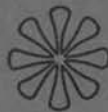


IV.C Evolution of the War (26 Vols.)

Direct Action: The Johnson Commitments, 1964-1968  
(16 Vols.)

2. Military Pressures Against NVN (3 Vols.)
  - b. July - October 1964

**TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE**



**UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS**  
**1945 - 1967**



**VIETNAM TASK FORCE**

**OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

**TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE**

*SET #13*

IV. C. 2. (b)

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

Military Pressures Against North Vietnam

July - October 1964





3  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NVN: JULY - OCTOBER, 1964

SUMMARY and ANALYSIS

During the spring and summer of 1964, there was disquiet about the situation in South Vietnam and disillusion with on-going U.S. actions to right that situation. During the third quarter of 1964, a consensus developed within the Johnson Administration that some form of continual overt pressures mounting in severity against North Vietnam soon would be required. The purpose of these pressures was twofold: (1) to effect DRV will and capabilities in order to persuade and force the leadership in Hanoi to halt their support and direction of the war in the South; and (2) to induce negotiations at some future point in time on our terms after North Vietnam had been hurt and convinced of our resolve. This consensus was in an early formative stage -- it had become an idea, not a program for action; it was a belief, not as yet fully staffed and considered. Because of this and because of important tactical considerations (the impending U.S. elections, the instability of the GVN, and the need to produce further evidence of VC infiltration into the South) implementation of such a policy was deferred. Nevertheless, the groundwork was being laid. The Tonkin Gulf reprisal constituted an important firebreak, and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution set U.S. public support for virtually any action.

Since the fall of Diem in November 1963, the political situation in South Vietnam had been deteriorating. The Khanh Government had succeeded Minh in January 1964, but had demonstrated only greater capacity for survivability, not more capacity for reversing the trend toward collapse. In the wake of the Tonkin Gulf reprisals, when South Vietnamese morale was still temporarily inflated, Khanh made a bold bid to consolidate his personal power and impose semi-dictatorial rule. He was brought to heel, however, in less than a month by the military junta which continued to operate behind the scenes. By September, the most salient aspect of the confused political situation in South Vietnam was the likelihood that it would continue its downward slide into the foreseeable future.

In this setting, a program of covert military pressures against North Vietnam already had been set in process. These were basically of three kinds: (1) low level recce with armed escort over Laos; (2) De Soto patrols within 4 n.m. of the NVN coast to acquire visual, electronic, and photographic intelligence; and (3) Oplan 34-A which included a variety of anti-infiltration, sabotage, and psywar measures. The portent of these actions was being conveyed to the North Vietnamese through private and public channels. A Canadian, Blair Seaborn, was sent to Hanoi to state that U.S. objectives were limited but that our commitment was deep, and that "in the event of escalation the greatest devastation would of course result for the DRVN itself."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Neither the situation in SVN nor the failure of Hanoi to acquiesce to our threats diminished the basic U.S. commitment. NSAM 288 expounding the need to do what was necessary to preserve an "independent non-communist South Vietnam" was the guiding policy document. At no time in this period was the NSAM 288 commitment brought into question. Rather, American concern was focused on how the U.S. could retrieve the situation. The usual palliatives -- more aid, more advice, more pressure on the GVN to reform, and more verbal threats to Hanoi -- were no longer seen as satisfactory. Nor did it appear to U.S. decision-makers that we faced a stark choice between complete U.S. withdrawal from the struggle or a large scale introduction of U.S. ground forces. Nor did the leadership in Washington believe that a massive bombing campaign against the North need be seriously considered -- although such a program was proposed by the JCS. With all these alternatives implicitly ruled out at this time, the choice was both obvious and inevitable. Although it did not take the form of decision, it was agreed that the U.S. should at an unspecified date in the future begin an incremental series of gradually mounting strikes against North Vietnam. The only real questions were precisely what actions should be taken and when? None of these early fall discussions in Washington really confronted the hard issues of what a bombing campaign would buy and what it would cost. These hard-headed discussions, to some extent, took place in the last few months of 1964.

The key events in this period were the Tonkin Gulf incidents of August 2nd and 4th and the U.S. reprisal on North Vietnam PT boats and bases on August 5th. The explanation for the DRV attack on U.S. ships remains puzzling (perhaps it was simply a way of warning and warding off U.S. patrols close to North Vietnam borders). The swift U.S. reaction was to be expected. While there was some momentary uncertainty about the actuality of the second attack on August 4th, confirming evidence of the attack was received before the U.S. reprisal was launched. The U.S. reprisal represented the carrying out of recommendations made to the President by his principal advisers earlier that summer and subsequently placed on the shelf. The existence of these previous recommendations with planning down to detailed targeting made possible the immediate U.S. reaction when the crisis came.

At the same time as U.S. reprisals were taken, President Johnson decided to act on another recommendation that had been under consideration since at least May -- a Congressional resolution of support for U.S. policy. Whereas in the earlier discussions, such a resolution had been proposed as a vehicle for mobilizing Congressional and public support behind an escalating campaign of pressures against the North, the President, in the midst of an election campaign, now felt impelled to use it to solidify support for his overall Vietnam policy. On August 5th he sent a message to Congress on the Tonkin incidents and asked for passage of a joint resolution endorsing his policy. The resolution itself was one prepared by the Administration and introduced on its behalf by the Chairmen of the Foreign Affairs Committees in the two Houses. It was passed with near unanimous support on August 7th.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The net effect of the swift U.S. reprisals and the Congressional Resolution was to dramatically demonstrate, publicly state and formally record the commitments to South Vietnam and within Southeast Asia, that had been made internal U.S. policy by NSAM 288 in March 1964. They were also conceived and intended as a clear communication to Hanoi of what it could expect if it continued to pursue its current course of action. They were portents of the future designed to demonstrate the firmness of U.S. resolve and the direction its policy was tending. The psychological impact of the raids on the Administration and the American public is also significant. They marked the crossing of an important threshold in the war, and it was accomplished with virtually no domestic criticism, indeed, with an evident increase in public support for the Administration. The precedent for strikes against the North was thus established and at very little apparent cost. There was a real cost, however. The number of unused measures short of direct military action against the North had been depleted. Greater visible commitment was purchased at the price of reduced flexibility.

But, a worried Administration went to some lengths to insure that the strikes did not bind or commit it to any future policies or actions and to have it understood that the strikes had been pure and simple reprisals of the one of a kind variety. Yet, for all these reasons, when a decision to strike the North was faced again, it was much easier to take.

The Tonkin reprisals were widely regarded within the Administration as an effective, although limited demonstration of the firmness of American resolve. However, they also served to stiffen that resolve and to deepen the commitment. Several officials within the Administration, including Ambassador Taylor, felt that to have any lasting impact this demonstration of resolve would have to be followed up by other continuing actions, in an increasing tempo. The positive short-term effect of the reprisals in raising South Vietnamese morale was noted as an important by-product of the strikes and offered as one justification for continuing pressures against the North. Also figuring importantly in calculations of resolve and intent was the appreciable improvement in our position in Laos as a result of the vigorous spring offensive by Laotian Government forces. This improvement had led us to oppose a 14-nation conference on Laos for fear of placing the new gains in jeopardy, and convinced many that only military measures were unambiguously understood by Hanoi's communist rulers. This, however, was tempered by a countervailing concern not to provoke by U.S. action any communist military escalation in Laos.

Quite another set of arguments for strikes against the North were advanced by Walt Rostow, then Counselor of the State Department, in a paper that circulated widely through the Administration in August 1964. The "Rostow Thesis" argued that externally supported insurgencies could only be successfully dealt with by striking at their sources of support and neutralizing them. The objective of such attacks would be psychological rather than purely military. They would be designed to alter the aggressor's calculation of interests in supporting the insurgency through the fear of



6

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

further military and economic damage, the fear of involvement in a wider conflict, the fear of internal political upheaval and the fear of greater dependence on a major communist power. Any incidental improvement in morale in the country troubled by insurgency or improvement in bargaining leverage were to be regarded as bonuses. To achieve the desired effect, a carefully orchestrated series of escalating military measures, coupled with simultaneous political, economic and psychological pressures was called for. The "thesis" was articulated in general terms, but the immediate case in everyone's mind was, of course, Southeast Asia.

A thorough critique of Rostow's paper was prepared in OSD/ISA with inputs from State's Policy Planning Council. This analysis argued that the validity of the "thesis" would depend on two variables: (1) the extent of the commitment of the nation supporting the insurgency; and (2) the degree to which vital U.S. interests were at stake in the conflict. The latter question having been settled with respect to South Vietnam by NSAM 288, the remaining problem was whether the kinds of actions Rostow recommended could succeed given the level of determined commitment of the North Vietnamese. For the Rostow approach to succeed, the DRV would have to be persuaded that: (1) the U.S. was taking limited action to achieve limited goals; (2) the U.S. commitment was total; and (3) the U.S. had established a sufficient domestic consensus to see the policy through. If the DRV was not so convinced, the approach would fail unless there were a major U.S. military involvement in the war. The critique concluded that the public opinion problems of such an approach, both domestic and international, would be very great, and that in view of the inherent problems of implementing and managing such a discriminating policy, it had poor chances of success. These reservations notwithstanding, the outlook embodied in the "Rostow thesis" came to dominate a good deal of Administration thinking on the question of pressures against the North in the months ahead.

All of the pressures-against-the-North thinking came to a head in the strategy meeting of the principals on September 7th. It appears that a rather narrow range of proposals was up for consideration. One program proposal came from the JCS. It was a repeat of the 94-target list program which the JCS had recommended on August 26th. The JCS called for deliberate attempts to provoke the DRV into taking acts which could then be answered by a systematic U.S. air campaign. The JCS argued that such actions were now "essential to preventing complete collapse of the U.S. position in the RVN and SEA," because "continuation of present or foreseeable programs limited to the RVN will not produce the desired result." The Chiefs were supported by ISA in their provocation approach. For ISA, ASD McNaughton argued that our acts and the DRV response "should be likely to provide good grounds for us to escalate if we wished." McNaughton's approach was for a "gradual squeeze," not simply a tit-for-tat contingency and unlike the quick, all-out proposals of the JCS.

The principal conferees at this September meeting did not believe that deliberate acts of provocation should be undertaken "in the immediate future while the GVN is still struggling to its feet." However, they apparently reached a consensus that they might recommend such actions -- "depending on GVN progress and communist reaction in the meantime" -- by early October.

7

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

This deferral decision was strongly supported by Mr. McCone of the CIA and Ambassador Taylor. Ambassador Taylor, revising his previous position, believed that the conflict should not be escalated to a level beyond South Vietnamese capacities to manage it. He opposed overt actions against North Vietnam as too risky and urged instead that further measures to strengthen the GVN be taken first. Similarly, Secretary McNamara affirmed his understanding that "we are not acting more strongly because there is a clear hope of strengthening the GVN." McNamara went on to urge, however, that the way be kept open for stronger actions even if the GVN did not improve or in the event the war were widened by the communists. In notes taken at this meeting the President asked: "Can we really strengthen the GVN?"

It is important to differentiate the consensus of the principals at this September meeting from the views which they had urged on the President in the preceding spring. In the spring the use of force had been clearly contingent upon a major reversal -- principally in Laos -- and had been advanced with the apparent assumption that military actions hopefully would not be required. Now, however, their views were advanced with a sense that such actions were inevitable.

The results of the September meeting were recorded in NSAM 314. The actions that were approved against the DRV for the next three month period were highly limited and marginal in character. They included resumption of the off-shore U.S. naval patrols, resumption of covert GVN coastal operations against the North, limited air and ground operations in the Laotian corridor, and a preparedness to respond to any further DRV attacks on a tit-for-tat basis.

From the September meeting forward, there was little basic disagreement among the principals on the need for military actions against the North. What prevented action for the time being was a set of tactical considerations. The President was in the midst of an election campaign in which he was presenting himself as the candidate of reason and restraint as opposed to the quixotic Barry Goldwater. Other concerns were the aforementioned shakiness of the GVN, the uncertainty as to China's response to an escalation, the desire not to upset the delicate Laotian equation, the need to design whatever actions were taken so as to achieve the maximum public and Congressional support, and the implicit belief that overt actions at this time might bring pressure for premature negotiations--that is, negotiations before the DRV was hurting. In summary, the period saw the development of the consensus on military pressures against the North and the decision to defer them for temporary reasons of tactics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS  
AND TEXT

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM  
July-October 1964

Table of Contents and Outline

	<u>Page</u>
I. PROLOGUE: ACTIONS AND PROGRAMS UNDERWAY.....	1
II. THE TONKIN GULF CRISIS.....	5
The First Incident.....	5
The Second Incident.....	6
The Response in Washington.....	8
Broadening the Impact.....	11
III. POST-TONKIN POLICY ASSESSMENTS.....	16
Dilemmas in Laos.....	16
Concern over Pressures for Negotiations.....	18
Concern over Tonkin Reprisal Signals.....	19
Reassertion of the Rostow Thesis.....	21
Accompanying Pause in Pressures.....	22
IV. NEXT COURSES OF ACTION.....	25
Strategy Meeting in September.....	25
Implementing Actions.....	27
Naval Operations.....	27
Actions in Laos.....	28
Negotiating Posture Re Laos.....	30
Anticipation of Wider Action.....	32
General Scheme.....	32
Reservations.....	34



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

	<u>Page</u>
Differing Agency Policy Views.....	37
JCS views.....	37
Saigon Embassy views.....	39
OSD views.....	40
State views.....	41
CIA views.....	41
Footnotes.....	43

TAB A - Text of Original Congressional Resolution,  
c. May 1964

TAB B - Secretary McNamara's Prepared Testimony,  
20 February 1968

TAB C - Text of Congressional Resolution,  
7 August 1964

CHRONOLOGY

12  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NVN, JULY - OCTOBER 1964

CHRONOLOGY

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
17 Jul 1964	DESOTO naval patrols off North Vietnam re-authorized	Authority was given to resume the DESOTO destroyer patrols off North Vietnam. They had been suspended since March.
30 Jul 1964	Covert GVN attack on North Vietnam	The night before the USS MADDOX is to resume her patrols off the North Vietnamese coast, South Vietnamese commandos raid two North Vietnamese islands.
31 Jul 1964	USS MADDOX resumes patrol off North Vietnam	After a six month suspension, the USS MADDOX resumed the DESOTO patrols off the coast of North Vietnam.
1 Aug 1964	British seek meeting of three Laotian princes	Acting on Souvanna Phouma's request, the British government urged the ICC members to arrange a meeting among the three Laotian political factions as represented by the three rival princes.
2 Aug 1964	China urges USSR not to resign Geneva co-chairmanship	The Chinese Communists urged the USSR not to carry out its threat to abandon its co-chairman role in the Geneva settlements, apparently viewing such a development as jeopardizing the possibilities of a Geneva settlement of the current Laotian crisis.
	DRV PT boats attack MADDOX	Apparently mistaking the MADDOX for South Vietnamese, three DRV patrol boats launched a torpedo and machine gun attack on her. Responding immediately to the attack, and with the help of air support from the nearby carrier TICONDEROGA, the MADDOX destroyed

13

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		one of the attacking boats and damaged the other two. The MADDOX, under 7th Fleet orders, retired to South Vietnamese waters where she is joined by the C. TURNER JOY.
3 Aug 1964	U.S. protest through ICC	A stiff U.S. protest of the attack on the MADDOX is dispatched to Hanoi through the ICC. It warns that "grave consequences" will result from any future attacks on U.S. forces.
	DESOTO patrol resumed	The JCS approved a CINCPAC request to resume the DESOTO patrol at 1350 hours, ordered the C. TURNER JOY to be added to it and authorized active defensive measures for the destroyers and their supporting aircraft. The President announced the action later that day.
3 Aug 1964	GVN again attacks North Vietnam	The Rhon River estuary and the Vinh Sonh radar installation were bombarded under cover of darkness.
4 Aug 1964	Second DRV naval attack on DESOTO patrol	At about 2140 hours, after several hours of shadowing, a second PT boat attack on the augmented DESOTO task force was launched. This engagement in the dark lasted about three hours and resulted in two patrol boats destroyed.
	Reprisal alerts	At 0030 hours (5 Aug 1964 Vietnam time), "alert orders" for possible reprisal air strikes were given to the TICONDEROGA and a second carrier, the CONSTELLATION, that had been steaming toward the area from Hong Kong since Aug 3.
	NSC meeting	At 1230, Washington time, the NSC convened after a brief meeting of the JCS with the President. The JCS, McNamara and others recommended reprisals against the patrol craft and their bases. This the President approved.

14  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
	2nd NSC meeting	After a confusing afternoon in which the attacks were double-checked and verified, the NSC met again at 1700, confirmed the reprisal order, and discussed incremental force deployments to the Western Pacific.
	Congressional briefing	At 1845 the President met with 16 Congressional leaders, briefed them on the proposed attacks and informed them of his intention to ask for a joint Congressional resolution of support. None raised objections.
5 Aug 1964	U Thant calls for 14-nation conference on Laos	In an unrelated development, UN Secretary General U Thant called for the rescheduling of the 14-nation conference to deal with the Laotian situation.
	Presidential message to Congress	In a formal message to both houses of Congress, the President requested passage of a joint resolution of support for U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. Concurrently, identical draft resolutions prepared by the executive branch were introduced in the Senate by Senator Fulbright, and in the House, by Representative Morgan.
6 Aug 1964	Tonkin Gulf Resolutions discussed in committee	Both houses heard top Administration officials, including Secretary McNamara, testify in behalf of the pending resolutions.
	Force deployments	The additional forces deployments, particularly air forces, begin to move to the theatre.
7 Aug 1964	Tonkin Gulf Resolution passes Congress	The Tonkin Gulf resolution was passed in both houses by near unanimous vote.



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
	Khanh proclaims himself President	Declaring a state of emergency, General Khanh proclaimed himself President of South Vietnam and claims virtual dictatorial powers.
	State message 136, Rusk to Vientiane and others	Concern over not provoking a communist military escalation in Laos, particularly in view of the Tonkin Gulf reprisals, prompted State to defer temporarily approval of air and ground initiatives in the Laotian panhandle.
9 Aug 1964	Embassy Saigon message 363, Taylor to Rusk	Taylor opposes a 14-nation Geneva Conference as likely to undermine the little stability the fragile GVN still has. He further states that the reprisals, while effective in the short run, do not deal with the continuing problem of DRV infiltration which must be confronted. He felt there was need for follow-up action to demonstrate to the DRV that the rules of the game had changed.
10 Aug 1964	U.S. message to Hanoi through Canadian ICC representative	Through the Canadian representative on the ICC, the U.S. communicated its uncertainty about DRV motives in the Aug 4 Tonkin Gulf raids, that additional air power deployed to SEA was precautionary, that U.S. official and public patience was wearing thin, that the Congressional resolution demonstrated U.S. determination in SEA, and that if the DRV pursued its present course, it could expect to suffer the consequences.
11 Aug 1964	William Bundy memo to SecDef, "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia	Assistant Secretary of State Bundy felt that only a continuous combination of military pressure and communication

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		would convince Hanoi that they were facing a determined foe and that they should get out of South Vietnam and Laos.
14 Aug 1964	CJCS memo to SecDef, "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia"	Positive assessment of the impact of the reprisal actions was given and a continuation of strikes against the North was recommended.
	State message 439 to Vientiane, Saigon, CINCPAC, "Southeast Asia, August 1964"	In opposing both a new 14-nation Geneva Conference on Southeast Asia, and U.S. air operations against the North, State stressed the shakiness of the GVN and the need to shore it up internally before any such actions were started. For planning purposes, the message suggested that Ambassador Taylor's suggested date of January 1, 1965, be used for any sustained U.S. air campaign against the North.
15 Aug 1964	JCS message 7947 to CINCPAC, "Rules of Engagement"	U.S. forces were authorized to attack any vessels or aircraft that attack or give positive indication of intent to attack, and to pursue such attackers into territorial waters or air space of all Southeast Asian countries, including North Vietnam.
16 Aug 1964	COMUSMACV message to CINCPAC, "Cross-Border Operations"	MACV requested authority to begin the Phase I of the covert cross-border operations into Laos and North Vietnam.
17 Aug 1964	CINCPAC message to JCS, "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia"	The positive impact of the reprisals on South Vietnamese morale is noted, and a strong argument made for continuing actions against the North to make clear to Hanoi and Peking the cost of their aggression.



