the confidence that eventually world and domestic opinion would force the U.S. to desist.

Moreover, Rice and his colleagues continued to express concern about the possible effects on the Chinese of an action by the U.S. that might be considered serious enough to cause China to intervene more actively in the war. (For earlier views of Rice on this subject, see pt. III of this study.) "Our consensus here," the letter said, "is that if there were a 'provocation' in Viet-

The Thompson group recommended, as a way of testing whether the Communists would negotiate, as well as to establish a basis for U.S. escalation if they refused, that there be a long pause in U.S. bombing of the North. If the response to such a pause were not satisfactory, bombing should be resumed and intensified.

The group also concluded—as had Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy and Ball—that the Communists appeared to be avoiding combat with American forces. According to the study, they “probably [would] decide in the near future to break up most of their large units and move toward one or the other of two strategies: They may change their tactics in the direction of small acts or sabotage; or less likely, they could adopt an even more passive strategy of apparently ‘fading into the woodwork.’” The second and more likely strategy would be “a strategy of guerrilla hit-and-run strikes, terror and sabotage.”

With respect to the prospects for negotiations, the group concluded that the Communists “would continue to oppose negotiations except on their own terms until such time as it becomes clear to them that we will stay the course and successfully, if gradually, push them back into the woodwork and begin a discernible trend toward pacification of most of the country.”

Thus, the Thompson group disposed of the issue of strategy in the ground war by assuming that if the U.S. were able to “stay the course” successfully, while making progress toward pacification, the Communists would eventually negotiate, capitulate, or fade away.

General Taylor prepared a separate memorandum in which he recommended increased bombing of the North but advised against substantial increases in U.S. forces. If the Communists continued to fight primarily a guerrilla war, he said, the U.S. might have to deploy up to one million men. Instead, he proposed that the U.S. should help the South Vietnamese build their own forces.⁷

The Thompson study, together with the discussions of these issues by Rusk, McNamara and McGeorge Bundy, raised what could have been viewed as disturbing questions about the role of the United States in the war. If the Communists were going to fight primarily a guerrilla war, in which, as McGeorge Bundy said in his September 12 memorandum to the President, U.S. forces “cannot play the dominant role,” then the U.S. might not be able to fight

nam which might be considered sufficiently grave the Chinese might decide that the time had finally come to play a more directly active role. A U.S. campaign against the Hanoi-Haiphong complex, particularly if it were a massive one, might be considered as such a ‘provocation.’”

Such attacks might also increase the aid being given to North Vietnam by the Russians, Rice said, as well as making it more difficult for the Russians to act as a moderating influence on the North.

⁷A copy of Taylor's memorandum, “Possible Alternatives in Vietnam—The Future of Rolling Thunder,” Oct. 11, 1965, is in the Department of State, Lot File 85 D 240 (William Bundy Papers).

In a column in the *Washington Post* on Sept. 30, 1965, Washington journalist Walter Lippmann, who was known for his astute analysis of problems and trends in U.S. foreign policy, said that although U.S. forces had thwarted Communist military progress, the U.S. was not achieving its objectives: “The war in Vietnam is like pushing a tub full of water. While the Americans can seize almost any place they choose to attack, the Vietcong will almost surely come back once the Americans leave. So we shall be forced to face the fact that in order to win the war in South Vietnam we shall have to occupy South Vietnam with American troops. A few months ago Mr. Hanson Baldwin, the military correspondent of the *New York Times*, called for a million men for Vietnam. It sounded fantastic at the time in the light of what President Johnson was saying about not wanting a wider war. But it is beginning to look very much as if Mr. Baldwin had made an informed and realistic estimate of what a military solution would require.”

the war for which it was preparing. According to the original plan, as noted earlier, U.S. forces were to be used to destroy Communist main force units. When questioned during the meetings in July on what the U.S. would do if the Communists avoided major confrontations with U.S. forces, McNamara and General Wheeler said that U.S. forces could engage guerrillas as well as main force units, and through harassment could force the Communists to come out and fight.⁸ Unless the Communists could be forced to come out and fight, it might be necessary for the U.S. to revise its strategy and to play a supporting role while the South Vietnamese carried on the counterguerrilla war. And if U.S. pressure on the Communists in the North and the South did not succeed in forcing the enemy to negotiate, capitulate or fade away, and the Communists were only gradually pushed back into the woodwork, as the Thompson report stated, the war could last considerably longer than had been predicted.