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		The momentum of the Aug 5 raids must not be lost or the benefits of the initial attacks will disappear.
k8 Aug 1964	Embassy Saigon message 465	Taylor reiterates his belief that the reprisals must be followed up with other actions against the North.
21 Aug 1964	Henry Rowen memo to JCS, <u>et al</u> , "The Rostow Thesis"	Initially presented in Dec 1963, the "Rostow Thesis" was recirculated within the Administration in mid-August. Its fundamental argument was that military pressure against the external sources of an insurgency would bring the aggressor to an appreciation of the costs of his interference and he would reduce or eliminate his support for the insurgents. The exercise was primarily psychological, not necessarily strategic. The measures should greatly increase his uncertainty about the consequences of continued support of the insurgency. Rowen's critique raised serious questions about the general validity of the thesis, pointing out the requirement for solid public and political support for such actions, and doubting that anywhere but in Southeast Asia U.S. interests were so critically at stake. Even in that area, it doubted the effectiveness of the proposal.
26 Aug 1964	JCSM-746-64	In response to State's Aug 14 analysis, the JCS proposed a continuous and escalating air campaign against the North designed to both the physical resources and the psychological will to support the insurgency in the South. It called for

18

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		deliberate attempts to provoke the DRV into actions which could then be answered by a systematic air campaign.
27 Aug 1964	Three Laotian Princes meet	The three Laotian Princes met in Paris as a result of the British initiative to begin discussions on the current crisis.
31 Aug 1964	CINCPAC message to JCS, "Immediate Actions to be taken in South Vietnam"	CINCPAC reiterates the request for approval of covert cross-border operations.
3 Sep 1964	McNaughton paper, "Plan of Action for South Vietnam"	In anticipation of the 7 September strategy meeting, McNaughton prepared a paper calling for actions that would provoke a DRV response that could be used as grounds for a U.S. escalation.
	Khanh reverts to Premiership	His bid for dictatorial power having been rebuffed by the Army with popular support, Khanh reverted to his former title of Premier with greatly reduced power. Minh is to play a larger role.
7 Sep 1964	JCS Talking Paper for CJCS, "Next Courses of Action for RVN"	The JCS repeated its recommendations of 26 Aug and detailed it with a list of 94 targets for air strikes.
	White House strategy meeting; decisions in William Bundy memo to SecDef, et al, "Courses of Action for South Vietnam," 8 Sep 1964	With Ambassador Taylor returned from Saigon, a full dress strategy review of actions against the North is held at the White House. The Pentagon spokesmen, both military and civilian, favored immediate initiation of an escalatory air campaign against the North. But this was rejected on the grounds that the GVN was too weak to sustain the

19

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		expected intensification of the war in the South it would evoke. This was the view of CIA, State and the White House. But a decision was made to resume the DESOTO patrols, the covert GVN coastal operations against the North, and to authorize limited cross-border operations into Laos when Souvanna approved. It was further agreed that we would respond to any future DRV attacks on U.S. units on a tit-for-tat basis. These latter measures were to bolster GVN morale.
10 Sep 1964	NSAM 314	Formal approval of the 7 September decision was given in NSAM 314.
11 Sep 1964	Saigon meeting on cross-border operations	At a Saigon meeting of representatives of the U.S. missions in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, it was agreed that the air operations in Southern Laos would be carried out by RIAF aircraft for the present. As to ground operations, while their desirability was recognized, they were disapproved because of the flagrant violation of the Geneva Accords they would constitute. This objection by Vientiane was subsequently removed and company-size operations up to 20 kilometers into Laos were approved.
12 Sep 1964	DESOTO patrols resumed	The destroyers USS MORTON and USS EDWARDS resumed the DESOTO patrols off North Vietnam.
18 Sep 1964	3rd Tonkin Gulf incident	On the night of the 18th, the third incident in the DESOTO patrols occurred. The two destroyers fired on radar identified attackers and apparently

20

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		scored a number of hits. No return fire was received from the "attackers." Later on the 18th the President suspended the DESOTO patrols which were not to be resumed until February 1965.
30 Sep 1964	CJCS memo to SecDef, "Cross-Border Operations"	The CJCS endorsed the proposals of the mission representatives and requested immediate authority to implement air operations in the Laotian panhandle with RIAF T-28s and U.S. aircraft for suppressive fire and attacking heavily defended targets. Authority for GVN ground intelligence acquisition patrols in the Laotian corridor was also sought.
1 Oct 1964	SNIE 53-2-64	The deterioration of GVN morale and effectiveness continued unabated and this intelligence estimate did not think that the hoped for civilian government would be able to reverse it. The VC were not, however, expected to make an overt military effort to capture the government.
4 Oct 1964	Covert GVN coastal operations against DRV again authorized	The President authorized reactivation of the covert coastal strikes by the GVN against the DRV, under very tight controls with each action to be cleared in advance by OSD, State and the White House.
6 Oct 1964	Joint State/Defense message 313 to Vientiane	The Embassy is authorized to urge the Laotian Government to begin T-28 strikes as soon as possible against a 22-target list which excluded the Mu Gia pass. Some of the targets were designed for U.S. YANKEE TEAM strikes.



21

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
9 Oct 1964	SNIE 10-3-64	In the evaluation of the likely North Vietnamese reactions to the actions approved in the September 7 meeting, CIA concluded that these would probably be limited to defensive and propaganda measures with possibly some scaling down of operations in the South. China was not expected to enter the war as a result of even a systematic U.S. air campaign against the North.
	Embassy Saigon message 1068, Taylor to Rusk	Taylor reported that the ARVN would be unable to conduct ground operations in the Laotian corridor in the foreseeable future and therefore U.S. air operations are urged. At a minimum, combat air patrols supporting RIAF strike missions were requested.
13 Oct 1964	Embassy Vientiane message 609, Unger to Rusk and McNamara	U.S. air strikes against four defended targets are requested to accompany RIAF T-28 strikes in the northern panhandle.
	Washington approves only combat air patrols	Washington, responding to Unger's request, authorized only U.S. combat air patrols in support of the RIAF operations, not the U.S. strikes. U.S. air strikes against communist LOCs in the panhandle are not authorized until much later.
14 Oct 1964	RIAF makes initial U.S. supported attacks	The RIAF, with U.S. aircraft in combat air patrol support, make the first strikes against the communist LOCs in the panhandle.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

I

PROLOGUE: ACTIONS AND PROGRAMS UNDERWAY

Several forms of pressure were already being applied against North Vietnam by July of 1964. Moreover, contingency plans for other forms -- should political and military circumstances warrant a decision to use them -- were continually being adjusted and modified as the situation in Southeast Asia developed.

The best known of these pressures was being applied in Laos. Since 21 May, U.S. aircraft had flown low-level reconnaissance missions over communist-occupied areas. 1/ In early June Premier Souvanna Phouma both gave and reaffirmed his permission for armed escort of these missions, which included the right to retaliate against hostile fire from the ground. 2/ This effort was supplemented at the end of the month when the United States decided to conduct transport and night reconnaissance operations and furnish additional T-28 aircraft and munitions to support a Royal Laotian counteroffensive near Muong Soui. This decision came in response to Souvanna's request, in which he equated the protection of Muong Soui with the survival of the Laotian neutralist army. 3/ Air strikes conducted by the Royal Lao Air Force, with T-28s obtained from the United States, were later credited with playing a major role in the success of the RLG's operations.

Other actions obviously designed to forestall communist aggressive intentions were taken in different parts of Southeast Asia. In June, following the Honolulu strategy conference, State and Defense Department sources made repeated leaks to the press affirming U.S. intentions to support its allies and uphold its treaty commitments in Southeast Asia. 4/ U.S. contingency ground-force stockages in Thailand were augmented and publicly acknowledged. 5/ Revelations were made that USAF aircraft were operating out of a newly constructed air base at Da Nang. Moreover, the base was characterized as part of a network of new air bases and operational facilities being developed in South Vietnam and Thailand. 6/ On 10 July, the Da Nang base was the site of a well-publicized Air Force Day display of allied airpower, including aircraft from a B-57 wing recently acknowledged to have been permanently deployed to the Philippines from Japan. 7/

Less known were parallel actions taken within the Government. U.S. resolve to resist aggression in Southeast Asia was communicated directly to North Vietnam by the newly appointed Canadian member of the International Control Commission, Blair Seaborn. Stressing that U.S. ambitions were limited and its intentions were "essentially peaceful," Seaborn told Pham Van Dong that the patience of the U.S. Government was not limitless. He explained that the United States was fully aware of the degree to which Hanoi controlled the Viet

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Cong insurgency and the Pathet Lao and might be obliged to carry the war to the North if DRV-assisted pressures against South Vietnam continued. He further cautioned that U.S. stakes in resisting a North Vietnamese victory were high, since the United States saw the conflict in Southeast Asia as part of a general confrontation with guerrilla subversion in other parts of the world, and that "in the event of escalation the greatest devastation would of course result for the DRVN itself." 8/

Also underway were efforts directed toward educating the American public regarding our national interests in Southeast Asia and the extent of the U.S. commitment there. In reporting to the President, Administration officials who participated in the Honolulu Conference stressed the need for a domestic information effort to "get at the basic doubts" of the importance of the U.S. stake in Southeast Asia. The program was to be focused both on key members of the Congress and on the public. 9/ Thereafter, work was begun under State Department guidance to assemble information in answer to some of the prevalent public questions on the U.S. involvement. Of special concern was a recent Gallup poll showing only 37 percent of the public to have some interest in our Southeast Asian policies. Administration officials viewed this group as consisting primarily of either those desiring our withdrawal or those urging our striking at North Vietnam. A general program was proposed with the avowed aims of eroding public support for these polar positions and solidifying a large "center" behind the thrust of current Administration policies. These aims were to be accomplished by directing public comment into discussions of the precise alternatives available to the United States, greater exposure to which it was believed would alienate both "hawk" and "dove" supporters. 10/ Less than a week after this proposal was submitted, the White House published a NSAM, naming its proponent, Robert Manning, as coordinator of all public information activities for Southeast Asia and directing all agencies to cooperate in furthering the Administration's information objectives. 11/ One of the principal foci of the subsequent information program was the compilation of a public pamphlet of questions raised by critics of Administration policy together with answers furnished and coordinated by several interested Government agencies.

Unknown to more than a limited number of Government officials were a variety of covert military or quasi-military operations being conducted at the expense of North Vietnam. U.S. naval forces had undertaken intermittent patrol operations in the Gulf of Tonkin designed to acquire visual, electronic and photographic intelligence on infiltration activities and coastal navigation from North Vietnam to the South. To carry out these missions, destroyers were assigned to tracks between fixed points and according to stipulated schedules. Designated DE SOTO Patrols, the first such operation of 1964 occurred during the period 28 February-10 March. On this patrol the U.S.S. Craig was authorized to approach to within 4 n.m. of the North Vietnamese mainland, 15 n.m. of the Chinese mainland and 12 n.m. of Chinese-held islands. No incidents were reported



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

as resulting from this action. The next DE SOTO Patrol did not occur until 31 July, on which the U.S.S. Maddox was restricted to a track not closer than 8 n.m. off the North Vietnamese mainland. 12/ Its primary mission, assigned on 17 July, was "to determine DRV coastal activity along the full extent of the patrol track." Other specific intelligence requirements were assigned as follows:

"(a) location and identification of all radar transmitters, and estimate of range capabilities; (b) navigational and hydro information along the routes traversed and particular navigational lights characteristics, landmarks, buoys, currents and tidal information, river mouths and channel accessibility, (c) monitoring a junk force with density of surface traffic pattern, (d) sampling electronic environment radars and navigation aids, (e) photography of opportunities in support of above...."

Separate coastal patrol operations were being conducted by South Vietnamese naval forces. These were designed to uncover and interdict efforts to smuggle personnel and supplies into the South in support of the VC insurgency. This operation had first been organized with U.S. assistance in December 1961; to support it a fleet of motorized junks was built, partially financed with U.S. military assistance funds. During 1964 these vessels operated almost continually in attempts to intercept communist seaborne logistical operations. As Secretary McNamara told Senate committees:

"In the first seven months of this year [1964], they have searched 149,000 junks, some 570,000 people. This is a tremendous operation endeavoring to close the seacoasts of over 900 miles. In the process of that action, as the junk patrol has increased in strength they [sic] have moved farther and farther north endeavoring to find the source of the infiltration." 14/

In addition to these acknowledged activities, the GVN was also conducting a number of operations against North Vietnam to which it did not publicly admit. Covert operations were carried out by South Vietnamese or hired personnel and supported by U.S. training and logistical efforts. Outlined within OPLAN 34A, these operations had been underway theoretically since February but had experienced what the JCS called a "slow beginning." Despite an ultimate objective of helping "convince the North Vietnamese leadership that it is in its own self-interest to desist from its aggressive policies," few operations designed to harass the enemy were carried out successfully during the February-May period. Nevertheless, citing DRV reactions tending "to substantiate the premise that Hanoi is expending substantial resources in defensive measures," the JCS concluded that the potential of the OPLAN 34A program remained high and urged its continuation through Phase II (June-September). 15/ Operations including air-infiltration of sabotage teams, underwater demolition, and seizures of communist junks were approved for the period, and a few were carried by specially trained GVN forces during June and July. 16/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In the process of combined GVN-U.S. planning, but not yet approved for execution, were cross-border operations against VC-North Vietnamese logistical routes in Laos. This planning provided for both air attacks by the VNAF and "ground operations up to battalion size" in the Laotian Panhandle. Preparations for such actions had been approved in principle since March but since then little further interest had been shown in them. Toward the end of July, the air force portion was examined seriously by Administration officials as a means not only to damage the Communist logistical effort but also "primarily for reasons of morale in South Vietnam and to divert GVN attention from [a] proposal to strike North Vietnam." 17/

In addition to both the open and covert operations already underway, a number of other actions intended to bring pressure against North Vietnam had been recommended to the White House. Receiving considerable attention among Administration officials during May and June was a proposed request for a Congressional Resolution, reaffirming support by the legislators for Presidential action to resist Communist advances in Southeast Asia during an election year [Tab A]. In some respects paralleling this domestic initiative, the President was urged to present to the United Nations the detailed case assembled by the Government supporting the charges of DRV aggression against South Vietnam and Laos. He was also urged to authorize periodic deployments of additional forces toward Southeast Asia as a means of demonstrating U.S. resolve to undertake whatever measures were required to resist aggression in that region. Moreover, in OPLAN 37-64, there was fully developed a listing of forces to be deployed as a deterrent to communist escalation in reaction to U.S./GVN actions against North Vietnam. Finally, it was recommended that the President make the decision to use "selected and carefully graduated military force against North Vietnam" if necessary to improve non-Communist prospects in South Vietnam and Laos. 18/

The source documents available to this writer are not clear on the exact decisions made in response to each of these recommendations, or indeed on the precise form or context in which the recommendations were presented. It is evident that the proposal to seek a Congressional Resolution was not favorably received, but as subsequent events indicate neither was it rejected out-of-hand. It proved very useful in largely the same language just two months later. Less certain are the decisions made about the other proposals. Certainly they were not approved for immediate implementation. However, it is not clear whether they were (1) flatly disapproved, (2) merely postponed, or (3) approved in principle, subject to gradual implementation. At the Honolulu Conference, where many of the proposed actions were discussed with U.S. officials from the theatre, many practical considerations were aired which showed that delayed implementation would be a reasonable course of action. 19/ But such factors would have provided equally valid reasons for either deciding against the proposals or for merely deferring a decision until a later, more appropriate time. The most significant point, for an understanding of the events and decisions of the second half of 1964, is that these options remained "on the shelf" for possible implementation should favorable circumstances arise.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II

THE TONKIN GULF CRISIS

Several of the pressuring measures recommended to the White House in May or June were implemented in conjunction with or in the immediate aftermath of naval action in the Tonkin Gulf. It is this fact and the rapidity with which these measures were taken that has led critics to doubt some aspects of the public account of the Tonkin incidents. It is also this fact, together with later Administration assessments of the Tonkin Gulf experience, that give the incidents greater significance than the particular events seemed at first to warrant.

THE FIRST INCIDENT

What happened in the Gulf? As noted earlier, U.S.S. MADDOX commenced the second DE SOTO Patrol on 31 July. On the prior night South Vietnamese coastal patrol forces made a midnight attack, including an amphibious "commando" raid, on Hon Me and Hon Nieu Islands, about 19° N. latitude. At the time of this attack, U.S.S. MADDOX was 120-130 miles away just heading into waters off North Vietnam. On 2 August, having reached the northernmost point on its patrol track and having headed South, the destroyer was intercepted by three North Vietnamese patrol boats. Apparently, these boats and a fleet of junks had moved into the area near the island to search for the attacking force and had mistaken Maddox for a South Vietnamese escort vessel. (Approximately eleven hours earlier, while on a northerly heading, Maddox had altered course to avoid the junk concentration shown on her radar; about six hours after that -- now headed South -- Maddox had altered her course to the southeast to avoid the junks a second time.) When the PT boats began their high-speed run at her, at a distance of approximately 10 miles, the destroyer was 28 miles from the coast and heading farther into international waters. Two of the boats closed to within 5,000 yards, launching one torpedo each. As they approached, Maddox fired on the boats with her 5-inch batteries and altered course to avoid the torpedoes, which were observed passing the starboard side at a distance of 100 to 200 yards. The third boat moved up abeam of the destroyer and took a direct 5-inch hit; it managed to launch a torpedo which failed to run. All three PT boats fired 50-caliber machine guns at Maddox as they made their firing runs, and a bullet fragment was recovered from the destroyer's superstructure. The attacks occurred in mid-afternoon, and photographs were taken of the torpedo boats as they attacked. 20/

Upon first report of the PT boats' apparently hostile intent, four F-8E aircraft were launched from the aircraft carrier Ticonderoga, many miles to the South, with instructions to provide air cover but not to fire unless they or Maddox were fired upon. As Maddox continued in a southerly direction, Ticonderoga's aircraft attacked the two boats that had initiated the action. Both were damaged with Zuni rockets and 20mm gunfire. The third boat, struck by the destroyer's 5-inch, was already



77  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

dead in the water. After about eight minutes, the aircraft broke off their attacks. In the meantime, Maddox had been directed by the 7th Fleet Commander to retire from the area to avoid hostile fire. Following their attacks on the PT's, the aircraft joined Maddox and escorted her back toward South Vietnamese waters where she joined a second destroyer, C. Turner Joy. The two ships continued to patrol in international waters. Approximately two hours after the action, in early evening, reconnaissance aircraft from Ticonderoga located the damaged PT's and obtained two photographs. The third boat was last seen burning and presumed sunk. 21/

On 3 August a note of protest was dispatched to the Hanoi Government, reportedly through the International Control Commission for Indo-China. Directed by the President, the note stressed the unprovoked nature of the North Vietnamese attack and closed with the following warning:

"The U.S. Government expects that the authorities of the regime in North Vietnam will be under no misapprehension as to the grave consequences which would inevitably result from any further unprovoked offensive military action against U.S. forces."

On that same day, measures were taken to increase the security of the DE SOTO Patrol, the approved schedule of which still had two days to run. At 1325 hours (Washington time) the JCS approved a CINCPAC request to resume the patrol at a distance of 11 n.m. from the North Vietnamese coast. 22/ Later in the day, President Johnson announced that he had approved doubling the patrolling force and authorized active defensive measures on the part of both the destroyers and their escorting aircraft. His press statement included the following:

I have instructed the Navy:

1. To continue the patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam.
2. To double the force by adding an additional destroyer to the one already on patrol.
3. To provide a combat air patrol over the destroyers, and
4. To issue orders to the commanders of the combat aircraft and the two destroyers; (a) to attack any force which attacks them in international waters, and (b) to attack with the objective not only of driving off the force but of destroying it. 23/

#### THE SECOND INCIDENT

Late the following evening the destroyers, Maddox and C. Turner Joy, were involved in a second encounter with hostile patrol boats. Like the first incident, this occurred following a South Vietnamese attack on North

28  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Vietnamese coastal targets -- this time the Rhon River estuary and the Vinh Sonh radar installation, which were bombarded on the night of 3 August. The more controversial of the two, this incident occurred under cover of darkness and seems to have been both triggered and described largely by radar and sonar images. After the action had been joined, however, both visual sightings and intercepted North Vietnamese communications confirmed that an attack by hostile patrol craft was in progress. 24/

At 1940 hours, 4 August 1964 (Tonkin Gulf time), while "proceeding S.E. at best speed," Task Group 72.1 (Maddox and Turner Joy) radioed "RCVD INFO indicating attack by PGM P-4 imminent." Evidently this was based on an intercepted communication, later identified as "an intelligence source," indicating that "North Vietnamese naval forces had been ordered to attack the patrol." At the time, radar contacts evaluated as "probable torpedo boats" were observed about 36 miles to the northeast. Accordingly, the Task Group Commander altered course and increased speed to avoid what he evaluated as a trap. At approximately 2035 hours, while west of Hainan Island, the destroyers reported radar sightings of three unidentified aircraft and two unidentified vessels in the patrol area. On receiving the report, Ticonderoga immediately launched F-8s and A-4Ds to provide a combat air patrol over the destroyers. Within minutes, the unidentified aircraft disappeared from the radar screen, while the vessels maintained a distance of about 27 miles. Actually, surface contacts on a parallel course had been shadowing the destroyers with radar for more than three hours. ECM contacts maintained by the C. Turner Joy indicated that the radar was that carried aboard DRV patrol boats. 25/

New unidentified surface contacts 13 miles distant were reported at 2134 hours. These vessels were closing at approximately 30 knots on the beam and were evaluated as "hostile". Six minutes later (2140) Maddox opened fire, and at 2142, by which time two of the new contacts had closed to a distance of 11 miles, aircraft from Ticonderoga's CAP began their attacks. Just before this, one of the PT boats launched a torpedo, which was later reported as seen passing about 300 feet off the port beam, from aft to forward, of the C. Turner Joy. A searchlight beam was observed to swing in an arc toward the C. Turner Joy by all of the destroyer's signal bridge personnel. It was extinguished before it illuminated the ship, presumably upon detection of the approaching aircraft. Aboard the Maddox, Marine gunners saw what were believed to be cockpit lights of one or more small boats pass up the port side of the ship and down the other. After approximately an hour's action, the destroyers reported two enemy boats sunk and no damage or casualties suffered. 26/

In the meantime, two patrol craft from the initial surface contact had closed to join the action, and the engagement was described for higher headquarters -- largely on the basis of the destroyers' radar and sonar indications and on radio intercept information. In successive messages to CINCPACFLT, beginning about 2150 hours, the Commander of Task Group 72.1 radioed that he was "under continuous torpedo attack" -- that at least six and later ten torpedoes had been successfully evaded. Eventually,

27

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

the count reached 22 torpedoes, a total which caused the Commanding Officer, once the engagement had ended, to question the validity of his report and communicate these doubts to his superiors:

"Review of action makes many recorded contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects and overeager sonarman may have accounted for many reports."

In addition to sonar readings, however, the Task Group had also reported intercepting communications from North Vietnamese naval craft indicating that they were involved in an attack on U.S. ("enemy") ships and that they had "sacrificed" two vessels in the engagement. 27/

THE RESPONSE IN WASHINGTON

Sometime prior to the reported termination of the engagement, at 0030 hours, 5 August (Tonkin Gulf time), "alert orders" to prepare for possible reprisal raids were sent out by naval authorities to Ticonderoga and to a second aircraft carrier, Constellation, which started heading South from Hong Kong late on 3 August. Such raids were actually ordered and carried out later in the day. "Defense officials disclosed [in public testimony, 9 January 1968] that, when the first word was received of the second attack 'immediate consideration was given to retaliation.'" That apparently began shortly after 0920 hours (Washington time), when the task group message that a North Vietnamese naval attack was imminent was first relayed to Washington. From this time on, amid a sequence of messages describing the attack, Secretary McNamara held "a series of meetings with [his] chief civilian and military advisers" concerning the engagement and possible U.S. retaliatory actions. As he testified before the Fulbright Committee:

"We identified and refined various options for a response to the attack, to be presented to the President. Among these options was the air strike against the attacking boats and their associated bases, which option was eventually selected. As the options were identified preliminary messages were sent to appropriate operational commanders alerting them to the several possibilities so that initial planning steps could be undertaken." 28/

At 1230, the President met with the National Security Council. Having just come from a brief meeting with the JCS, attended also by Secretary Rusk and McGeorge Bundy, Secretary McNamara briefed the NSC on the reported details of the attack and the possibilities for reprisal. Shortly thereafter (presumably during a working lunch with the President, Secretary Rusk and Bundy) and after receiving by telephone the advice of the JCS, McNamara and the others recommended specific reprisal actions. It was at this point that the President approved "a response consisting of an air strike on the PT and SWATOW boat bases and their associated facilities." 29/



30

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Returning from this session shortly after 1500, Secretary McNamara, along with Deputy Secretary Vance, joined with the JCS to review all the evidence relating to the engagement. Included in this review was the communications intelligence information which the Secretary reported, containing North Vietnamese reports that (1) their vessels were engaging the destroyers, and (2) they had lost two craft in the fight. In the meantime, however, messages had been relayed to the Joint Staff indicating considerable confusion over the details of the attack. The DE SOTO Patrol Commander's message, expressing doubts about earlier evidence of a large-scale torpedo attack, arrived sometime after 1330 hours. Considerably later (it was not sent to CINCPACFLT until 1447 EDT), another message arrived to the effect that while details of the action were still confusing, the commander of Task Group 72.1 was certain that the ambush was genuine. He had interviewed the personnel who sighted the boat's cockpit lights passing near the Maddox, and he had obtained a report from the C. Turner Joy that two torpedoes were observed passing nearby. Accordingly, these reports were discussed by telephone with CINCPAC, and he was instructed by Secretary McNamara to make a careful check of the evidence and ascertain whether there was any doubt concerning the occurrence of an attack. CINCPAC called the JCS at least twice more, at 1723 and again at 1807 hours, to state that he was convinced on the basis of "additional information" that the attacks had taken place. 30/ At the time of the earlier call Secretary McNamara and the JCS were discussing possible force deployments to follow any reprisals. On the occasion of the first call, the Secretary was at the White House attending the day's second NSC meeting. Upon being informed of CINCPAC's call, he reports:

"I spoke to the Director of the Joint Staff and asked him to make certain that the Commander in Chief, Pacific was willing to state that the attack had taken place, and therefore that he was free to release the Executive Order because earlier in the afternoon I had told him that under no circumstances would retaliatory action take place until we were, to use my words, 'damned sure that the attacks had taken place.'" 31/

At the meeting of the National Security Council, proposals to deploy certain increments of OPLAN 37-64 forces to the Western Pacific were discussed, and the order to retaliate against North Vietnamese patrol craft and their associated facilities was confirmed. Following this meeting, at 1845, the President met with 16 Congressional leaders from both parties for a period of 89 minutes. Reportedly, he described the second incident in the Gulf, explained his decisions to order reprisals, and informed the legislators of his intention to request a formal statement of Congressional support for these decisions. On the morning following the meeting, The Washington Post carried a report that none of the Congressional leaders present at the meeting had raised objections to the course of action planned. Their only question, the report stated, "had to do with how Congress could show its agreement and concern in the crisis." 32/



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In many ways the attacks on U.S. ships in the Tonkin Gulf provided the Administration with an opportunity to do a number of things that had been urged on it. Certainly it offered a politically acceptable way of exerting direct punitive pressure on North Vietnam. In South Vietnam, the U.S. response served to satisfy for a time the growing desire for some action to carry the war to the North. Relative to the election campaign, it provided a means of eliminating any doubts about President Johnson's decisiveness that may have been encouraged by his preferred candidate's image as the restrained man of peace. The obvious convenience and the ways in which it was exploited have been at the root of much of the suspicion with which critics of Administration policy have viewed the incident.

The documents available to this writer are not conclusive on this point, but the evidence indicates that the occurrence of a DRV provocation at this time resulted from events over which the U.S. Government exercised little control. It has been suggested that the incidents were related in some way to pressure coming from the GVN for U.S. action against North Vietnam. However, the patrol was authorized on or prior to 17 July, and General Khanh's oft-cited "Go North" appeal wasn't made until 19 July. The first attack almost certainly was a case of mistaken judgment on the part of the local Vietnamese commander. His probable association of U.S.S. Maddox with the South Vietnamese raiding force is indicated by the circumstances preceding the event, the brief duration and character of it, and the long-delayed (not until 5 August) and rather subdued DRV public comment. Moreover, there is little reason to see anything more than coincidence in the close conjunction between the GVN's maritime operations against the North Vietnamese coast and the scheduling of the DE SOTO Patrol. The two operations were scheduled and monitored from different authorities and through separate channels of communication and command. Higher U.S. naval commands were informed of the operations against the two islands by COMUSMACV, but the task group commander had no knowledge of where or when the specific operations had taken place. As Secretary McNamara told Senator Morse, in response to charges that U.S. naval forces were supporting the GVN operation,

"Our ships had absolutely no knowledge of it, were not connected with it; in no sense of the word can be considered to have backstopped the effort."

In addition, there was no reason on the basis of earlier DE SOTO Patrol experience to even suspect that patrol activity might precipitate hostile action by North Vietnam. 33/

Although the events of the second attack were less clear-cut, the evidence does not support beliefs (which have been expressed) that the incident was staged. On the contrary, the evidence leads readily to other explanations, which are at least equally as plausible.

DRV motivations for the second attack are unclear, but several possibilities provide rational explanations for a deliberate DRV decision. Those given credence at the time -- that the DRV or China wanted to

32

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

increase pressures for an international conference or that the DRV was testing U.S. reactions to a contemplated general offensive 34/ -- have lost some credibility. Subsequent events and DRV actions have appeared to lack any consistent relationship with such motives. Perhaps closer to the mark is the narrow purpose of prompt retaliation for an embarrassing and well-publicized rebuff by a much-maligned enemy. Inexperienced in modern naval operations, DRV leaders may have believed that under cover of darkness it would be possible to even the score or to provide at least a psychological victory by severely damaging a U.S. ship. Unlike the first incident, the DRV was ready (5 August) with a propaganda blast denying its own provocation and claiming the destruction of U.S. aircraft. Still, regardless of motive, there is little question but that the attack on the destroyers was deliberate. Having followed the destroyers for hours, their course was well known to the North Vietnamese naval force, and its advance units were laying ahead to make an ambushing beam attack fully 60 miles from shore.

The reality of a North Vietnamese attack on 4 August has been corroborated by both visual and technical evidence. That it may have been deliberately provoked by the United States is belied to a considerable degree by circumstantial evidence. Operating restrictions for the DE SOTO Patrol were made more stringent following the first attack. The 11 n.m., rather than 8 n.m., off-shore patrolling track indicates an intention to avoid -- not provoke -- further contact. On 4 February the rules of engagement were modified to restrict "hot pursuit" by the U.S. ships to no closer than 11 n.m. from the North Vietnamese coast; aircraft were to pursue no closer than 3 n.m. 35/ Given the first attack, the President's augmentation of the patrol force was a normal precaution, particularly since both Ticonderoga and C. Turner Joy were already deployed in the immediate vicinity as supporting elements. Moreover, since the augmentation was coupled with a clear statement of intent to continue the patrols and a firm warning to the DRV that repetition would bring dire consequences, their addition to the patrol could be expected to serve more as a deterrent than a provocation.

The often alleged "poised" condition of the U.S. reprisal forces was anything but extraordinary. U.S.S. Constellation was well out of the immediate operating area as the patrol was resumed on 3 August. In fact, one reason for delaying the launching of retaliatory air strikes (nearly 1100 hours, 5 August -- Tonkin Gulf time) was to permit Constellation to approach within reasonable range of the targets. Target lists from which to make appropriate selections were already available as a result of routine contingency planning accomplished in June and July. In preparation for the resumed DE SOTO Patrol of 3-5 August, the patrol track was moved farther north to make clearer the separation between it and the 34-A operations. 36/ The ways in which the events of the second Tonkin Gulf incident came about give little indication of a deliberate provocation to provide opportunity for reprisals.

BROADENING THE IMPACT

There is no question, however, that the second incident was promptly exploited by the Administration. The event was seized upon as an opportunity

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

to take several measures that had been recommended earlier and which were now seen as useful means of turning an essentially unique and localized incident into an event with broader strategic impact. The extent to which the strategic utility of these actions was perceived during the two days between the incidents is not clear. Certainly the disposition of U.S.S. Constellation does not suggest a picture of intensive preparation for a planned series of new military and political pressures against North Vietnam. Moreover, there is no record in the usual sources of the series of staff meetings, task assignments and memoranda that typically accompany preparations for coordinated political and military initiatives. Whatever was contemplated between 2 and 4 August, the deliberations immediately preceding the reprisal decision seem to have been largely ad hoc, both within DOD and among the President's principal advisers.

The most reasonable explanation for the actions which accompanied the reprisals, and for the rapidity of their implementation, is the fact that each of them had been proposed and staffed in detail months before. These "on the shelf" options had been recommended unanimously by the principal officials responsible for security matters in Southeast Asia. The fact that they were implemented in August indicates that the President did not disapprove of them, but rather that the domestic and international political environments had probably been judged inappropriate earlier in the summer. The measures apparently had been considered either too costly or too risky (perhaps politically or perhaps in terms of communist reactions), given the President's election strategy and his policy theme of "maximum effect with minimum escalation". The kind of circumstances created by the Tonkin Gulf affair enabled them to be carried out at lower cost and with less risk. The promptness with which these actions were to be taken now is perhaps as much a direct result of the President's well-known political astuteness and keen sense of timing as any other single factor.

One of the first actions taken was to deploy additional U.S. military forces to the Western Pacific. This was done in part as a measure to deter any hostile responses by Hanoi or Peking to the reprisal raids. It also enabled making a stronger signal of U.S. resolve to defend its interests throughout Southeast Asia, as recommended at the end of May. Orders directing the deployment of selected 37-64 forces and the alerting of others were dispatched from the Pentagon shortly after the President's meeting with Congressional leaders on the evening of 4 August. Shortly after midnight, on 5 August, and again later in the day, Secretary McNamara announced the specific measures by which U.S. military capabilities around Southeast Asia were being augmented:

"First, an attack carrier group has been transferred from the First Fleet on the Pacific coast to the Western Pacific. Secondly, interceptor and fighter bomber aircraft have been moved into South Vietnam. Thirdly, fighter bomber aircraft have been moved into Thailand. Fourthly, interceptor and fighter



34  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

bomber squadrons have been transferred from the United States into advance bases in the Pacific. Fifthly, an antisubmarine task force group has been moved into the South China Sea. 37/

It is significant, relative to the broader purpose of the deployments, that few of these additional units were removed from the Western Pacific when the immediate crisis subsided. In late September the fourth attack aircraft carrier was authorized to resume its normal station in the Eastern Pacific as soon as the regularly assigned carrier completed repairs. The other forces remained in the vicinity of their August deployment. 38/

Other actions taken by the Administration in the wake of Tonkin Gulf were intended to communicate to various audiences the depth and sincerity of the U.S. commitment. On the evening of 4 August, in conjunction with his testing of Congressional opinion regarding reprisal action, President Johnson disclosed his intention to request a resolution in support of U.S. Southeast Asian policy. This he did through a formal message to both houses on 5 August. Concurrently, identical draft resolutions, the language of which had been prepared by executive agencies, were introduced in the Senate by J. William Fulbright (D., Ark.) and in the House by Thomas E. Morgan (D., Pa.) and co-sponsored by bi-partisan leadership. 39/ Discussed in committee on 6 August, in response to testimony by leading Administration officials, the resolution was passed the following day -- by votes of 88 to 2 in the Senate and 416 to 0 in the House Tab C7.

Despite the nearly unanimous votes of support for the Resolution, Congressional opinions varied as to the policy implications and the meaning of such support. The central belief seemed to be that the occasion necessitated demonstrating the nation's unity and collective will in support of the President's action and affirming U.S. determination to oppose further aggression. However, beyond that theme, there was a considerable variety of opinion. For example, in the House, expressions of support varied from Congressman Laird's argument, that while the retaliation in the Gulf was appropriate such actions still left a policy to be developed with respect to the land war in Southeast Asia, to the more reticent viewpoint of Congressman Alger. The latter characterized his support as being primarily for purposes of showing unity and expressed concern over the danger of being dragged into war by "other nations seeking our help." Several spokesmen stressed that the Resolution did not constitute a declaration of war, did not abdicate Congressional responsibility for determining national policy commitments, and did not give the President carte blanche to involve the nation in a major Asian war. 40/

Similar expressions were voiced in the senior chamber. For example, Senator Nelson sought assurances that the Resolution would not be exploited to commit the United States further in the direction of a large land war



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

in Asia without an expression of specific Congressional approval. In response, Senator Fulbright stated that he did not believe that the Resolution changed in any way the Administration's concept of keeping the conflict in Vietnam as limited as possible. He identified the purposes of the Resolution as being only (1) "to make it clear that the Congress approves the action taken by the President to meet the attack on U.S. forces...." and (2) to declare support for the resolute policy enunciated by the President in order to prevent further aggression, or to retaliate with suitable measures should such aggression take place." 41/ However, in subsequent discussion it was made clear that preventing or retaliating against further aggression was interpreted rather broadly at the time:

"(Mr. Cooper) ...are we now giving the President advance authority to take whatever action he may deem necessary respecting South Vietnam and its defense, or with respect to the defense of any other country included in the [SEATO] treaty?

"(Mr. Fulbright) I think that is correct.

"(Mr. Cooper) Then, looking ahead, if the President decided that it was necessary to use such force as could lead into war, we will give that authority by this resolution?

"(Mr. Fulbright) That is the way I would interpret it. If a situation later developed in which we thought the approval should be withdrawn it could be withdrawn by concurrent resolution." 42/

The Congressional Resolution had several intended audiences. First, it was aimed at the communist powers who might not believe the President would risk legislative debate over strong military actions in an election year. Second, it was intended to reassure our allies, particularly in Asia, who might doubt the ability of the President to rally the necessary public resolve should stronger military measures be needed. Finally it was directed at the U.S. public, whose appreciation of national interests in Southeast Asia might be strengthened through observation of combined executive-legislative and bipartisan political support. 43/

The United Nations was the target of a separate statement, on 5 August, as Ambassador Stevenson described the events in the Gulf for members of the Security Council and specifically related the DRV provocation to the wider campaign of terror and infiltration occurring in South Vietnam and Laos. 44/ This address was designed to establish the legitimacy of our actions in the Gulf under provisions of the UN Charter and to reaffirm that U.S. policy in Southeast Asia had limited aims and was based on upholding provisions of existing international agreements.

The third communication was directed specifically to Hanoi, on 10 August, through the Canadian I.C.C. representative and was intended to strengthen the warning which he conveyed on his initial visit. In

36

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

addition to repeating points made earlier, Seaborn's second message conveyed the U.S. Government's uncertainty over DRV intentions in the 4 August attack and explained that subsequent U.S. deployments of additional airpower to South Vietnam and Thailand were "precautionary." In addition, the new message stressed: (1) that the Tonkin Gulf events demonstrated that "U.S. public and official patience" was wearing thin; (2) that the Congressional Resolution reaffirmed U.S. determination "to continue to oppose firmly, by all necessary means, DRV efforts to subvert and conquer South Vietnam and Laos"; and (3) that "if the DRV persists in its present course, it can expect to suffer the consequences." 45/

Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the provocation handed the U.S. Government in the Tonkin Gulf, the Administration was able to carry out most of the actions recommended by its principal officials early in the summer. By the same token, it was reducing the number of unused measures short of direct military action that had been conceived as available for exerting effective pressure on the DRV. In effect, as it made its commitments in Southeast Asia clearer it also deepened them, and in the process it denied itself access to some of the uncommitting options which it had perceived earlier as offering policy flexibility. 46/ Meanwhile, other events were also having the effect of denying options which had been considered useful alternatives to strikes against the North.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III

POST-TONKIN POLICY ASSESSMENTS

The Tonkin Gulf incidents were important not only because of what they enabled the United States to do in response -- but also because of the way what was done began to be regarded by policy-makers. The fact that U.S. forces had responded to hostile acts by making direct attacks on North Vietnam, albeit limited ones under unique circumstances, had rather significant impacts on the Administration's policy judgments. These impacts appeared as it became increasingly evident that the United States actually had fewer options than it once believed available.

DILEMMAS IN LAOS

One of the areas where the Administration first saw its freedom of action being impaired was Laos.

Prior to the events in Tonkin Gulf, the situation in Laos had become increasingly complex, thus making U.S. policy choices increasingly delicate. Since the end of May, U.S. hopes for a stabilized Laos had been based largely on a Polish proposal to convene a preliminary conference among six nations. <sup>47/</sup> Particularly promising was the Soviet Union's willingness to support the proposal. Toward the end of June, as the Laotian government warned of the imminent threat of a major communist offensive near Muong Soui, the Soviet Union asked Great Britain to postpone efforts toward such a conference, and the Poles seemed to back away from their original initiative. On 25 July the Soviet Union announced her return to the 14-Nation formula, and threatened to resign her co-chairman role if a conference were not called. <sup>48/</sup> The Soviet threat to withdraw from the international machinery that is basic to the neutralist Laotian government's claim to legitimacy was a matter of considerable mutual concern in Vientiane and Washington. <sup>49/</sup>

One of the major reasons for U.S. support of the Polish 6-Nation preliminary conference was its value in forestalling pressure for a Geneva-type meeting. It was hoped that such a conference could be prolonged well into the autumn to give the political and military situation in South Vietnam time to be improved, and to build a more favorable political climate for an eventual 14-Nation conference on Laos. The latter could be accomplished, it was hoped, by: (1) demonstrating the extent of communist responsibility for Laotian instability; (2) getting the I.C.C. to function more effectively; (3) strengthening international backing for Souvanna's position; and (4) thereby obtaining support for his insistence on Pathet Lao withdrawal from the Plaine des Jarres as a precondition for a new Geneva settlement. <sup>50/</sup> Insofar as Laos was concerned, the United States recognized that a new conference was probably desirable, as long as it did not occur too soon. However, it also recognized the suspicion with which the GVN would regard any kind of negotiations



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

over Southeast Asia and the likelihood that back-corridor discussions of the Vietnamese problem would be an almost inevitable by-product. In time such a procedure might be useful, but for the balance of 1964 it was to be avoided in order to promote GVN stability and encourage a more vigorous GVN war effort. 51/

The pressure for a Geneva-type conference had been building ever since the resumption of fighting in Laos in May. The chief protagonist in the quest for negotiations was France, who first proposed reconvening the 14-Nation Conference to deal with the crisis on 20 May. What made French policy so dangerous to U.S. interests, however, was that its interest in a Geneva solution applied to Vietnam as well. On 12 June, DeGaulle publicly repeated his neutralization theme for all Indo-China and called for an end to all foreign intervention there; on 23 July he proposed reconvening the 1954 Geneva Conference to deal with the problems of Vietnam.