There was also the question of whether, if the Communists did not come out and fight, interdiction bombing of the North would be effective. McNamara had been told by U.S. officials in Saigon in July that to wage guerrilla warfare at the level being carried out at the time the Communists only needed about 14 tons of supplies per day, an amount so small that it could not be interdicted by bombing.⁹ Only if the Communists decided to come out and fight—which, U.S. officials assumed, would thereby substantially increase their need for supplies—could interdiction bombing of North Vietnamese infiltration routes into South Vietnam become effective.

Phase II and the Policy Choices Facing the U.S.

Toward the end of October 1965, Washington officials began to review the projected needs for Phase II of the U.S. plan of military operations. Under the original conception of Phase II in July 1965—the “strategic offense” phase, which would occur during January 1–June 30, 1966—U.S. forces would conduct offensive operations in high priority areas “necessary to destroy enemy forces and reinstitution of rural construction activities.” According to this plan, an additional 100,000 U.S. troops (24 combat battalions) would be deployed during Phase II, bringing U.S. forces to 275,000 by July 1966.¹⁰

In meetings during October 18–22 with the Joint Chiefs as well as with the Secretary of Defense and the Service Secretaries (Army, Navy, Air Force), followed by a meeting with Rusk, McNamara, Ball, William Bundy, McGeorge Bundy, McNaughton, Vance, General Wheeler, Llewellyn Thompson, Maxwell Taylor and McNaughton, Westmoreland’s J-3, General DePuy, presented MACV’s (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) proposal for 1966. It was, according to William Bundy, “a sobering picture. . . . Instead of a situation brought back into balance by the end of 1965, with significant gains early in 1966, as Westmoreland had seemed to predict in June and July, DePuy now thought that it would take most of 1966 to get slowly on top of the situation, with gains only

⁸ See pt. III of this study, p. 401.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

commencing thereafter."¹¹ Rather than 100,000 additional troops, DePuy estimated that 115,000 would be needed, which, added to the increases that had already been made in Phase I forces from the original 175,000 to 210,000, would raise the level of U.S. forces to 325,000 in 1966, even before the completion of Phase I, compared to the 275,000 provided for Phase II by the original plan.¹²

On October 23, William Bundy prepared a top secret memorandum, "Policy Choices and Decision-Making Procedures on Vietnam," copies of which were sent only to Rusk, McNamara, Ball, McGeorge Bundy and Thompson, on the policy choices facing the U.S.¹³ Based on DePuy's presentation, the proposal of the Thompson Group for a bombing pause,¹⁴ and a message from Ambassador Lodge expressing concern about the adverse effects on South Vietnam of possible negotiations to end the war,¹⁵ the memorandum began with a discussion of the "elements of the problem." The U.S. military command in Vietnam, Bundy said, had made a strong case for the need to increase U.S. forces in Phase II to 325,000 men in order to achieve U.S. objectives, and even then there was no "absolute assurance that we are going to get there." He added that although DePuy predicted little increase in U.S. casualties, "Nonetheless, we are faced with the pressures from various quarters, symbolized by General LeMay and the [Gerald R.] Ford, [Mich.]/[E. Ross] Adair [Ind.] line [Ford and Adair were leading Republican Members of the House of Representatives], to hit the North substantially harder."

¹¹ William Bundy MS, ch. 31, pp. 31-32.

¹² On October 16, Westmoreland met in Saigon with Henry Kissinger, a professor at Harvard University who was in Vietnam at the request of Lodge to analyze and report on various aspects of the situation. According to Westmoreland (CMH, History File, History Notes), Kissinger was "attempting to make some projection as to how long it will take our programmed military efforts to accomplish the objective of pacifying the country." Westmoreland told him that Phase I U.S. forces and South Vietnamese forces could have 60 percent of the population under government control in 18 months, and that in another 18 months Phase II forces could have 80 percent of the population under control."

Westmoreland said he told Kissinger that it was important to continue to deploy U.S. forces in Vietnam "to maintain the initiative and to go for victory, not a stalemate," and that "Kissinger said that he fully agreed with this thesis."

¹³ U.S. Department of State, Lot File 85 D 240 (William Bundy Papers).