The Soviet Union's return to the 14-Nation formula in July (it had endorsed the original French proposal before indicating willingness to support the 6-Nation approach) indicated solidarity in the communist camp. The call was endorsed by North Vietnam on the following day. Communist China first announced support for a 14-Nation Conference (on Laos) on 9 June, repeating this through notes to the co-chairman calling on the 13th for an "emergency meeting." On 2 August, the Chinese urged the USSR not to carry out its threat to abandon its co-chairman role, apparently viewing such a development as jeopardizing the possibilities for a Geneva settlement. 52/

Great Britain also urged the Russians to stay on, and during the last days of July it attempted to make arrangements in Moscow to convene a 14-Nation assembly on Laos. The negotiations failed because Britain insisted on Souvanna's prerequisite that the communists withdraw from positions taken in May and was unable to gain Soviet acquiescence. However, U.S. leaders were aware that Britain's support on this point could not be counted on indefinitely in the face of increasing pressure in the direction of Geneva. 53/

In the meantime, however, Laotian military efforts to counter the communist threat to key routes and control points west of the Plaine des Jarres were showing great success. As a result of a counteroffensive (Operation Triangle), government forces gained control of a considerable amount of territory that gave promise of assuring access between the two capitals (Vientiane and Luang Prabang) for the first time in three years. 54/

In effect, the government's newly won control of territory and communication routes in Central Laos created a new and more favorable balance of power in that country, which in the perceptions of the Administration should not be jeopardized. A threat to this balance from either (1) communist reactions to additional pressure, or (2) Laotian insistence on extending their offensive into the Plaine des Jarres, was cited to discourage proposals near the end of July to permit the VNAF to



39

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

bomb infiltration routes in the Laotian Panhandle. 55/ This "don't rock the boat" policy was given added encouragement when, on 1 August, Great Britain initiated a promising effort toward a new diplomatic solution. Acting on Souvanna Phouma's request, the British government urged the I.C.J. members to arrange a meeting among the three Laotian political factions. 56/

Concern over not provoking a communist military escalation that would upset the relatively stabilized situation in Laos figured prominently in a tentative analysis of U.S. strategy for Southeast Asia made and circulated for comment by the State Department in mid-August. It had a significant impact on the Administration's assessment of its options in the post-Tonkin period. Among other effects, this concern caused it to withhold for several weeks its approval of continuing proposals for air and ground initiatives in the Panhandle as means to improve the situation in South Vietnam. 57/

#### CONCERN OVER PRESSURES FOR NEGOTIATIONS

One of the Tonkin Gulf impacts which was perceived within the Administration served to exacerbate its policy dilemmas regarding Laos. Administration officials were apprehensive that the international crisis precipitated by incidents in the Gulf might intensify the kind of Geneva conference pressures generated previously. 58/ Administration concern was apparently well founded. On 5 August UN Secretary General U Thant stated that the 14-Nation assembly should be reconvened to deal with the Tonkin Gulf debate then being urged on the UN Security Council. (He had earlier urged reconvening the 1954 Conference to negotiate a Vietnam settlement.) Two days later, during the debate, the French delegation urged the calling of a conference for the pacification of all of Indo-China. Reports appeared on 10 August that the Chinese People's Daily published an editorial arguing that a Geneva settlement was the only effective way to solve the problem of South Vietnam. On the 19th, in a note rejecting potential UN Security Council findings regarding responsibility for the Tonkin Gulf incidents, North Vietnam declared its insistence on a Geneva conference. 59/

Such was the Administration's concern in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, that it contemplated a diplomatic initiative relating to Laos that was designed to counteract the expected pressure. Reflecting a point of view reportedly also becoming attractive to Souvanna Phouma, the State Department sought reactions to a policy direction that would no longer insist on Pathet Lao withdrawal from the Plaine des Jarres as a precondition to an international conference. The gains recently achieved through "Operation Triangle" were so significant, it reasoned, that they more than offset communist control of the Plaine. And it was clear that any negotiations by which a communist withdrawal might be arranged would include reciprocal demands for the government to relinquish its recently won gains. 60/ Moreover, passage of the Congressional Resolution and the strong DRV naval attacks had accomplished the exact kind of actions believed to be necessary earlier to demonstrate U.S.

40

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

firmness in the event negotiating pressure should become compelling. 61/

Reactions to this tentative policy change were unfavorable. It was seen as likely to have a demoralizing impact on the GVN. It was also seen as possibly eroding the impression of strong U.S. resolve, which the reprisal air strikes were believed to have created. For example, Ambassador Taylor cabled:

"...rush to conference table would serve to confirm to CHICOMS that U.S. retaliation for destroyer attacks was transient phenomenon and that firm CHICOM response in form of commitment to defend NVN has given U.S. "Paper tiger" second thoughts....

"In Vietnam sudden backdown from previously strongly held U.S. position on Plaine des Jarres withdrawal prior to conference on Laos would have potentially disastrous effect. Morale and will to fight and particular willingness to push ahead with arduous pacification task...would be undermined by what would look like evidence that U.S. seeking to take advantage of any slight improvement in non-Communist position as excuse for extricating itself from Indo-China via conference route....

"Under circumstances, we see very little hope that results of such a conference would be advantageous to us. Moreover, prospects of limiting it to consideration of only Laotian problem appear at this time juncture to be dimmer than ever...." 62/

CONCERN OVER TONKIN REPRISAL SIGNALS

Contained in Ambassador Taylor's views was yet another of the Administration's reflections on the impact of the Tonkin Gulf incidents. Officials developed mixed feelings regarding the effect of the Tonkin reprisals for signaling firm U.S. commitments in Southeast Asia. On one hand, it was conceded that the reprisals and the actions which accompanied them represented the most forceful expression of U.S. resolve to date. Improvements were perceived in South Vietnamese morale, and the combination of force and restraint demonstrated was believed effective in interrupting communist momentum and forcing a reassessment of U.S. intentions. 63/ On the other hand, they reflected concern that these effects might not last and that the larger aspects of U.S. determination might still be unclear.

Several officials and agencies indicated that our actions in the Tonkin Gulf represented only one step along a continually demanding route for the United States. They expressed relief that if a persuasive impression of firmness were to be created relative to the general security of Southeast Asia, we could not rest on our laurels. Ambassador Taylor expressed the limited impact of the Tonkin Gulf action as follows:

41

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"It should be remembered that our retaliatory action in Gulf of Tonkin is in effect an isolated U.S.-DRV incident. Although this has relation...to the larger problem of DRV aggression by subversion in Viet-Nam and Laos, we have not (repeat not) yet come to grips in a forceful way with DRV over the issue of this larger and much more complex problem. 64/

Later, he described a need for subsequent actions that would convey to Hanoi that "the operational rules with respect to the DRV are changing." 65/ Assistant Secretary of State Bundy believed that Hanoi and Peking had probably been convinced only "that we will act strongly where U.S. force units are directly involved...that in other respects the communist side may not be so persuaded that we are prepared to take stronger action...." He saw the need for a continuous "combination of military pressure and some form of communication" to cause Hanoi to accept the idea of "getting out" of South Vietnam and Laos. 66/ CINCPAC stated that "what we have not done and must do is make plain to Hanoi and Peiping the cost of pursuing their current objectives and impeding ours....Our actions of August 5 have created a momentum which can lead to the attainment of our objectives in S.E. Asia....It is most important that we not lose this momentum." 67/ The JCS urged actions to "sustain the U.S. advantage recently gained," and later cautioned: "Failure to resume and maintain a program of pressure through military actions... could signal a lack of resolve." 68/

What these advisors had in mind by way of actions varied somewhat but only in the extent to which they were willing to go in the immediate future. Bundy stressed that policy commitments must be such that U.S. and GVN hands could be kept free for military actions against DRV infiltration routes in Laos. Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC and the JCS urged prompt air and ground operations across the Laotian border to interrupt the current (though modest) southward flow of men and supplies. Both Taylor and CINCPAC indicated the necessity of building up our "readiness posture" to undertake stronger actions -- through additional deployments of forces and logistical support elements and strengthening of the GVN political base.

The mood and attitudes reflected in these viewpoints were concrete and dramatic expressions of the increased U.S. commitment stemming from the Tonkin Gulf incidents. They were candidly summed up by CINCPAC in his statement:

"...pressures against the other side once instituted should not be relaxed by any actions or lack of them which would destroy the benefits of the rewarding steps previously taken...." 69/

Increasingly voiced by officials from many quarters of the Administration and from the professional agencies were arguments which said, in effect, now that we have gone this far we cannot afford to stop and go no farther; our original signal must continually be reinforced. What



42

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

was not stated -- at least not in documentary form -- were estimates of how long the process might have to continue or to what extent the actions might have to be carried.

REASSERTION OF THE ROSTOW THESIS

Soon after the Tonkin Gulf incidents State Department Counselor Walt Rostow reformulated and circulated his earlier thesis that insurgencies supported by external powers must be dealt with through measures to neutralize the sources of that support. First presented to President Johnson in December 1963, variations on this theme had been proposed by Rostow at various times throughout 1964, the most recent occasion being in June, right after the Honolulu Conference. 70/ Now in mid-August, his newly articulated arguments were passed to the White House, Department of State, Department of Defense and the JCS.

The "Rostow thesis" was generalized -- not explicitly dealing with a particular insurgency -- but it was evident that considerations of the U.S. dilemmas in Southeast Asia affected its formulation. It started with a proposition:

"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. The objective of these pressures is not necessarily to attack his ability to provide support, although economic and certain military actions would in fact do just that. Rather, the objective is to affect his calculation of interests. Therefore, the threat that is implicit in initial U.S. actions would be more important than the military effect of the actions themselves." 71/

In Rostow's view, the target government's "calculation of interests" could be affected by a number of factors, none of which would preclude, however, the need for effective counterinsurgency programs within the country already under attack. The factors included: (1) loss, and fear of further loss, of military and economic facilities; (2) fear of involvement in a much larger conflict; (3) fear of increased dependence upon, and loss of independent action to, a major communist country; and (4) fear of internal political upheaval and loss of power. The coercive impacts of the pressures were to be their principal objectives. Significant (in view of currently espoused rationale for increased pressures on North Vietnam) was the explicit caution that improved morale in the country troubled by insurgency and "improved U.S. bargaining leverage in any international conference on the conflict" were to be considered merely as "bonus effects."

The coercive pressure was to result from "damaging military actions" coupled with concurrent political, economic and psychological pressures. The former could include selective or full naval blockade and "surgical"



43

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

destruction of specific targets by aerial bombardment or naval gunfire. They could be supported by such non-destructive military actions as aerial reconnaissance, harassment of civil aviation and maritime commerce, mock air attacks, and timely concentrations of U.S. or allied forces at sea or near land borders. Following a line of reasoning prevalent in the Government during the early 60's, Rostow observed that a target government might well reduce its insurgency supporting role in the face of such pressures because of the communists' proverbial "tactical flexibility." 72/

The thesis was subjected to a rather thorough analysis in OSD/ISA and coordinated with the Department of State. The nature of this review will be discussed on later pages and in a different context.

#### ACCOMPANYING PAUSE IN PRESSURES

The foregoing policy assessments were conducted in an atmosphere relatively free of even those pressure measures that preceded the Tonkin Gulf crisis. Since the force deployments of 6 August, little military activity had been directed at the DRV. U-2 flights over North Vietnam and reconnaissance of the Laotian Panhandle were continued. Military operations within Laos were limited to the consolidation of gains achieved in Operation Triangle. A deliberate stand-down was adopted for all other activities -- including DE SOTO Patrols and the GVN's covert harassing operations. The purpose of this "holding phase," as it was called, was to "avoid actions that would in any way take the onus off the Communist side for [the Tonkin] escalation." 73/

However, during the "holding phase" some of the administrative impediments to wider military action were cleared away. One measure that was taken was to relax the operating restrictions and the rules of engagement for U.S. forces in Southeast Asia. This was accomplished in response to JCS urging that attacking forces not be permitted sanctuaries from which to regroup and perhaps repeat their hostile acts. 74/ Prior rules had not permitted pursuit of hostile aircraft outside South Vietnam or authorized intercept of intruders over Thailand. 75/ Under the revised rules of 15 August 1964, U.S. forces were authorized to attack and destroy any vessel or aircraft "which attacks, or gives positive indication of intent to attack" U.S. forces operating in or over international waters and in Laos, to include hot pursuit into the territorial waters or air space of North Vietnam and into the air space over other countries of Southeast Asia. "Hostile aircraft over South Vietnam and Thailand" could be engaged as well and pursued into North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. 76/

Another prerequisite to wider military action that was accomplished was the combined GVN-U.S. planning for cross-border ground operations. By 16 August, this had proceeded to such an extent that COMUSMACV believed it necessary to seek approval of the concept and appropriate to urge that Phase I of the program get underway. Significant for understanding the pressure for wider actions increasingly being brought to bear on the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Administration was the fact that MACV made the request despite explicit comment that the concept was "an overly ambitious scheme." 77/ Presumably, he considered it likely to be ineffective militarily, but perhaps important in stimulating more vigorous GVN efforts. Whatever his particular reasons at the time, MACV repeated the recommendations later in the month as part of several measures to be taken inside and outside South Vietnam. These were designed "to give the VC a bloody nose," to steady the newly reformed South Vietnamese government, and to raise the morale of the population. 78/ However, the earlier MACV cable had already acknowledged what must have been one of the Administration's key inhibitions against undertaking cross-border actions: General Westmoreland stated, "It should be recognized that once this operation is initiated by the GVN, U.S. controls may be marginal."

The period of the "holding phase" was also a period of significant developments within South Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor's initial report (10 August) made clear that the political situation was already precarious, giving Khanh only a 50-50 chance of staying in power and characterizing the GVN as ineffective and fraught with conflicting purposes. In Taylor's view, the leadership in Saigon showed symptoms of "defeatism" and a hesitancy to prosecute the pacification campaign within South Vietnam. Meanwhile, however, its popular support in the countryside seemed to be directly proportional to the degree of protection which the government provided. 79/ In view of this shaky political base, General Khanh seized upon the occasion of post-Tonkin euphoria -- apparently with Ambassador Taylor's encouragement -- to acquire additional executive authority. On 7 August, announcing the necessity for certain "emergency" powers to cope with any heightened VC activity, he proclaimed himself President and promulgated the Vung Tau Charter. This action, which gave him virtually dictatorial power over several aspects of South Vietnamese life, met with hostile reactions. In late August, Khanh's authority was challenged in the streets of Saigon, Hue and Da Nang, during several days of student protest demonstrations and clashes between Buddhist and Catholic groups. In response to student and Buddhist pressures primarily, he resigned his recently assumed post as President and promised that a national assemblage would be called to form a more popularly based government. On 3 September, Khanh returned to assume the premiership, but clearly with weaker and more conditional authority than before the government crisis.

Meanwhile, as the GVN's lack of cohesion and stability was being demonstrated, the infiltration of communist forces into South Vietnam may have been on the increase. At least, belief in an increase in the rate of this infiltration apparently gained currency in various U.S. agencies at this time. The documents available to this writer from the period neither refute nor substantiate the increase, but several of them contained references to this perception. For example, a State Department memorandum, dated 24 August, acknowledged a "rise and change in the nature of infiltration in recent months." 80/ Later analyses confirmed that increases had taken place, but the precise period when they began was not identified. 81/ Hence, unless there were other intelligence data to confirm them, any implications regarding North Vietnamese policy decisions were largely speculative.

45

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Possibly influencing the judgments of August was the fact that increased communist movement of men and supplies to the South was expected, resulting in part from a DIA assessment (7 August) of the most likely DRV reactions to the Tonkin reprisals. <sup>82/</sup> Moreover, the State Department's analysis of next courses of action in Southeast Asia had made "clear evidence of greatly increased infiltration from the North" an explicit condition for any policy judgment that "systematic military action against DRV" was required during the balance of 1964. <sup>83/</sup> And leading officials from several agencies were beginning to feel that such action might be inevitable.

The combined effects of the signs of increased VC infiltration and of continuing upheaval in Saigon caused great concern in Washington. The central perception was one of impending chaos and possible failure in South Vietnam. Among several agencies, the emerging mood was that some kind of action was urgently needed -- even if it had the effect merely of improving the U.S. image prior to pulling out. It was this mood that prevailed as the period of "pause" drew to a close.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive



46

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

IV

NEXT COURSES OF ACTION

By early September a general consensus had developed among high-level Administration officials that some form of additional and continuous pressure should be exerted against North Vietnam. Though Laos was relatively stabilized, the situation there was recognized as dependent ultimately on the degree of success achieved in solving the problems of Vietnam. Pacification efforts within South Vietnam were regarded as insufficient by themselves to reverse the deteriorating trends in that country. As a result, officials from both civilian and military agencies were anxious to resume and to extend the program of military actions against communist forces outside its borders.

STRATEGY MEETING IN SEPTEMBER

How to go about this was a problem of great concern to top-level officials (the President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, General Wheeler, Ambassador Taylor, CIA Director McCone) as they assembled in Washington on 7 September. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss with Ambassador Taylor future courses of U.S. and GVN action, particularly as related to the implications of the recent political upheaval in Saigon.

The alternatives presented for discussion were based largely on responses to the tentative analysis circulated by the State Department in mid-August. Replies from CINCPAC and the Saigon and Vientiane embassies had been circulated, and they provided the basis for a number of questions which Ambassador Taylor's party was asked to be ready to discuss. 84/ JCS reactions to the analysis and to the earlier replies were submitted to the Secretary of Defense with the specific intent that they be considered at the meeting and presumably were passed to other participating agencies. 85/ OSD/ISA views were prepared by Assistant Secretary McNaughton on 3 September and were known at least to Assistant Secretary of State Bundy. 86/

Just prior to the meeting, the JCS urged that General Wheeler, their Chairman, propose a course of action involving air strikes against targets in North Vietnam appearing on the JCS-approved, 94-target list. 90/ This kind of action had been recommended before -- most recently on 26 August, in response to the Department of State analysis -- as a means of "destroying the DRV will and capabilities, as necessary, to continue to support the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos." What made this proposal particularly significant was that it called for deliberate attempts to provoke the DRV into taking actions which could then be answered by a systematic U.S. air campaign. According to the JCS scheme, the campaign "would be continuous and in ascending severity," with its tempo and intensity varied as required by enemy reactions. Targets would eventually include airfields, bridges, railroads, military installations, industrial facilities and armed route reconnaissance along the LOC's. The JCS argued that such actions were now "essential to prevent a complete collapse of the U.S. position in the Republic of Vietnam and Southeast Asia," because "continuation of present or foreseeable programs limited to the RVN will not produce the desired



47

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

result." 88/ Quite similar language also appeared in the 26 August memorandum.

Whether or not or in what form General Wheeler presented this proposal to the assembled officials on 7 September is not indicated in the documentary sources available. The JCS belief in the necessity of bombing North Vietnam was discussed, as was some of their rationale. Made explicit, for example, was their argument that there was no reason to delay the bombing since (in their view) the situation in South Vietnam would only become worse. 89/ That the idea of deliberately provoking a DRV reaction was discussed in some form is indicated in a record of the consensus arrived at in the discussions. 90/ However, the JCS were not the only officials who favored such an idea. Assistant Secretary McNaughton's "Plan of Action" (3 September 1964) also called for actions that "should be likely at some point to provoke a military DRV response." The latter, in turn, "should be likely to provide good grounds for us to escalate if we wished." 91/

The principal conferees did not believe that deliberately provocative actions should be undertaken "in the immediate future while the GVN is still struggling to its feet." However, they apparently reached a consensus that they might recommend such actions -- "depending on GVN progress and Communist reaction in the meantime" -- by early October. 92/

The reasons cited for their opposition to provocative acts were also applied in rejecting proposals for an immediate bombing campaign. The GVN was expected to be too weak for the United States to assume the "deliberate risks of escalation that would involve a major role for, or threat to, South Vietnam." 93/ In the discussion, Mr. McCone observed that undertaking a sustained attack on the DRV would be very dangerous, due to the weakness and unpredictability of the political base in South Vietnam. Secretary Rusk stated the view that every means short of bombing must be exhausted. Secretary McNamara affirmed his understanding that "we are not acting more strongly because there is a clear hope of strengthening the GVN." But he went on to urge that the way be kept open for stronger actions even if the GVN did not improve or in the event the war were widened by the communists. It is interesting to note that the President asked specifically, "Can we really strengthen the GVN?" 94/

Even though the principals did not accept the JCS proposal and apparently did not agree with their assessment of the chances for improvement in South Vietnam, they did indicate accord with the JCS sense of the gravity of the U.S. predicament. In response to General Wheeler's statements that "if the United States loses in South Vietnam, it will lose all of Southeast Asia" and that its position throughout all of Asia would be damaged, both McCone and Rusk indicated agreement. Ambassador Taylor stated the view that the United States could not afford to let Ho Chi Minh win in South Vietnam. Secretary Rusk added the consideration that the whole world doubted our ability to pull it off. 95/

48

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The meeting resulted in consensus among the principals on certain courses of prompt action to put additional pressure on North Vietnam. The following measures were recommended to the President for his decision:

"1. U.S. naval patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin should be resumed immediately (about September 12). They should operate initially beyond the 12-mile limit and be clearly dissociated from 34A maritime operations....

"2. 34A operations by the GVN should be resumed immediately thereafter (next week). The maritime operations are by far the most important....

"3. Limited GVN air and ground operations into the corridor areas of Laos should be undertaken in the near future, together with Lao air strikes as soon as we can get Souvanna's permission. These operations will have only limited effect, however.

"4. We should be prepared to respond on a tit-for-tat basis against the DRV against specific and related targets in the event of any attack on U.S. units or any special DRV/VC action against SVN."96/

The purposes for these measures were conceived as: (1) "to assist morale in SVN," (2) to "show the Communists we still mean business," and (3) "to keep the risks low and under our control at each stage."

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

These recommendations (and presumably the purposes) were approved by the President and became the basis for a program of limited (though not continuous) pressures exerted against North Vietnam from mid-September to mid-December 1964. On 10 September, the White House issued a National Security Action Memorandum which authorized immediate resumption of the DE SOTO Patrols and prompt discussions with the Government of Laos to develop plans for cross-border operations. It also authorized resumption of 34A operations following completion of the DE SOTO Patrol, with the additional guidance that "we should have the GVN ready to admit that they are taking place and to justify and legitimize them on the basis of the facts of VC infiltration by sea." 97/ It is significant that although this order, in effect, authorized the initiation of Phase III (October through December) of the covert operations under OPLAN 34A, it specified contrary to the provisions of Phase III that "we should not consider air strikes under 34A for the present."

Naval Operations. The resumption of naval patrol and covert maritime operations off the coast of North Vietnam did not proceed exactly as planned. The destroyers U.S.S. Morton and U.S.S. Edwards embarked on the third DE SOTO Patrol on 12 September. On the night of the 18th, while on a southeasterly heading, the ships made a surface radar contact which was observed to split into two images, increase speed and close rapidly.

49

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Approximately 40 minutes after first contact and after firing a warning shot, Morton and Edwards opened fire, both scoring hits. Subsequently, on two separate occasions after the target images had disappeared from the radar, new contacts appeared and were fired on at a range of approximately 8,500 yards, hits again being indicated for both vessels. In all, Morton fired 56 five-inch and 128 three-inch rounds; Edwards fired 152 five-inch and 6 three-inch rounds. There were no rounds or torpedoes reported coming from the radar contacts. 98/ Later on the 18th (Washington time), President Johnson suspended the DE SOTO Patrols; they were not to be resumed until February 1965.

In the aftermath of the third destroyer incident in the Tonkin Gulf, covert GVN maritime operations were not resumed until October. President Johnson authorized reactivation of this program on the 4th, under very tight controls. 99/ The proposed schedule of maritime operations had to be submitted at the beginning of each month for approval. Each operation was approved in advance by OSD (Mr. Vance), State (Mr. L. Thompson or Mr. Forrestal) and the White House (Mr. McGeorge Bundy). 100/ During October, these included two probes, an attempted junk capture, and ship-to-shore bombardment of North Vietnamese radar sites. Later, they included underwater demolition team assaults on bridges along coastal LOC's. Unlike the DE SOTO Patrols, these unacknowledged operations continued throughout the year.

Actions in Laos. Operations in the Laotian Panhandle took shape with fewer unpredictable developments. On 11 September, representatives of the U.S. missions in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam met in Saigon to discuss implementation of the NSAM 314 provisions for cross-border air and ground operations. Regarding air operations, they agreed that if their primary objective was military in nature, "sharp, heavy" and concentrated attacks would be needed and that U.S. and/or VNAF/FARMGATE forces would be required. If their impact was intended to be primarily psychological (presumably affecting both communists and the GVN), they believed that the operations could be more widely spaced, relying primarily on Laotian T-28s with some U.S. strikes on harder targets. In view of Souvanna Phouma's reported opposition to VNAF strikes in the Panhandle, the representatives conceded that the slower paced operation with RLAFF aircraft offered the best course. 101/ However, they saw a joint Lao, Thai, RVN and U.S. operation as particularly desirable, were it not for the time required to arrange it. As one means of symbolizing four power support for the operation, they recommended that the Thai Government be approached regarding use of the Korat base by participating U.S. aircraft. 102/

Regarding cross-border ground operations, the representatives agreed that the southern and central Panhandle offered terrain and targets consistent with the available GVN assets. Although it was recognized that accompanying U.S. advisors might be necessary to assure the success of the operations, the planners acceded to Vientiane's objections that such a



50

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

flagrant violation of the Geneva Accords would endanger the credibility of our political stance in Laos. 103/ Subsequent to the meeting, the Vientiane Embassy removed a reservation expressed earlier and cleared the way for company-size penetrations of up to 20 km along Route 9, near Tchepone. 104/ At the conference this operation was considered of high priority with respect to infiltration traffic into South Vietnam.

The mission representatives agreed that, once the operations began, they should not be acknowledged publicly. In effect, then, they would supplement the other covert pressures being exerted against North Vietnam. Moreover, while the Lao Government would of course know about the operations of their T-28s, Souvanna was not to be informed of the GVN/U.S. operations. The unacknowledged nature of these operations would thus be easier to maintain. Accordingly, the representatives recommended to Washington that Vientiane be authorized to approach the Laotian Government regarding initiation of T-28 operations. On the other hand, the Administration was asked to approve ground operations in three specified areas of the Panhandle. 105/

Over two weeks passed before these recommendations were acted on. In the meantime, the JCS also submitted proposals for implementing NSAM 314, requesting immediate authority to implement air operations in the Panhandle. Endorsing the main theme of the mission representatives, they called for combined action by RIAF T-28s and U.S. aircraft which would provide "suppressive fire" and attack heavily defended bridges. The JCS also sought authority to initiate GVN ground intelligence collection and target reconnaissance patrols in the Laotian corridor. 106/

On 6 October, authority was given the Vientiane Embassy to urge the Laotian Government to begin T-28 air strikes "as soon as possible." The RIAF targets were to be selected from a previously coordinated 22-target list, a few of which were designed for U.S. YANKEE TEAM strikes, but they were to exclude Mu Gia Pass. The latter mission was known to require U.S. escort and suppressive fire, and a decision on whether to authorize such U.S. operations had not yet been made in Washington. Moreover, neither had the Administration authorized YANKEE TEAM strike missions against the tougher Panhandle targets. 107/

Administration rationale on the issue of U.S. participation in the Panhandle air strikes is not clear from the sources available to this writer. Contemporary intelligence estimates indicated the communist responses were likely to be limited to (1) increases in anti-aircraft deployments in the area, (2) propaganda attacks and (3) possible sabotage of U.S./GVN supporting bases. 108/ However, Washington's viewpoint on another Laotian request for air support may be significant. With respect to air strikes against targets along Route 7, in support of the RLG campaign to consolidate its holdings west of the Plaine des Jarres, Administration rationale was as follows:

"Since we wish to avoid the impression that we are taking [the] first step in escalation, we [are] inclined



51

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

[to] defer decision on Route 7 strikes until we have strong evidence [of] Hanoi's preparation for new attack in [the] Plaine des Jarres, some of which might come from RIAF operations over the Route." 109/

On 13 October, one day before the initial RIAF attacks, U.S. strikes were again requested on four defended targets near Nape and Tchepone. They were to accompany T-28 strikes on communist military installations and supply points in the northern part of the Panhandle. 110/ The significance of these operations, and U.S. participation in them, was indicated a few days earlier in another meeting among representatives of the three missions. It was reported at this time that it was probable "that ARVN will be unable [to] afford detachment [of] any significant ground capability for [the] Laotian Corridor in [the] foreseeable future." Therefore, air operations would offer the only dependable means of combatting VC infiltration through Laos. The participants recorded "unanimous agreement that U.S. participation in air operations in [the] corridor is essential if such operations are to have desired military and psychological impact." Emphasizing that the initiative for these operations came from the United States Government, they pointed out that failure to participate could result in loss of control over them and could even jeopardize their continuation. At minimum the group recommended that U.S. aircraft fly CAP (combat air patrol) over the RIAF aircraft, as requested by the Laotian Government and as permitted by a "relatively minor extension" of existing U.S. rules of engagement. 111/

CAP missions were approved, but U.S. air strikes against communist LOCs in the Laotian Panhandle were not authorized until much later in the year. 112/ Cross-border ground operations did not receive authorization at any time during the period covered in this study.

NEGOTIATING POSTURE RE LAOS

One reason for the delay in requesting Laotian air strikes in the Panhandle was the need to await the uncertain outcome of discussions in Paris among leaders of the three Laotian political factions. Since 27 August, when they first met, the three Princes (Souvanna Phouma, Souphanouvang, and Boun Oum) had reached an impasse on conditions to accompany a cease-fire. Souvanna Phouma insisted on communist withdrawal from positions won in the May offensive and had proposed neutralization of the Plaine des Jarres under I.C.C. supervision. 113/ On 15 September, when it seemed that further negotiations had become fruitless, Prince Souphanouvang offered to withdraw communist forces from the Plaine in return for discussions leading to a new 14-Nation Conference. The following day, Souvanna countered with a proposal that a cease-fire begin on 1 October and attempted to verify and make more explicit the mutual concessions. The pro-communist leader balked over stipulated guarantees, such as I.C.C. supervision, that pro-communist forces would in fact withdraw and be replaced by neutralists. However, on the 21st, the leaders arrived at agreement for continued meetings at the ministerial level, based on an agenda which included a cease-fire

52  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

and preliminary conditions for reconvening a Geneva conference. 114/

The narrow margin by which the cease-fire agreement failed to come about dramatized the delicate nature of the Administration's diplomatic position in Laos. Having agreed to support the tripartite discussions prior to the Tonkin Gulf incidents and prior to the political upheaval in Saigon, it felt constrained to go along with them -- particularly if they served to forestall movement toward a Geneva-type negotiation. However, a Laotian cease-fire was not compatible with current perceptions of U.S. interest even if it resulted in communist withdrawal from the Plaine des Jarres. Ambassador Unger pointed out the contradictory nature of our position in his reply to the State Department's mid-August analysis of future U.S. courses of action. 115/ Ambassador Taylor emphasized the need to maintain the option of operations in the Panhandle in his reply also, and the September discussions in Washington confirmed that his view was shared by most of the President's advisors. One could conclude that the United States was fortunate that Prince Souphanouvang was so intransigent on the issue of I.C.C. supervision. It is also possible that in insisting on this provision to the leftist prince Souvanna Phouma "knew his man" -- perhaps reflecting perceptive American advice.

Certainly the course of the tripartite discussions followed a pattern commensurate with prior U.S. calculation. In an assessment of future courses of action used as the basis for the policy analysis cabled to affected interested embassies and CINCPAC by the State Department, Assistant Secretary Bundy characterized U.S. strategy with the statement, "We would wish to slow down any progress toward a conference...." He then referred to a specific negotiating position proposed by Ambassador Unger (a proposal for tripartite administration of the Plaine des Jarres) as "a useful delaying gambit." 116/ Significantly, this proposal was advanced at Paris by Souvanna Phouma on 1 September -- illustrating the fact that Souvanna was carefully advised by U.S. diplomats both prior to and during the Paris meetings. 117/ Other features of Souvanna's negotiating posture which apparently were encouraged as likely to have the effect of drawing out the discussions were insistence on communist acceptance of (1) Souvanna's political status as Premier and (2) unhampered operations by the I.C.C. 118/ It will be recalled that the latter point was the issue on which progress toward a cease-fire became stalled.

It is important to note here that the State Department recognized that Souvanna Phouma might well act on his own and feel compelled to move toward a conference, even at the price of a cease-fire. In such an event, our position was to be dependent on conditions in South Vietnam:

"If the timing of the Laos Conference, in relation to the degree of pressures we had then set in motion against the DRV, was such that our attending or accepting the conference would have major morale drawbacks in South Viet-Nam, we might well have to refuse to attend ourselves and to accept the disadvantage of having no direct participation. In the last analysis, GVN morale would have to be the deciding factor." 119/

53  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

It is apparent from this and other documents that GVN stability and morale were perceived by the Administration as the principal pacing elements for Southeast Asian policy in the post-Tonkin period.

ANTICIPATION OF WIDER ACTION

Through most of the strategy discussions of early autumn, South Vietnam was the main focus of attention. However, with increasing frequency its political and military conditions were referred to in a new way. More and more it was being evaluated in terms of its suitability as a base for wider action. Ambassador Taylor cautioned that "we should not get involved militarily with North Vietnam and possibly with Red China if our base in South Viet Nam is insecure and Khanh's army is tied down everywhere by the VC insurgency." 120/ At the September meeting, Mr. McCone criticized the actions recommended by the JCS as being very dangerous because of the current weakness of the GVN base. On 23 September, Walt Rostow wrote to Ambassador Taylor of the need for building a more viable political system in South Vietnam "which will provide us with an adequate base for what we may later have to do." 121/

General Scheme. The kind of operations for which "an adequate base" was increasingly considered essential is evident in a number of strategy discussions of the period. Moreover, it is clear that several officials shared the expectation that these operations would begin early in the new year. It will be recalled that the series of actions recommended to President Johnson by his top advisors at the end of May -- most of which had been completed within a few days of the Tonkin Gulf incidents -- were intended to culminate, if necessary, in a strike against North Vietnam accompanied by an active diplomatic offensive that included agreement to a negotiated settlement. 122/ Further, Phase III of the approved contingency OPLAN 37-64, developed in response to NSAM 288, provided for the application of overt graduated pressures against North Vietnam -- primarily air strikes. These were to be carried out by the GVN, but which would also include operations by U.S. air and naval forces. Deployments of additional forces to Southeast Asia in early summer and in the immediate aftermath of the Tonkin Gulf incidents were based on force requirements identified to support this plan. Its perceived significance during the post-Tonkin period was indicated when Ambassador Taylor reported that the objectives of the U.S. Mission in Saigon included preparation to implement OPLAN 37-64 "with optimum readiness by January 1, 1965." 123/

Subsequent strategy discussions reflected the extent to which the new year was anticipated as the occasion for beginning overt military operations against North Vietnam. Both the State Department's mid-August strategy analysis and the working paper on which it was based indicated that the "limited pressures" (subsequently authorized by NSAM 314) would extend "tentatively through December." However, these actions were perceived as "foreshadowing systematic military action against the DRV," which "we might at some point conclude...was required." (Noteworthy is the point of view that these actions might be ordered "either because of incidents arising from the limited pressures or because of deterioration in the



54

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

situation in South Vietnam, particularly if there were to be clear evidence of greatly increased infiltration from the north.") Should specific provocations not occur, a contingency target date of 1 January 1965 was indicated: 124/

"...in [the] absence of such major new developments [incidents or increased infiltration], we should probably be thinking of a contingency date for planning purposes, as suggested by Ambassador Taylor, of 1 January 1965." 125/

The working paper elaborated more fully than the cable the kind of preliminary actions considered necessary to set the stage. Some of this elaboration was provided in suggested language changes penciled-in by OSD prior to an inter-agency meeting called to discuss its contents. Referring to air strikes in the Panhandle (proposed to begin in September), a suggested OSD addition stated: "The strikes should probably be timed and plotted on the map to bring them to the borders of North Vietnam at the end of December." The main body of the text suggested that the January operations include "action against infiltration routes and facilities" as "probably the best opening gambit." It explained that "the family of infiltration-related targets starts with clear military installations near the borders [and] can be extended almost at will northward." The "next upward move" was suggested to include action against "military-related targets," such as "POL installations and the mining of Haiphong Harbor" and "key bridges and railroads." The purpose perceived for these operations was "to inflict progressive damage that would have a meaningful cumulative effect." 126/

Ambassador Taylor viewed 1 January 1965 as a "target D-Day" before which the U.S. Mission and the GVN should develop "a posture of maximum readiness for a deliberate escalation of pressure against North Viet Nam." The nature of this escalation was perceived as "a carefully orchestrated bombing attack on NVN, directed primarily at infiltration and other military targets." It would consist of

"U.S. reconnaissance planes, VNAF/FARMGATE aircraft against those targets which could be attacked safely in spite of the presence of the MIGs, and additional U.S. combat aircraft if necessary for the effective execution of the bombing programs."

He qualified this assessment with the observation, "We must always recognize, however, that events may force [the] U.S. to advance D-Day to a considerably earlier date." The reason for this qualification was Taylor's concern that the GVN might not be able to sustain its authority until January. Thus, in order to "avoid the possible consequences of a collapse of national morale" it would be necessary, he felt, "to open the campaign against the DRV without delay." The nature of the air campaign "would be essentially the same" as under the January scheme, except that it would rely "almost exclusively on U.S. military means." 127/



55

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Similar assessments of timing in relation to more vigorous military action against North Vietnam were made in OSD/ISA. The immediate measures proposed in McNaughton's draft "Plan of Action for South Vietnam" (3 September) were conceived not only as means to provoke North Vietnam into responses justifying U.S. punitive actions. They were also believed to make possible the postponement "probably until November or December" of a decision regarding the more serious escalation. In McNaughton's terminology the latter were referred to as "a crescendo of GVN-U.S. military actions against the DRV," but they included a variety of possibilities:

"The escalating actions might be naval pressures or mining of harbors; or they might be made up of air strikes against North Vietnam moving from southern to northern targets, from targets associated with infiltration and by-then-disclosed DRV-VC radio command nets to targets of military then industrial importance, and from missions which could be handled by the VNAF alone to those which could be carried out only by the U.S." 128/

It is clear, however, that what was contemplated was a pattern of gradually mounting pressures intended to impress the DRV with the increasing gravity of its situation.

Records of the September conference do not indicate that a decision was made relative to an explicit January contingency date. In several respects they do make clear that the possibility of escalation at the end of the year was considered. For example, hope was expressed that the GVN would grow stronger over the following two to three months -- by implication, strong enough to permit "major deliberate risks of escalation" or "deliberately provocative" U.S. actions. 129/ Directly related to this hope was the intention of having the GVN admit publicly to its conduct of maritime operations against North Vietnamese coastal installations and communications. The aim was "to justify and legitimize them on the basis of the facts of VC infiltration by sea." 130/ It was believed that this step would be useful in establishing a climate of opinion more receptive to expanded (air) operations against North Vietnam when they should become necessary. 131/

Reservations. By October 1964, therefore, there was a general belief among the President's top advisors that it would probably be necessary eventually to subject North Vietnam to overt military pressure. Many were convinced, however reluctantly, that it would not be possible to obtain an effective solution to the problem of DRV sponsorship of the insurgency in South Vietnam or a permanent solution to the political strife in Laos without such direct pressure on the instigator of these problems. Significantly, these views were dissimilar in character to the interest in graduated pressures shown in the Spring and to the determination "to use force if necessary" urged on the President at the end of May. For

56

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

most of the principal advisors, the earlier views had been clearly contingent upon a major reversal--principally in Laos--and had been advanced with the apparent assumption that military actions hopefully would not be required. Now, however, their views were advanced with a sense that such actions were inevitable. Moreover, they were advanced despite the perspective afforded by a number of critical evaluations of the use of military pressure. In addition to the studies made during the first half of 1964, all of the principal advisory agencies had reviewed a detailed critique of the so-called "Rostow thesis" just prior to the September strategy conference.

The critique was accomplished in OSD/ISA with inputs and coordination from State's Policy Planning Council. The assigned task was to make "a thorough analysis of and report on the Rostow thesis that covert aggression justifies and must be fought by attacks on the source of the aggression." Copies were distributed to the Washington recipients of the Rostow paper, including the White House, Department of State, Department of Defense, the JCS and each of the services.

In their summary analysis of the thesis the critiquers emphasized two variables which would determine its utility: (1) the extent of the commitment of the nation furnishing external support and (2) the extent to which the insurgency affected vital U.S. interests. With regard to the former variable, they described "three fundamental conditions" which would have to exist to achieve success "in cases where the external opponent is committed to the extent of the North Vietnamese." The opponents would have to be persuaded that: (1) the United States was "taking limited actions to achieve limited objectives;" (2) "the commitment of the military power of the United States to the limited objective is a total commitment -- as total as our commitment to get the missiles out of Cuba in October 1962;" (3) the United States has "established a sufficient consensus to see through this course of action both at home and on the world scene." Further, unless such an opponent were so persuaded, "the approach might well fail to be effective short of a major U.S. military involvement." 132/

Essential to creating the necessary conviction of U.S. intent on the part of the opposing government, the analysis argued, was a firm image that the President and the U.S. public were in agreement that vital national interests were at stake. Unless vital interests were clearly at stake,

"the limited military actions envisaged would not only involve much greater political costs at home and abroad...but there would be much greater risk that the program would not be effective except at high levels of involvement and risk, and that it might be allowed to fall short of such levels."

In the analysts' view, "this requirement of vital interest would sharply limit the application of the thesis" among the world areas currently threatened. It observed that "Laos-Vietnam seems the only one in which a strong, but not necessarily conclusive, case can be made that this condition holds." 133/

57

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Assuming that vital U.S. interests were assessed as being at stake by an Administration in some unspecified case, the critiquers went on to outline some additional "conditions for success." First, an Administration would have to present a solid case to the U.S. Congress and public and to our allies that the external support provided by the target nation was instrumental in sustaining the insurgency. In the interest of making its public case conclusive, "the U.S. would have to be prepared to expose intelligence data." Second, it would have to identify enemy targets "such that limited attacks and the threat of further attacks would bring great pressure on him to comply." Third, the U.S. Government would have to be able to communicate its case to the target nation "including the high degree of U.S. commitment and the limited nature of our objective." This would involve controlling both the U.S. and its ally's actions "to convey limited objectives, minimizing incentives to comply." Finally, it would have to be capable of determining enemy compliance with our demands. 134/

The critiquers' analysis included an assessment of the costs and risks to be incurred in applying the thesis and cautioned against its adoption as a general declaratory policy:

"Given present attitudes, application of the Rostow approach risks domestic and international opposition ranging from anxiety and protest to condemnation, efforts to disassociate from U.S. policies or alliances, or even strong countermeasures....

"Currently, then, it is the Rostow approach, rather than the measures it counters that would be seen generally as an "unstabilizing" change in the rules of the game, an escalation of conflict, an increasing of shared, international risks, and quite possibly, as an open aggression demanding condemnation...particularly in general terms or in abstraction from a specific, immediately challenging situation.

"On the other hand, the controlled, limited military actions implied in the Rostow approach would be far more acceptable to the extent that they were seen to follow from Presidential conviction of vital national necessity in a specific context, and even more to the extent that this conviction were shared by Congress and the U.S. public.