¹⁴ According to William Bundy (MS, ch. 33, p. 3), Ball and McNamara, "took up the [pause] proposal with zeal." At Ball's direction, William Bundy prepared a memorandum, "Elements of a Second Pause Scenario," Oct. 22, 1965, a copy of which is in the Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S, Saigon to Washington 1377, Oct. 21, 1965. Lodge argued that the South Vietnamese Government was not yet strong enough to survive the "political warfare" with the Communists which would result from negotiations. (This point had been emphasized by Ky in a meeting with Lodge and Kissinger the previous day. See in the Johnson Library, NSF Country File, Vietnam, Saigon to Washington 1361, Oct. 20, 1965.)

Lodge also took the position, contrary to the State Department's negotiating position, that not all Communist military activity in South Vietnam would have to cease. He argued that negotiations could be based on pacification of the area around Saigon and on the coast, and on maintaining existing control by the government of cities and province capitals, with major roads open day and night, provided that the North Vietnamese ceased their infiltration and the Communists in the South disbanded their "formal" military units.

On November 10, Rusk personally drafted a reply to Lodge in which he stated that although negotiations did not appear likely, it was important, both from the standpoint of U.S. and world opinion, to demonstrate that the United States would be willing to negotiate. (U.S. Department of State, Lot file 85 D 240 (William Bundy Papers).) "The point which would concern me most," Rusk said, "would be the idea that the war must be continued because the South Vietnamese authorities with whom we are dealing are afraid of peace. . . . I see great difficulty in accepting the internal political difficulties of the South Vietnamese as a war aim of the United States." He added: "Frankly, I do not know whether the negotiations will come about in the near future or at all. I know that it will be contrary to our most fundamental policy to permit negotiations to accomplish what we have resisted by force."

If the American people and "international opinion" were going to be persuaded to accept such an expansion of the U.S. effort, a convincing case would have to be made, Bundy said, that the U.S. had "exhausted all avenues" to negotiation. However, a move toward negotiations, including a bombing pause in the near future, could, as Lodge had warned, produce an adverse reaction in South Vietnam and damage efforts to create a "real political structure" in Saigon.

Another element concerned the role of the U.S.S.R. There had been a report, Bundy noted, that the Russians wanted a pause of at least three weeks in order to generate diplomatic pressures that might nudge the North Vietnamese toward negotiations, and this "vital Soviet factor argues strongly for a pause" as well as against any substantial increase in bombing the North.¹⁶

There were, said William Bundy, three broad policy choices for the U.S.:

(1) A serious pause for a month, followed—if it fails—by decisions on Phase II deployment and possibly by some step-up in the bombing of the North.

(2) Finish up Phase I deployments and proceed to Phase II decisions and actions without any major action such as a pause, or any appreciable change in the bombing pattern against the DRV.

(3) Complete Phase I deployments and stop at that point for perhaps three months before going further, while continuing present bombing pace against the North.

As will be seen, this memorandum became the basis in early November of a staff paper for the President. Meanwhile, on October 26 McGeorge Bundy circulated the draft of a joint Defense Department-State Department-White House message to Lodge asking for his comments on the situation and the U.S. course of action.¹⁷ Referring to DePuy's presentation of Phase II, and noting that the plan envisioned that U.S. forces would play the dominant combat role, it questioned whether "what began as a Vietnamese war with U.S. assistance may end as a U.S. war with only passive Vietnamese cooperation." It would be useful, the draft said, if Lodge could explain how Vietnamese forces would be strengthened. Also, what should the U.S. do about the air war, and should there be a pause before Phase II deployments?

From available records, it is not clear whether this message was sent, but on November 3 Lodge sent a letter to President Johnson that appears to be an answer to the message, in which he said, "Herewith is my best attempt to peer into the future."¹⁸ McGeorge Bundy gave Lodge's letter to the President with a note saying that he had given copies to Rusk and McNamara, but not to Arthur Goldberg (U.S. Ambassador to the U.N.), "because I am afraid it would only stir him to a very strong reaction." (Goldberg was in favor of trying to find a way to negotiate an end to the war.) "We

¹⁶For an interesting analysis of possible Russian moves toward becoming more involved in Indochina, and the importance of recognizing that this could benefit the U.S. in its effort to contain the North Vietnamese and the Chinese, see the message from the U.S. Ambassador to Laos, William Sullivan, an experienced and astute diplomat, Vientiane to Washington 437, Nov. 3, 1965, in the Johnson Library, NSF Memos to the President—McGeorge Bundy.

¹⁷U.S. Department of State, Lot File 85 D 240 (William Bundy Papers).

¹⁸U.S. Department of State, Central File, Pol 27 Viet S.