"An attempt to legitimize such actions in general terms, and in advance of an emergency situation, would not only be likely to fail, but might well evoke public expressions of domestic and allied opposition and denunciations, warnings, counterthreats and binding commitments



58

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

from opponents that would make it much more difficult for the President to contemplate this approach when an occasion actually arose...."

They went on to point out that accepting the Rostow thesis as a principle of U.S. declaratory policy would require making it public before applying it. The need to be assured of "Congressional and other public support in carrying through the thesis in a given case" would require this. Therefore, the analysts concluded, "It would be exceedingly unwise to make the Rostow thesis a declaratory policy unless the U.S. were prepared to act on it" -- but then only if we were assured of the public commitment and the capability to achieve success. 135/

With regard to the applicability of the thesis to the contemporary situation in Southeast Asia, the critiquers summarized their views as follows:

"...the situation in Vietnam and Laos is the only one in which a strong case can be made that the two major indications for the Rostow approach are made: the ineffectiveness of alternatives and vital U.S. interests. Even in this case the degree of U.S. interest, the degree and acceptability of the risks, and the potential effectiveness of this approach are subject to question. In particular, the likelihood and the political costs of failure of the approach, and the pressures for U.S. escalation if early moves should fail, require serious examination." 136/

DIFFERING AGENCY POLICY VIEWS

In describing the evolution of Administration strategy this account has previously emphasized the points of general agreement among the President's advisors. Its purpose has been to describe the existence and sense of a policy consensus that had emerged by mid-October. However, significant differences of opinion existed among the various advisory agencies regarding what actions should be taken and how soon they should be initiated. These differences can be discerned with respect to five issues: (1) whether and how soon the GVN maritime operations should be acknowledged; (2) the desirability of tit-for-tat reprisals; (3) how best to cope with enemy reactions to increased pressures on the DRV; (4) the degree of GVN/U.S. readiness required before increasing the pressures; and (5) the relationship perceived between increased pressures and negotiations.

JCS views. Senior military officials differed among themselves on the first three issues. CINCPAC apparently perceived difficulties resulting from official acknowledgements of GVN maritime operations and suggested that press leaks would achieve the desired effects on SVN morale. General Wheeler saw official acknowledgement as a means to legitimize the



59

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

operations and thereby enable their scope and effectiveness to be increased. However, he was not supported by the service chiefs. They opposed surfacing the GVN operations until they could become associated with the DE SOTO Patrols "or until the United States is prepared openly to support MAROPS militarily." 137/ All of these officials agreed that it was necessary to undertake reprisals for a variety of hostile VC or DRV actions. In particular they wanted U.S. responses to be greater in degree, not necessarily matching in kind, than the provocations. Where they came to differ was on the desirability of deliberately provoking DRV actions to which we could then respond. After the September White House meeting only the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Marine Commandant favored this approach. 138/

Differences with respect to preparation for coping with enemy reactions to harsher pressures centered around the issue of committing greater numbers of U.S. ground forces to South Vietnam. CINCPAC, supporting General Westmoreland's request, urged provision for deployment of Marine and Army units to provide security for U.S./GVN operating bases. The JCS disagreed and disapproved a request to make such adjustments in OPLAN 37-64, on grounds that since VC capabilities were still questionable it was preferable not to precommit U.S. forces in the manner urged. At issue concurrently was an Air Force proposal to reduce the number of ground forces provided for in the event of a large scale DRV/CHICOM intervention in Southeast Asia and to rely more heavily on tactical air capabilities. The other chiefs disagreed, but the controversy concerning the relative emphasis on ground and air forces for the defense of Southeast Asia was to occupy JCS attention for several months to come. 139/

Regarding the issue of readiness to increase pressures on North Vietnam and the role of negotiations, the military chiefs were in agreement throughout the period. Soon after the Tonkin Gulf incidents they urged prompt implementation of more serious pressures using U.S. air capabilities. They opposed B-57 training for the VNAF, citing its limited pilot and supporting technical resources which would be needed for counter-insurgency missions. In response to warnings that we should not get deeply involved in a conflict in Southeast Asia until we were surer of the GVN's commitment, they replied that "the United States is already deeply involved." They went on to recommend preparations for deploying the remaining OPLAN 37-64 forces needed for mounting a U.S. air strike program against North Vietnam. 140/ While the JCS did not address the subject of negotiations explicitly during this period, their statements implied a lack of interest in a negotiated solution to the Vietnam problem. At every opportunity they reiterated their recommendation that we should attack North Vietnamese will and capabilities as necessary to force a DRV decision to halt its support and direction of the insurgency.

60

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Saigon Embassy views. Ambassador Taylor opposed the views of his former military colleagues on most issues. Prior to the September meeting, he expressed objections to the idea of surfacing or leaking to the press the nature of GVN maritime operations. He also opposed tit-for-tat retaliation bombing for the reason that it was "likely to release a new order of military reaction from both sides, the outcome of which is impossible to predict." He saw enemy ground assaults as a greater threat to U.S. bases in South Vietnam than enemy air attacks and supported the deployment of U.S. ground force units for base security purposes. This was to occur after the beginning of GVN/U.S. ground and air cross-border operations into Laos. However, not unlike the Chiefs, one of the criteria he employed in shaping his recommendation was the avoidance of a major U.S. ground force commitment. 141/

Ambassador Taylor's views were apparently based on an underlying rationale that actions to counter the VC/DRV aggression should not outstrip the GVN and that if it could be avoided, the conflict should not be escalated to a level beyond South Vietnamese capacities to manage it. Although believing firmly that the United States would have to apply direct pressure against North Vietnam eventually, to force her to abandon her objectives, he felt that the major burden of this effort should be borne by the GVN. Thus, his support for U.S. base security deployments was based in part on concern lest ARVN units be tied down in such roles and, thus, unavailable for more free-ranging combat. Similarly, in August, the Embassy favored immediate initiation of B-57 training for the VNAF to enable it to play a substantial role in the overt air attacks envisioned for 1965.

This training -- like Saigon's discouragement of U.S. eagerness to negotiate in Laos -- was also advocated for its value in bolstering the GVN's morale and determination to continue fighting against its communist enemies. This same consideration was at the root of the Ambassador's belief that any negotiations which affected South Vietnam should be avoided until North Vietnam was subjected to more forceful military pressures. He also felt that communication with Hanoi should be preceded by a thorough discussion and understanding of our limited war aims with the GVN. 142/

The Ambassador's basic concern that the GVN be capable of and committed to supporting the evolving levels of war effort against the communists was indicated in his response to the political upheaval in Saigon. Earlier, his recommendations had included the option of opening "the [air] campaign against the DRV without delay," in the event of threatened collapse of the Khahn Government. The objective was to have been "to avoid the possible consequences of a collapse of national morale." At the September meeting and subsequently, however, after Khahn had already been forced to step down from GVN leadership once and his new government was even shakier than two months earlier, the Ambassador opposed overt action against North Vietnam as too risky and urged instead that further measures to strengthen the GVN be taken first. 143/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

61  
OSD views. OSD and OSD/ISA views were clearer on some issues than on others. For example, the source documents indicate their consistent support for surfacing the GVN maritime operations. 144/ Similarly, it is clear that OSD continually regarded negotiations as a necessary process for terminating the insurgency in South Vietnam and a program of increased pressures against the DRV as a means of improving the U.S. bargaining position. Like other agencies, it saw negotiations as something that should not be entered into until the pressures were hurting North Vietnam, but it emphasized that the pattern of pressures should make clear our limited aims. 145/

Equally consistent but less explicit were OSD views on GVN/U.S. readiness to mount overt attacks on North Vietnam. Secretary McNamara was concerned that too early initiation of air action against North Vietnam might find the United States unprepared to cope with the consequences. At the end of August he directed the JCS to study and report on POL and ordnance stocks available to carry out approved contingency plans to combat a large-scale communist intervention after the expenditures required for the pattern of attacks which they proposed against North Vietnam. He also asked for specific recommendations on next steps to be taken in the event destruction of the proposed JCS targets did not destroy the DRV will and capability to continue. Mr. McNaughton's "Plan of Action" was intended to make unnecessary any decision concerning larger operations until late in the autumn. Moreover, it was designed explicitly "to create as little risk as possible of the kind of military action which would be difficult to justify to the American public and to preserve where possible the option to have no U.S. military action at all." In September, OSD/ISA was on record as favoring the initiation of bombing against North Vietnam -- after suitable provocation by Hanoi. But by mid-October the OSD view was apparently that overt actions against the North should be held off at least until the new year. 146/

With respect to the other issues the most consistent aspect of OSD views was their prudence. Its attitudes toward tit-for-tat reprisals are not really clear. Soon after Tonkin Gulf OSD notified the JCS that the events there precluded any further need for their work on retaliation scenarios in support of NSAM 288. Then, just three weeks later, the McNaughton "Plan of Action" proposed deliberate provocation of DRV actions to permit U.S. retaliation -- but as a means to begin a gradual squeeze on North Vietnam, not merely tit-for-tat reprisals. Mr. McNamara's own views do not appear except by implication, in that he did not indicate any opposition to them when shown William Bundy's draft summation of the September meeting consensus. 147/ Prudence was again the dominant feature of OSD views on preparations to cope with possible enemy reactions to the harsher pressures. For example, "on several occasions" Secretary McNamara expressed to the JCS his interest in the possibility of countering a massive Chinese intervention in Southeast Asia without the need to introduce large numbers of U.S. ground forces. The OSD appraisal of the USAF



62  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

proposal to reduce provisional ground force levels for Southeast Asian defense concluded that the issue remained "open." It was critical of that particular study because of its methodology and assumptions. Later, however, Mr. McNamara supported the JCS in their disapproval of the MACV request for allocation of additional ground force units for base security purposes. 148/

State views. Various documents make it clear that there were several different points of view prevalent within the State Department during the period in question. Reflected here are those channeled through the Secretary of State or communicated to the Department of Defense, usually through the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. With few exceptions, the courses of action followed by the Administration were those advocated by State. Its proposal for B-57 training for the VNAF was apparently overruled on the basis of JCS recommendations, but otherwise its support for measures to further strengthen the GVN and for pressuring actions other than overt military attacks throughout 1964 prevailed. 149/ Its support for the acknowledgement of GVN maritime operations failed to materialize only because of objections on the part of the GVN itself. 150/

State Department views on the other issues, likewise, were reflected in U.S. policy positions. Reprisals for VC acts that could be matched with fitting responses were favored in principle but were not necessarily to be carried out in all instances. Escalation through such responses was seen as useful for purposes of assisting GVN morale, but State did not believe that steps should be taken to bring about such situations just yet. It did, however, acknowledge that deliberate provocations might be useful in the future. Negotiation of a Vietnam solution through an international conference was viewed as inevitable, but it should be permitted only after hurting North Vietnam and convincing South Vietnam of U.S. resolve to achieve its objectives. Moreover, Secretary Rusk, Assistant Secretary Bundy and Counselor Rostow were each known to view avoidance of a commitment of U.S. ground forces to Southeast Asia as an important element in policy. 151/

CIA views. With the exception of Mr. McCone's opinions rendered in the September strategy meeting, available CIA documents provide no policy recommendations. However, they do contain assessments bearing directly on the policy issues discussed previously -- particularly with respect to enemy reactions to the measures contemplated. For example, intelligence estimates indicated little likelihood that intensified maritime operations would result in retaliation against GVN naval bases. Similarly, they predicted few serious consequences in response to U.S. limited tit-for-tat reprisal strikes. Rather, the CIA believed that communist responses would be limited to defensive measures, increased propaganda, and additional logistical assistance from China. In the event our reprisal actions were "heavier and sustained," the DRV was expected first to attempt to dissuade the United States through international political moves, apparent concessions, and efforts to underline communist solidarity and determination. They would probably also curb the VC from making new provocative attacks "and might direct them to reduce temporarily the tempo and size of their attacks." 152/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

CIA estimates of communist reaction to systematic U.S./GVN air attacks on North Vietnam were less certain. While acknowledging "substantial danger" that the DRV might decide to send its own armed forces on a large scale to Laos and South Vietnam,

("Hanoi might assume that United States would be unwilling to undertake a major ground war, or that if it was, it could ultimately be defeated by the methods which were successful against the French.")

they thought it more likely that Hanoi would choose a more conservative course. They reasoned that "the DRV might calculate that it would be better to stop VC activity temporarily than risk loss of its military facilities and industry," but that they would make no meaningful concessions "such as agreeing to effective international inspection of infiltration routes." 153/ In any event, the CIA did not believe that Chinese intervention was likely unless the United States should strike the Chinese mainland or unless U.S./GVN forces should attempt to "occupy areas of the DRV or communist-held territory in Northern Laos." 154/ It indicated that both North Vietnam and Communist China wished to avoid direct conflict with the United States and would probably "avoid actions that would in their view unduly increase the chances of a major U.S. response" against them.

Rather than outright military victory in South Vietnam, CIA estimates indicated belief that the communists expected to gain control through a "neutralist coalition government dominated by pro-Communist elements" that would come about "soon." This concern over the threat of neutralism had been voiced at the September meeting by Mr. McCone and was quite prevalent among intelligence discussions of the period. Altogether, it created a rather gloomy impression of GVN readiness to support sustained overt operations against North Vietnam and absorb likely VC countermeasures. In October the picture became even gloomier as a result of an intelligence assessment which described continuing deterioration of the South Vietnamese political situation and predicted even more:

"...we believe that the conditions favor a further decay of GVN will and effectiveness. The likely pattern of this decay will be increasing defeatism, paralysis of leadership, friction with Americans, exploration of possible lines of political accommodation with the other side, and a general petering out of the war effort." 155/





65  
TOP SECRET

25 May 1964

DRAFT RESOLUTION ON SOUTHEAST ASIA

Whereas the signatories of the Geneva Accords of 1954, including the Soviet Union, the Communist regime in China, and Viet Nam agreed to respect the independence and territorial integrity of South Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia; and the United States, although not a signatory of the Accords, declared that it would view any renewal of aggression in violation of the Accords with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security;

Whereas the Communist regime in North Viet Nam, with the aid and support of the Communist regime in China, has systematically flouted its obligations under these Accords and has engaged in aggression against the independence and territorial integrity of South Viet Nam by carrying out a systematic plan for the subversion of the Government of South Viet Nam, by furnishing direction, training, personnel and arms for the conduct of guerrilla warfare within South Viet Nam, and by the ruthless use of terror against the peaceful population of that country;

Whereas

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

- 2 -

Whereas in the face of this Communist aggression and subversion the Government and people of South Viet Nam have bravely undertaken the defense of their independence and territorial integrity, and at the request of that Government the United States has, in accordance with its Declaration of 1954, provided military advice, economic aid and military equipment;

Whereas in the Geneva Agreements of 1962 the United States, the Soviet Union, the Communist regime in China, North Viet Nam and others solemnly undertook to respect the sovereignty, independence, neutrality, unity and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Laos;

Whereas in violation of these undertakings the Communist regime in North Viet Nam, with the aid and support of the Communist regime in China, has engaged in aggression against the independence, unity and territorial integrity of Laos by maintaining forces on Laotian territory, by the use of that territory for the infiltration of arms and equipment into South Viet Nam, and by providing direction, men and equipment for persistent armed attacks against the Government of National Unification of the Kingdom of Laos;

Whereas

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

- 3 -

Whereas in the face of this Communist aggression the Government of National Unification and the non-Communist elements in Laos have striven to maintain the conditions of unity, independence and neutrality envisioned for their country in the Geneva Agreements of 1962;

Whereas the United States has no territorial, military or political ambitions in Southeast Asia, but desires only that the peoples of South Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia should be left in peace by their neighbors to work out their own destinies in their own way, and, therefore, its objective is that the status established for these countries in the Geneva Accords of 1954 and the Geneva Agreements of 1962 should be restored with effective means of enforcement;

Whereas it is essential that the world fully understand that the American people are united in their determination to take all steps that may be necessary to assist the peoples of South Viet Nam and Laos to maintain their independence and political integrity.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled:

That

TOP SECRET



TOP SECRET

- 4 -

That the United States regards the preservation of the independence and integrity of the nations of South Viet Nam and Laos as vital to its national interest and to world peace;

Sec. 2. To this end, if the President determines the necessity thereof, the United States is prepared, upon the request of the Government of South Viet Nam or the Government of Laos, to use all measures, including the commitment of armed forces to assist that government in the defense of its independence and territorial integrity against aggression or subversion supported, controlled or directed from any Communist country.

Sec. 3. (a) The President is hereby authorized to use for assistance under this joint resolution not to exceed \$\_\_\_\_\_ during the fiscal year 1964, and not to exceed \$\_\_\_\_\_ during the fiscal year 1965, from any appropriations made available for carrying out the provisions of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, in accordance with the provisions of that Act, except as otherwise provided in this joint resolution. This authorization

is in

TOP SECRET

69.

TOP SECRET

- 5 -

is in addition to other existing authorizations with respect to the use of such appropriations.

(b) Obligations incurred in carrying out the provisions of this joint resolution may be paid either out of appropriations for military assistance or appropriations for other than military assistance, except that appropriations made available for Titles I, III, and VI of Chapter 2, Part I, of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, shall not be available for payment of such obligations.

(c) Notwithstanding any other provision of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, when the President determines it to be important to the security of the United States and in furtherance of the purposes of this joint resolution, he may authorize the use of up to \$\_\_\_\_\_ of funds available under subsection (a) in each of the fiscal years 1964 and 1965 under the authority of section 614(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, and is authorized to use up to \$\_\_\_\_\_ of such funds in each such year pursuant to his certification that it is inadvisable to specify the nature of the use of such funds, which certification shall be deemed to be a sufficient voucher for such amounts.

(d) Upon

TOP SECRET

70  
TOP SECRET

- 6 -

(d) Upon determination by the head of any agency making personnel available under authority of section 627 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, or otherwise under that Act, for purposes of assistance under this joint resolution, any officer or employee so made available may be provided compensation and allowances at rates other than those provided by the Foreign Service Act of 1946, as amended, the Career Compensation Act of 1949, as amended, and the Overseas Differentials and Allowances Act, to the extent necessary to carry out the purposes of this joint resolution. The President shall prescribe regulations under which such rates of compensation and allowances may be provided. In addition, the President may utilize such provisions of the Foreign Service Act of 1946, as amended, as he deems appropriate to apply to personnel of any agency carrying out functions under this joint resolution.

TOP SECRET



TAB B

72

3

In any event, the interest of the Committee is not in a discussion of the staff study, but in your testimony of August 6, 1964, and Ambassador Stevenson's statement to the United Nations of August 5 in light of any information your office may have acquired since the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Therefore, in the interest of a thorough discussion on February 20, the Committee will make available to your office a copy of the transcript of the testimony of August 6, 1964, (Ambassador Stevenson's presentation is, of course, a matter of public record.) I would hope that you will be able to review this transcript and bring the Committee up to date on what we now know of the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin. The Committee is particularly interested in discussing what lessons have been learned about the problems of analyzing information in the midst of a crisis situation.

Finally, as I mentioned to you during our conversation, I would like to renew my request of January 8th that the Department of Defense provide the Committee at the earliest possible date with a report done by the Weapons System Evaluation Group on the subject "Command and Control of the Tonkin Gulf Incident, 4-5 August 1964."

I look forward to seeing you on February 20.

Sincerely yours,

J. W. FULBRIGHT, *Chairman.*

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, my own view is that this statement of yours should not be made public until after the committee has had an opportunity to go through the hearings, and also to decide what it does about its own staff report and the hearings. This is an executive meeting and I hope that you will be willing to retain that. I realize there will be pressures upon you, as there are upon the committee, for release of these documents, but I would think it is premature to do so.

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT S. McNAMARA, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE; ACCOMPANIED BY GEN. EARLE G. WHEELER, CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, AND CAPT. H. B. SWEITZER, U.S. NAVY, MILITARY ASSISTANT TO THE CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

Secretary McNAMARA. Mr. Chairman, I very much appreciate your personal kind wishes and compliments. It has been a most satisfying 7 years to me, made more so by the courtesy with which I have been treated by this committee on my numerous occasions before it.

I might also say I share T. S. Eliot's belief that history may be freedom, and I look forward to the development of our discussions here today in a way that will make it freedom and not servitude.

I do have a statement which I would like to present to the committee at this time. I have not released it to the press. I told my associates that we should not do so. We have submitted to the committee some 200 copies of it so they may release it. I doubt very much that we will be able to withstand the pressures of the press today without releasing it. We have been deluged by requests for it.

#### RELEASING OF DOCUMENTS

Senator MORSE. Can I only say, Mr. Chairman, on a procedural matter, I quite agree with the Secretary. I do not think we ought in any way to place any restrictions on the Secretary in regard to releasing anything he wants to release. I know you did not so imply. But I think the judgment of the Secretary should prevail in regard to what the Department of Defense releases, and I think the judgment of the committee should prevail in regard to what we should release.

The CHAIRMAN. The only thing I was suggesting—

Senator MORSE. It is in keeping with the division of powers doctrine.

The CHAIRMAN. I thought it would be much fairer if we could arrange to release them simultaneously. For example, the staff report would present only one side of the picture, as would the Secretary's statement. I think it would be too bad if this goes out and nothing else. That is a matter for the committee to determine, I grant.

Senator MORSE. I still would not want to—I would personally not be a party to placing any restriction on the Secretary.

The CHAIRMAN. The point I am trying to make is that much of the information which we have is confidential and cannot be released. Whereas a great many of the documents to which the Secretary refers, but does not incorporate, are also confidential. I would submit that it is a very one-sided picture to release only the statement.

Senator MORSE. It is one-sided only if the committee leaves it that way.

The CHAIRMAN. I grant that. But it is only a matter of time. We have not had a chance to read the Secretary's statement. We only received this statement an hour ago and it is a matter of timing.

Senator MORSE. I understand.

The CHAIRMAN. Does the Senator object for the committee to have time to consider the statement?

Senator MORSE. I would only object as to placing any restrictions on the Secretary at all.

The CHAIRMAN. I do not consider it placing restrictions. It is a matter for us to arrive at an understanding as to when we do it.

Senator GORE. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes?

Senator GORE. There is a question here. We are having an executive session. Could we not defer judgment on this until we have had a chance to read it?

The CHAIRMAN. That is what we normally do. That is what I was suggesting, until we receive it; the committee makes up its own mind usually afterward, this afternoon, for example.

Senator GORE. The point I was attempting to raise, I find a great deal of appeal in what Senator Morse has said, but I think it must be interpreted in the light of the fact that we are dealing here with classified materials and having an executive hearing. The release of a statement in executive hearing, used in an executive hearing, has not, so far as I can recall, been done except by permission of the committee.

I remember one time when I was chairman of a subcommittee, Secretary Rusk was appearing, and the question of releasing his statement was submitted to the committee, and the committee voted unanimously to approve its release. I dare say it might do so—we might do so, after hearing this, but I would like to defer judgment on it.

The CHAIRMAN. That is all right.

PROCEDURAL RIGHT OF WITNESS

Senator MORSE. Can I take 30 seconds more? I do not want to be a stickler or make a tempest in a teapot, but I do think, gentlemen, you are dealing here with a procedural matter that you should not set a precedent on. I do not think that at any time a committee of the Congress has the right to call into executive session a Cabinet officer or any-



one who is really a spokesman for the administration and seek to impose any restriction on that witness in regard to anything that he says in that executive session in respect to his right to make any comment after the meeting is over or release any statement he wants to make after the meeting is over.

Speaking hypothetically, although the Secretary has made very clear his willingness to oblige you, I am not talking about his willingness to oblige but I am talking about what I consider to be a very, very important basic procedural right of the administration witness under the separation powers doctrine. I have never transgressed upon it knowingly, and I am not going to let the administration at any time transgress upon our corresponding right under the same doctrine. Therefore, I think we ought to deal with each other on the basis that we know what these respective rights are and seek to place no restriction on each other. That is my point.

I took the same position, you will recall, in the MacArthur hearings when there was an attempt, in my judgment, on the part of the committee then to infringe the rights of the administration under the doctrine there. I take the same position this morning.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Hickenlooper.

#### RESPONSIBILITY FOR RELEASING A STATEMENT

Senator HICKENLOOPER. I think we have a rather complicated situation here which is not necessarily one under the control of the Secretary or of the committee. It may be more under the control of the committee than of the Secretary.

I would say that the Secretary has no right whatsoever under our procedure to release a transcript of this record where members question the Secretary and answers come in. On the other hand, I would say this, that the responsibility of releasing a statement on the sole responsibility of the Secretary or any other administrative official is the responsibility of that official of that department. I am not so sure we can control it. We can control what we release. I think it is a matter of some kind of an understanding.

I am thoroughly sympathetic with what you have said, Mr. Chairman, about piecemeal releases of these things. I hate to read about them even though they have not been released—I hate to read about them in Time magazine or the New York Times or other papers of that kind, where we have to get some of our information from there. That makes us quite restless but apparently there is nothing we can do about it, and sometimes what goes on in this committee at least seems to be approximative in some of those news releases of certain columnists and so on.

So it is a problem that has its various facets. But so far as a straight statement of the Secretary, I would say that we have no authority to inhibit him from a straight statement he wants to make to the public on his own responsibility without regard to questions or answers or what anyone else has said, because when that occurs, then there is a dual responsibility there, not only on the questioner but the Secretary, and I hope we can control that.

But I do not know; it is a very difficult thing, and I am thoroughly sympathetic with the piecemeal—

The CHAIRMAN. I was not asserting any right to control it. It was merely a suggestion if there was some comity——

Senator HICKENLOOPER. If it is a question of comity, we can arrive at it.

The CHAIRMAN. He can keep it within his control.  
Go ahead, Mr. Secretary.

#### NEWSPAPER REPORTS OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

Senator LAUSCHE. Mr. Chairman, having listened to what Senator Hickenlooper has just said, I feel obliged to make a statement that this body, vested with secret information of the most intimate character, dealing with the security of the United States, has been brought scandalously into disrepute by the frequency with which reports are carried in the newspapers of what is supposed to be done under closed executive meetings, and I do not feel content that we can wink at these leaks that are coming out of this committee. I am not satisfied with the statement that there is nothing we can do about it. Somebody is leaking things, whether it is a member, Members of the Senate, or whether it is members of the staff. I do not know who it is, but it is a terrible mistake that this body, related most intimately to matters that deal with the security of the United States, finds itself with newspapers reporting what takes place under confidential discussions.

It cannot be denied that these reports are being carried outside of the meeting. How do they get out? I think we ought to make an investigation. We ought to find out whether it is from the staff or where it emerges.

The whole world can laugh at us at what happened. It seems you do not need spies, all you have to do is look at the papers and fully you will find revealed what takes place confidentially in this room.

The CHAIRMAN. I wonder if we could get on with the testimony.

Senator AIKEN. I would like to observe that sometimes the leaks appear 2 or 3 days after they come out in the newspapers, which can hardly be in the category of a leak.

The CHAIRMAN. Let us get on.

Senator LAUSCHE. The chairman wants to get on with this matter, and I can understand why he would want to get on, but I will say to you with what you are trying to get on is not as significant as what I am trying to search out. Something is wrong with this committee.

Senator MORSE. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. I wonder if we could proceed.

Senator CLARK. Let us go ahead.

#### PLACING RESTRICTIONS ON ADMINISTRATION SPOKESMEN

Senator MORSE. We are not going to leave this record in this condition so far as the Senator from Oregon is concerned. I do not think we ought to take up the Secretary's time with quarrels of the committee, but, Frank, you were not here and you are not aware of what Senator Hickenlooper was talking about. We are not talking about what you are talking about. That was not raised. I had risen to the defense of what I think is a very important doctrine that always ought to prevail at our hearings when we have a Cabinet officer or anyone else from the administration here; namely, we should make no attempt to place

76

7

any restriction on the spokesman of the administration regarding what he says to the press afterward and what he releases. The only suggestion was a very helpful intention by the chairman suggesting that the Secretary of Defense hold any statement when he goes out of this meeting such as releasing the testimony he is about to give us until we will have the whole record considered.

I only raised a point there, understanding the motivation of the chairman to be of the highest, that I would not support placing any restriction, under the separation-of-powers doctrine, on Secretary McNamara. That is how all this occurred. We were not talking, Frank, about the problem that you are raising, and I do not think we ought to be taking the time of the Secretary to be talking about that now. That is for us to handle in our own executive session.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, will you go ahead. I think we ought to proceed.

Senator LAUSCHIE. I want to make this statement, and then I will close.

In the report that was filed by the staff, there was an addendum, and in the addendum there was stated that X contacted the staff and told about the truth that there were no missiles seen fired at our ships. Y spoke to the staff. Well, as a member of the bench for 10 years, when you begin offering that type of proof to establish a fact, I simply cannot accept it.

The CHAIRMAN. Proceed, Mr. Secretary.

#### STAFF STUDY REFUSED

Secretary McNAMARA. Mr. Chairman, I have sought in my statement to be as responsive as I can to what I believe to be are the questions in the mind of the committee regarding the Tonkin Gulf incident. I have not had the advantage, however, or the privilege of exposure to the staff study that I know has been completed and circulated among you. I asked for that several weeks ago but was denied access to it, and I may, therefore, not entirely respond to all of the information that you wish to query me about. I will be very happy to take questions concerning the statement.

Senator MANSFIELD. Do I understand the Secretary requested a copy of the study and was denied?

The CHAIRMAN. That is correct. I also requested their command and control documents and it was denied.

Senator MANSFIELD. I was thinking of those in juxtaposition.

The CHAIRMAN. That is correct.

Senator GORE. Perhaps we can exchange those now. That might solve it.

The CHAIRMAN. I think we ought to go on.

Go on, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary McNAMARA. Let me comment, Mr. Chairman. These are not to be equated. You can have any raw material we have. We tried to supply all of it to you. Some of it is very highly classified, and we assume you will treat it with the care that its classification deserves. We also are quite willing to let you have evaluation reports, but only after we have ascertained that the authors of those reports had access to all the appropriate information. It turns out that the author of this particular study you mentioned did not have access. I never heard of the



77

8

study when you requested it. General Wheeler was not aware of it. The author did not query General Wheeler or me about the actions we took today, or the actions of the Joint Chiefs, the National Security Council, or those the President took.

I do not think you want evaluative reports sent over here that are incomplete. Any report we have, you have access to, but only after it has been properly reviewed as to its reliability.

Your staff study is quite a different matter. I consider it a very serious handicap to me in appearing before you today to address these issues that have been reviewed and addressed and considered in your staff study, evidence of which is examined in your staff study, which evidence has never even been brought to my attention, but if you are willing to go ahead with the hearing on that basis, I am.

The CHAIRMAN. All of the staff was based upon material that came from your office, all of it. We gave you a complete list of every document and everything we had received, and it is available to you as it was to us.

#### ADDENDUM TO STAFF STUDY

Secretary McNAMARA. Senator Lausche has just stated it had an addendum to it that included information that was not available to me.

The CHAIRMAN. That was not used in the preparation of the staff study and it was purely an addendum of things that had happened outside of the documents which came from the Pentagon.

Senator LAUSCHE. Let me say, Mr. Chairman, that the addendum recited a number of contacts made by a staffman with persons unknown. Now it was offered as an addendum supposedly having an insignificant importance, but it is there. Three or four men who were supposed to have been in the Tonkin Bay are alleged to have said that there were no missiles fired. Who are the men? How did they contact them?

Senator COOPER. What weight was given to it?

Senator MANSFIELD. Mr. Chairman, I apologize for the interruption but I have to be up here on the floor.

The CHAIRMAN. I would hope the Secretary would be allowed to proceed.

Mr. Secretary?

#### ESSENTIAL FACTS ARE THE SAME TODAY

Secretary McNAMARA. Mr. Chairman, on August 6, 1964, I appeared before this committee and testified concerning the attacks in the Tonkin Gulf on the destroyers U.S.S. *Maddox* and U.S.S. *Turner Joy*, and our response to those attacks.

Over 3½ years have passed since that time. However, even with the advantage of hindsight, I find that the essential facts of the two attacks appear today as they did then, when they were fully explored with this committee and other Members of Congress.

The relevant events, and their significance, were the subject of intensive debate in the House and Senate. Both my testimony and that of other officials of the Government reported the evidence that established conclusively the occurrence of these attacks on U.S. naval vessels operating in international waters. This evidence was available to us at the time of the decision to make a carefully tailored response to the

attacks. In my testimony, I noted that, while sonar and radar readings may be subject to interpretation and argument because of sea and atmospheric conditions, we had intelligence reports of a highly classified and unimpeachable nature which established, without question, that the attacks took place on both August 2 and August 4.

PART PLAYED BY U.S. NAVAL VESSELS

Also fully explored at the time was the question whether the attacks on the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were in any way provoked by or related to certain South Vietnamese naval activity which occurred in the period from July 30 to August 4. As I stated then, and repeat now, our naval vessels played absolutely no part in, and were not associated with, this activity. There was then, and there is now, no question but that the U.S. Government knew, and that I knew personally, the general nature of some countermeasures being taken by the South Vietnamese in response to North Vietnam's aggression. As I informed Congress, the boats utilized by the South Vietnamese were financed by the United States. But I said then, and I repeat today, that the *Maddox* and the *Turner Joy* did not participate in the South Vietnamese activities, that they had no knowledge of the details of these operations, and that in no sense of the word could they be considered to have backstopped the effort.

As the chairman noted in the Senate debates, he was informed that "our boats did not convoy or support or back up any South Vietnamese naval vessels" and that they were "entirely unconnected or unassociated with any coastal forays the South Vietnamese themselves may have conducted." He was so informed and the information was completely accurate. When the South Vietnamese conducted the first of their two naval operations against North Vietnamese targets during this period, the *Maddox* patrol had not even begun and the ship was at least 130 miles to the southeast. The attack on the *Maddox* on August 2 took place 63 hours after completion of this South Vietnamese naval operation. When the South Vietnamese boats conducted their second foray, the *Maddox* and the *Turner Joy* were at least 70 nautical miles to the northeast.

Senator CASE. I wonder if you could go a little more slowly. It is a little hard to understand.

Secretary McNAMARA. Yes.

The attack made against them on August 4 was almost a full day after this second South Vietnamese operation.

The facts thus show today, as they showed 3½ years ago, that attacks occurred against our ships both on August 2 and August 4, that we had available to us incontrovertible evidence of these attacks when the decision was made to make our limited and measured response, and that these attacks were in no sense provoked or justified by any participation or association of our ships with South Vietnamese naval operations. I would like briefly to review these facts with you.

REVIEW OF FACTS OF ATTACK

On the 2d of August 1964, the U.S.S. *Maddox* was engaged in a patrol in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin. At no time during the conduct of her patrol did *Maddox* depart from international

77

10

waters, or engage in any hostile act. Yet, while she was 28 miles from the coast of North Vietnam, on a course away from the coast, *Maddox* was attacked by three North Vietnamese torpedo boats. At least three torpedoes were directed by the boats at the *Maddox*, as well as machinegun fire. The *Maddox* avoided all torpedoes and, together with aircraft arriving on the scene from the U.S.S. *Ticonderoga*, repelled the attack and sank or damaged the attacking craft.

The attack on *Maddox* took place in daylight. North Vietnamese reports of their plans had previously been obtained from an intelligence source. The attacking craft were clearly seen by *Maddox* personnel and were photographed. The launching of the torpedoes by these PT boats was also observed as were the torpedo wakes passing near *Maddox*. Machinegun fire from the attackers was also observed and, indeed, one bullet was recovered—it is in our possession and I have it here this morning if you wish to inspect it.

This was an unprovoked attack on a ship of the United States on the high seas. Nevertheless, no reprisal by the United States was undertaken. The *Maddox*, fortunately, had avoided significant damage itself, and inflicted damage on the attackers. Since no rational motive for the attack was apparent, we believed it possible that it had resulted from a miscalculation or an impulsive act of a local commander. After the second attack, the chairman commented in Senate debate that I had stated, after the first attack on the *Maddox*, that I did not expect it to be repeated. He also noted that this showed how wrong I was.

On August 3, the day following, a note of protest was dispatched to the North Vietnam regime at the direction of the President. It concluded with the words: "The U.S. Government expects that the authorities of the regime in North Vietnam will be under no misapprehension as to the grave consequences which would inevitably result from any further unprovoked offensive military action against U.S. forces." At the same time, the President made public his instructions to the Navy to continue and to add another destroyer to its patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin.

It was within this context that we received, at about 9:20 Washington time on the morning of August 4, information from an intelligence source that North Vietnamese naval forces had been ordered to attack the patrol.

Soon thereafter reports from the *Maddox* were received that the patrol was being approached by high speed surface radar contacts and that an attack appeared imminent. Other amplifying messages quickly followed and by about 11 a.m., we received a flash report that our destroyers, then located some 60 to 65 miles from the coast of North Vietnam, were actually under attack. During this same time, intelligence sources reported that North Vietnamese vessels stated they had our ships under attack. Throughout the remainder of the morning and early afternoon, flash message reports of the engagement, some ambiguous and some conflicting, continued to pour in. Frequent telephone contact was maintained with the commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, Hawaii. The President was kept informed of these developments.



CONTRADICTIONS EXAMINED AND RECONCILED

During this period, I had a series of meetings with my chief civilian and military advisers in which the apparent ambiguities and contradictions in the reports were examined and reconciled to our satisfaction. We identified and refined various options for a response to the attack, to be presented to the President. Among these options was the air strike against the attacking boats and their associated bases, which option was eventually selected. As the options were identified, preliminary messages were sent to appropriate operational commanders alerting them to the several possibilities so that initial planning steps could be undertaken.

In the early afternoon, the National Security Council met, at which time we briefed the participants, including the President, on the available details of the attack. Shortly thereafter, having received the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, we recommended to the President, and he approved, a response consisting of an air strike on the PT and Swatow boat bases and their associated facilities. During all of this time, the message reports of the engagement from the ships, plus other information of a very highly classified nature received during the attack, were being reviewed to eliminate any doubt that an attack on the destroyers in fact occurred.

For example, I saw a message from the onscene task group commander which expressed doubts as to the validity of many of the sonar reports. I discussed this message by telephone with the commander in chief, Pacific, and informed him that, although we would continue with the preparations, the reprisal strike would not be executed until we were absolutely positive of the attack. He of course agreed and in a later telephone call informed me that he was satisfied, from all the reports he had on hand, that an attack on our ships had taken place.

Finally, at about 6:30 p.m., Washington time, the message to execute the strike was transmitted by the commander in chief, Pacific.

Those are the essential details. To recapitulate, on August 2, one of our destroyers was attacked by North Vietnamese naval forces without provocation while on patrol on the high seas. Since the destroyer had suffered no damage and had repulsed and damaged her attackers, and since the possibility seemed to exist that the incident was an isolated act, no further military response was made. North Vietnam was warned the next day, however, of the "grave consequences which would inevitably follow" another such attack. Furthermore, the President announced that the patrol would continue and would consist of two destroyers. The next night, the two destroyers were also attacked without provocation on the high seas by North Vietnamese naval forces.

When these facts were established to the complete satisfaction of all responsible authorities, we responded with an air strike on the facilities which supported the attacking vessels.

ACCURACY OF DETAILS STILL QUESTIONED

Now, three and a half years later, there again seems to be debate about the essential accuracy of the above account. The questions that appear now to be raised are the same as those considered and settled at the time:

Was the patrol in fact for legitimate purposes?

Were the attacks unprovoked?

Was there indeed a second attack?

If there was a second attack, was there sufficient evidence available at the time of our response to support this conclusion?

I would like to address these questions.

WAS PURPOSE OF PATROL LEGITIMATE?

First, was the patrol in fact for legitimate purposes?

Patrols of the nature of those carried on by *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were initiated in the western Pacific in 1962. They were carried out in international waters along the coastlines of Communist countries in that area. They were open patrols and no hostile actions were ever taken by the U.S. forces involved. Provocative actions were avoided. The purpose was to learn what we could of military activity and environmental conditions in these parts of the world, operating in waters where we had every legal right to be. The primary purpose of the *Maddox* was to observe North Vietnamese naval activity in those waters, in view of the evidence we had of infiltration by sea by North Vietnam into South Vietnam. Other secondary purposes were area familiarization and observation by visual and electronic means of any other activity of military interest. We had the undisputed right to do this. In view of our assistance to South Vietnam, such observations were needed.

The suggestion has appeared incidentally that because *Maddox*, prior to commencement of its patrol, took aboard certain communications equipment, with personnel to operate this equipment, its patrol had some different and presumably more sinister purpose than others which had preceded it. This is simply not true. The mission of observation which I have outlined was to be fulfilled with the regularly installed equipment of the ships. The extra equipment brought aboard *Maddox* consisted in essence of standard shipboard radio receivers added to the ship's normal complement of such receivers in order to give an added capability for detecting indications of a possible hostile attack on the patrol.

The Congress, at the time of the debates on the Tonkin Gulf resolution, was aware that visual and electronic surveillance of the area was one of the purposes served by the De Soto patrol. Any suggestion now that the installation of passive radio receiving equipment changed the essential nature of the patrol is unwarranted.

I might add that virtually all of the De Soto patrols, since their commencement in 1962, had been outfitted with similar equipment for the same primarily defensive purposes.

WERE THE ATTACKS UNPROVOKED?

Second, were the attacks unprovoked?

Senator MUNDT. Are you defining the De Soto patrol?

Secretary McNAMARA. The term as I am using it here refers to the patrols in the Tonkin Gulf of which this was the fourth, one having occurred in 1962, one in 1963, and the third in the early part of 1964, and the fourth in August 1964. Actually it is a generic term covering a broader range of patrols in the western Pacific but as used in this paper it refers to the four patrols in the Tonkin Gulf.

Second, were the attacks unprovoked?

I have heard it suggested that the patrol provoked the attacks by intruding into the territorial waters of North Vietnam. The facts, I think, are these.

Prior to the first attack, on August 2, the *Maddox* had been engaged on its patrol since July 31. At no time during the conduct of this patrol did the *Maddox* depart from international waters. It had been instructed to approach the North Vietnamese coastline no closer than 8 nautical miles and any offshore island no closer than 4 nautical miles. *Maddox* adhered scrupulously to these instructions. When the patrol resumed with *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*, the ships were instructed to remain at least 11 miles from the coast. These instructions also were followed. The United States recognizes no claim of a territorial sea in excess of 3 miles. This consistent position of the United States was reemphasized at the close of the 1960 Convention on Law of the Sea in Geneva.

There have, however, been statements reported in the press that the *Maddox* entered into waters claimed by North Vietnam as territorial. Such statements have no basis in fact. At no time prior to the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf incidents did the North Vietnamese Government claim a width of territorial sea in excess of 3 miles. The North Vietnamese Government succeeded the French Government, which adhered to the 3-mile limit. Under the rules of international law, no claim by North Vietnam in excess of 3 miles would be assumed unless specifically made and published. It should be noted that Cambodia, a sister successor state, publicly adopted the French 3-mile rule on achieving independence. Later, it proclaimed a 5-mile limit. South Vietnam claims 3 miles. The first statement of North Vietnam which approaches a claim in excess of 3 miles occurred well after the attacks on September 1, 1964, in the form of a broadcast from Radio Hanoi in which it was stated, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam declared that the territorial sea is 12 miles." No official documentary confirmation of the claim asserted in this broadcast is known to exist.

In short, at no time during the patrol did either of the destroyers leave the high seas and enter areas claimed by the North Vietnamese or recognized by the United States as national waters.

The question might be asked, however: Should not we as a practical matter have assumed a claim of 12 miles since this is the uniform position of the Communist countries? The simple answer is that Communist countries do not have such a uniform position: Cuba and Poland each adhere to the traditional 3-mile limit, while Yugoslavia and Albania claim 10 miles.

#### SOUTH VIETNAMESE OPERATIONS

Another point relating to "provocation" was discussed and disposed of during the debates on the Tonkin Gulf resolution and the hearings prior thereto, but, of late, it seems to have been resurrected. It is the



suggestion that our patrol was in some way connected with certain reconnaissance and bombardment activities of South Vietnamese patrol craft against North Vietnamese.

I informed members of this committee of these activities of the South Vietnamese in an informal meeting on August 3, 1964, after the attack on the *Maddox*. The subject was again raised in lesser detail in my testimony before this committee on August 6, 1964. I pointed out that these raids were a legitimate attempt by the South Vietnamese to counter and retaliate against the systematic infiltration of their country by sea which had been carried out by North Vietnam for the previous two and a half years. I described the scope of that infiltration; that is, 140 known incidents between July and December 1961, an estimated 1,400 infiltrators having been landed in South Vietnam during that time.

With respect to the legitimacy of those South Vietnamese operations, you, Mr. Chairman, stated during the Tonkin Gulf floor debates:

The boats that may have struck at the coastal areas of North Vietnam may have been supplied by us. We have been helping South Vietnam arm itself. I do not know about the specific boats.

I personally think this is a perfectly legitimate and proper way to defend oneself from the kind of aggression South Vietnam has been subjected to for years.

Senator Morse, at the hearing on August 6, specifically raised the question of a connection between our patrol and the South Vietnamese bombardment of two North Vietnamese islands which had occurred some two and a half days prior to the attack on *Maddox*, and I responded that there was no connection. The two operations were separate and distinct. I informed you that our destroyers took no part whatsoever in the South Vietnamese operation. They did not convoy, support, or back up the South Vietnamese boats in any way. As I stated during the hearings:

\* \* \* as I reported to you earlier this week, we understand that the South Vietnamese sea force carried out patrol action around these islands and actually shelled the points they felt were associated with this infiltration.

Our ships had absolutely no knowledge of it, were not connected with it; in no sense of the word can be considered to have backstopped the effort.

That statement remains entirely accurate. I can confirm today that neither the ship commanders nor the embarked task group commander had any knowledge of the South Vietnamese action against the two islands or of any other specific South Vietnamese operations against the North. Higher naval commands were made aware of the operations by Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, in order to avoid mutual interference or confusion between our patrols and those operations.

#### DIRECTIONS TO U.S. DESTROYERS

Throughout the patrol conducted first by the *Maddox* alone and later by the *Maddox* and the *Turner Joy*, the U.S. destroyers were directed to remain in waters which would keep them from becoming operationally involved with the South Vietnamese activity. The restrictions this imposed on the patrol were such that, at one time, consideration was given to its abandonment. The task group commander knew only that certain South Vietnamese naval operations were periodically carried on in the area. He had no detailed knowledge

of their type or of where or when they would be conducted. Indeed, his lack of knowledge was such that he mistakenly identified the South Vietnamese craft returning from their operation of July 31 as Soviet P-6 class boats.

In point of fact, our patrols and the shore bombardments by South Vietnamese forces were separated in both time and space. When South Vietnamese PTF's bombarded the islands of Hon Nieu and Hon Me on the night of July 30-31, the *Maddox* had not even commenced her patrol, and was at least 130 miles to the southeast of the nearest of those islands. At the time of the attack on the *Maddox* on August 2, the South Vietnamese boats had been back at their base in Da Nang for almost 53 hours.

I learned subsequent to my testimony of August 6, 1964, that another South Vietnamese bombardment took place on the night of August 3-4. At the time of that action, the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were at least 70 miles to the northeast. The North Vietnamese attack on *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* on the night of August 4 occurred some 22 hours later.

I think it important, too, in dealing with this issue, to recall that the President had announced publicly on August 3 that our patrol would continue and consist of two destroyers. It is difficult to believe, in the face of that announcement, and its obvious purpose of asserting our right to freedom of the seas, that even the North Vietnamese could connect the patrol of the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* with a South Vietnamese action taking place some 70 miles away.

#### WAS THERE A SECOND ATTACK?

Now, thirdly, was there indeed a second attack?

I know of no claim that the attack on *Maddox* on August 2 did not occur. As for the second attack, the incident occurred on a very dark, moonless, overcast night. As would be expected under these conditions, some uncertainty existed, and to this day exists, about some of the precise details of the attack. But there should be no uncertainty about the fact that an attack took place. The evidence pertaining to the incident is reviewed in the following paragraphs.

On the evening of August 4, 1964, Task Group 72.1 consisting of U.S.S. *Maddox* and U.S.S. *Turner Joy*, with COMDESDIV 192 embarked in *Maddox* and acting as CTG 72.1, was proceeding on an easterly course in the Gulf of Tonkin at a speed of 20 knots. At about 7:40 p.m., Tonkin Gulf time,<sup>1</sup> the task group commander, Capt. J. J. Herrick, USN, observed on the surface search radar at least five contacts, which he evaluated as probable torpedo boats, located about 36 miles to the northeast of the two ships. At 7:46 p.m., *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* changed course to 130 and increased speed to 28 knots to avoid what the task group commander had evaluated as a trap.

Shortly after 9 p.m., both ships' radars held contacts approximately 14 miles to the east. These contacts were on course 160, speed 30 knots. At that time the two U.S. ships were approximately 60 miles from the North Vietnamese coast.

At about 9:39 p.m., both *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* opened fire on the approaching craft when it was evident from their maneuvers that they

<sup>1</sup> To convert local Tonkin Gulf time to e.d.t. subtract 12 hours.

85  
16

were pressing in for attack positions. At about this time, the boats were at a range of 6,000 yards from *Maddox* when the radar tracking indicated that the contact had turned away and begun to open in range. Torpedo noises were then heard by the *Maddox's* sonar. A report of the torpedo noise was immediately passed to the *Turner Joy* by inter-ship radio and both ships took evasive action to avoid the torpedo.

#### REPORTS OF EYEWITNESSES

A torpedo wake was then sighted passing abeam *Turner Joy* from aft to forward, approximately 300 feet to port on the same bearing as that reported by *Maddox*. This sighting was made by at least four of *Turner Joy's* topside personnel: the forward gun director officer, Lt. (jg.) John J. Barry, USNR; the port lookout, Edwin R. Sentel, SN, USN; by a seaman who was in the forward gun director with the director officer, Larry O. Litton, SN, USN; and by a seaman who was operator of the after gun director, Roger N. Bergland, SN, USN.

At about 10:24 p.m., one target was taken under fire by *Turner Joy*. Numerous hits were observed on this target and it disappeared from all radars. The commanding officer and other *Turner Joy* personnel observed a thick column of black smoke from this target.

Later, 10:47 p.m., during the attack a searchlight was observed by all signal bridge and maneuvering bridge personnel including the commanding officer of U.S.S. *Turner Joy*. The beam of the searchlight did not touch the ship, but was seen to swing in an arc toward *Turner Joy* and was immediately extinguished when aircraft from the combat air patrol orbiting above the ships approached the vicinity of the searchlight. (Walter L. Shishim, QMCS, USN; Richard B. Johnson, SM1, USN; Richard D. Nooks, QM3, USN; Richard M. Bacino, SM2, USN; and Gary D. Carroll, SM3, USN, stationed on the *Turner Joy's* signal bridge all made written statements that they sighted the searchlight.)

The silhouette of an attacking boat was seen by at least four *Turner Joy* personnel when the boat came between the flares dropped by an aircraft and the ship. When these four men were asked to sketch what they had seen, they accurately sketched P-4-type boats. (None of the four had ever seen a picture of a P-4 boat before). (Donald V. Sharkey, BM3, USN; Kenneth E. Garrison, SN, USN; Delner Jones, GMG-SN, USN, and Arthur B. Anderson, FT SN, USN, are the four personnel from the *Turner Joy* who sighted the boat.)

In addition to the above, a gunner's mate second class stationed aft of the signal bridge aboard U.S.S. *Maddox* saw the outline of a boat which was silhouetted by the light of a burst from the 3-inch projectile fired at it. (Jose R. San Augustin GMG2, USN.)

The commanding officer of Attack Squadron 52 from the *Ticonderoga* (Comdr. G. H. Edmondson, USN) and his wingman (Lt. J. A. Burton), while flying at altitudes of between 700 and 1,500 feet in the vicinity of the two destroyers at the time of the torpedo attack both sighted gun flashes on the surface of the water as well as light anti-aircraft bursts at their approximate altitude. On one pass over the two destroyers, both pilots positively sighted a "snakey" high speed wake 1½ miles ahead of the lead destroyer, U.S.S. *Maddox*.

Two U.S. Marine Corps personnel who were manning machineguns on U.S.S. *Maddox* saw lights pass up the port side of the ship, go out



ahead, and pass down the starboard side. Their written statement asserts their belief that this was one or more small boats at high speed. (These were Matthew B. Allasre, SGT, USMC, and David A. Prouty, L/CPL, USMC.)

#### INTELLIGENCE REPORTS

In addition to the above, intelligence reports received from a highly classified and unimpeachable source reported that North Vietnam was making preparations to attack our destroyers with two Swatow boats and with one PT boat if the PT could be made ready in time. The same source reported, while the engagement was in progress on August 4, that the attack was underway. Immediately after the attack ended, the source reported that the North Vietnamese lost two ships in the engagement.

No one within the Department of Defense has reviewed all of this information without arriving at the unqualified conclusion that a determined attack was made on the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* in the Tonkin Gulf on the night of August 4, 1964. Vice Adm. Roy L. Johnson, USN, commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet at the time, stated in his review of the combined chronology and track charts submitted by the task group commander:

Commander, Seventh Fleet, is convinced beyond any doubt that *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were subjected to an unprovoked surface torpedo attack on the night of 4 August 1964.

Adm. T. H. Moorer, then commander in chief, Pacific Fleet, concurred in that appraisal.

In Washington, the Director of the Joint Staff, Lt. Gen. David A. Burchinal, USAF, analyzed the incoming information from message traffic, with the assistance of the Joint Staff. He then gave his evaluation to the Secretary of Defense: "The actuality of the attack is confirmed."

In the face of this evidence, I can only conclude that many of the persistent questions as to whether or not an attack took place must have arisen from confusion between the August 4 attack and another incident which occurred on the 18th of September 1964; that is, about 45 days later. At that time, the U.S. destroyers *Morton* and *Edwards* were patrolling, at night, in the Gulf of Tonkin, and initially reported themselves under attack. While the ensuing situation reports indicated the probability of hostile craft in the area of the patrol, it was decided at both the Washington and field command levels that no credible evidence of an attack existed. It should be noted that the intelligence source that confirmed the attacks of August 2 and 4 provided no evidence of any enemy action on September 18. In view of our unresolved doubts, no retaliatory action was taken. Many individuals who were not aware of all of the facts about all three incidents, that is, August 2 and 4, and September 18, have made the mistaken assumption that descriptions of the September 18 incident were referring to the second Tonkin Gulf incident. Aware of the negative findings on September 18, they have mistakenly assumed that there is serious doubt as to whether the "second" Tonkin Gulf attack in fact took place.

87

REPORTS FROM CAPTURED NORTH VIETNAMESE NAVAL PERSONNEL

As a final point on this issue, U.S. naval forces in the 3½ years which have elapsed since the August 1964 incidents have captured several North Vietnamese naval personnel. These personnel were extensively interrogated. One of these, captured in July 1966, stated he had taken part in the August 2, 1964, attack on the *Maddox*, and his account of that attack coincided with our observations. He professed no knowledge of the August 4 attack and said that he believed that PT boats were not involved in that attack. He stated that Swatows could have been used for that attack. His disclaimer of PT participation is contradicted by information received from a later captive. A North Vietnamese naval officer captured in July 1967 provided the name of the commander of a PT squadron. In intelligence reports received immediately after the August 4 attack, this commander and his squadron were identified by name and number as participants.

SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT CONCLUSION

Now, finally, if there was a second attack, was there sufficient evidence available at the time of our response to support this conclusion?

Some of the details cited above, particularly the statements of eyewitnesses, although gathered immediately after the attack, had not reached Washington at the time that the reprisal air strikes were ordered executed. Sufficient information was in the hands of the President, however, to establish beyond any doubt then or now that an attack had taken place. Allow me to repeat again that information:

An intelligence report of a highly classified and unimpeachable nature received shortly before the engagement, stating that North Vietnamese naval forces intended to attack the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*.

Reports from the ships that their radars indicated they were being shadowed by high speed surface vessels.

Reports from the ships that they were being approached by the high speed vessels and an attack appeared imminent.

Reports from the ships that they were under attack.

A report from the ships that searchlight illumination had been utilized by the attacking craft and that gunfire against the patrol had been observed.

A report that two torpedoes had passed close to the *Turner Joy* and that there had been positive visual sightings of what appeared to be cockpit lights of patrol craft passing near the *Maddox*.

An intelligence report stating that North Vietnamese naval forces had reported that they were involved in an engagement.

Reports from the U.S. ships that they had sunk two and possibly three of the attacking craft.

An intelligence report stating that North Vietnamese naval forces had reported losing two ships in the engagement.

A report from the onscene task group commander that he was certain that the ambush had taken place, although precise details of the engagement were still not known.

A report from the commander in chief, Pacific, that he had no doubt that an attack had occurred.

All of this information was available prior to the time the Executive order was issued.

88

19

#### MONSTROUS INSINUATIONS

As a final point, I must address the suggestion that, in some way, the Government of the United States induced the incident on August 4 with the intent of providing an excuse to take the retaliatory action which we in fact took. I can only characterize such insinuations as monstrous.

The effective repulsion of the August 2 attack on the *Maddox* with relatively high cost to the small North Vietnamese Navy, coupled with our protest which clearly and unequivocally warned of the serious consequences of a recurrence, made us confident that another attack was unlikely. The published order of the President that the destroyers should continue to assert the right of the freedom of the seas in the Gulf of Tonkin, and setting forth the composition of the patrol, should have served to avoid any further misunderstanding. As the patrol resumed the ships were ordered to remain 11 miles from the coastline in lieu of the 8 miles ordered on the previous patrols, hardly indicative of an intent to induce another attack. As a matter of fact, on their own initiative the two ships approached the coastline no closer than 16 miles during their patrol. But beyond that, I find it inconceivable that anyone even remotely familiar with our society and system of Government could suspect the existence of a conspiracy which would include almost, if not all, the entire chain of military command in the Pacific, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Chiefs, the Secretary of Defense, and his chief civilian assistants, the Secretary of State, and the President of the United States.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement, and I will be very happy to try to answer any questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I would like to have a few preliminary questions with regard to the situation under which this whole affair took place. I don't think they are very difficult to answer.

#### INTERNAL TROUBLES OF KHANH GOVERNMENT

Mr. Secretary, is it true that the government of General Khanh which overthrew the Minh junta in January 1964 was in serious trouble by the spring and early summer of 1964?

Secretary McNAMARA. I think there was considerable dissension among the members of the government, Mr. Chairman, and there was then and later a series of changes in the government as a result of that dissension.

The CHAIRMAN. Did you not say recently on "Meet the Press," and I quote: "Three and a half years ago the South Vietnamese forces were on the verge of defeat. The North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces were on the verge of victory."

Is that accurate?

Secretary McNAMARA. Mr. Chairman, if I said that, I misestimated the date. What I was talking about—I think later in that same broadcast I specifically referred to it, was July 1965. I should have said two and a half years ago. That was the reference I was making.

The CHAIRMAN. That is a quote from just 2 weeks ago.

Secretary McNAMARA. It may be, Mr. Chairman. I would have to have the full transcript of what I said. I believe I mentally deducted



TAB C

90  
COPY

SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOLUTION <sup>1/</sup>

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approve and support the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Sec. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

---

<sup>1/</sup> Text of Public Law 88-408 [H.J. Res. 1145], 78 Stat. 384, approved Aug. 10, 1964.





92

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

FOOTNOTES

1. Baltimore Sun, 22 May 1964.
2. On 6 and 7 June two U.S. Navy reconnaissance aircraft were shot down over Laos by communist ground-fire. The United States requested and received permission to furnish armed escort reconnaissance flights, and on 9 June, U.S. aircraft struck Pathet Lao gun positions and damaged a Pathet Lao headquarters. Souvanna Phouma temporarily withdrew his permission for armed escort in response to vigorous DRV and Chinese protests, but renewed it on 12 June. See Baltimore Sun, 7, 9, 10, 13 June 1964. Also, New York Times, 9, 10 June 1964.
3. State/Defense message to Vientiane and Bangkok Embassies, 29 June 1964 (In Vietnam 381: 11-30 June 1964 file) (SECRET).
4. See Baltimore Sun, 3 June 1964; New York Times, 7, 20, 23, 24 June 1964.
5. New York Times, 21 June 1964.
6. New York Times, 22 June 1964; Washington Post, 23 June 1964.
7. New York Times, 11 July 1964; New York Herald Tribune and Washington Star, 9 June 1964.
8. Canadian delegation (Saigon) message to U.S. Department of State, 20 June 1964 (in Vietnam 381: 11-30 June 1964) (TOP SECRET).
9. See Bundy memorandum to Secretary Rusk, "Highlights of Honolulu Conference," 3 June 1964 (in State Department Materials, Vol. I) (SECRET). See also discussion in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, IV.C.5, "Military Pressures Against North Vietnam: Action and Debate, Feb-Jun 1964," pp. 34-35 (TOP SECRET).
10. Robert Manning memorandum to President Johnson, "Information Program for Southeast Asia," 16 June 1964 (in Vietnam 381: 11-30 June 1964) (TOP SECRET).
11. NSAM 308, 22 June 1964 (SECRET).
12. From "Pertinent Historical Background, Rules of Engagement--Southeast Asia," (Undated) 1966, notes compiled by Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) McNaughton (in McNaughton VIII) (TOP SECRET).
13. Secretary McNamara, before Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 20 February 1968, Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, Ninetieth Congress, Second Session, with the Honorable Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense on February 20, 1968 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 26.

93

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

14. Secretary McNamara, before Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees, 6 August 1964 (in McNaughton VIII) (TOP SECRET).
15. CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "North Vietnam Operations (S)," 19 May 1964 (JCSM 426-64) (TOP SECRET).
16. SACSA memoranda to SecDef, "Operations Against North Vietnam," 13 June 1964; 1 July 1964; 28 July 1964 (in Vietnam 381: Sensitive File) (TOP SECRET).
17. Rusk message to Vientiane Embassy, 26 July 1964 (State 89) (in "Southeast Asia, June-July 1964," CF 15) (TOP SECRET). See also, CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "U.S./GVN Combined Planning," 24 June 1964 (in Vietnam 381: 11-30 June 1964) (TOP SECRET). The internal policy of controversy on cross-border operations during the first half of 1964 is described to some extent in United States-Vietnam Relations, IV.C.5. (TOP SECRET).
18. The specific recommendations appear in a McGeorge Bundy memorandum to Secretary Rusk, et. al., "Draft Basic Recommendation and Projected Course of Action on Southeast Asia," 25 May 1964 (w/Attachment) (in State Department Material, Vol. I) (TOP SECRET). The disposition of these recommendations is discussed in United States-Vietnam Relations, IV.C.5., pp. 22-40 (TOP SECRET).
19. Proceedings of the Honolulu Conference, dealing with the question of pressures against North Vietnam, are discussed in United States-Vietnam Relations, IV. C. 5., pp. 28-34 (TOP SECRET).
20. Secretary McNamara, op. cit., 20 February 1968, pp. 9, 10, 15, 28. See also Ted Sell in the Washington Post, 8 August 1964.
21. Ibid, pp. 31, 32. Assistant Secretary McNaughton, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Tonkin Gulf Incident, August 2 and 4, 1964," 23 May 1966 (in McNaughton VIII) (TOP SECRET). See also U.S. Navy chronology in New York Times, 4 August 1964 and officially released accounts in the New York Times, 9 and 10 January 1968.
22. McNamara, op. cit., 20 February 1968, pp. 10, 13; McNaughton, op. cit., Edwin L. Dale, Jr., New York Times, 4 August 1964.
23. In New York Times, 4 August 1964.
24. McNamara, op. cit., 20 February 1968, pp. 17, 18, 28.
25. From "Proof of Attack," notes compiled by Assistant Secretary McNaughton (in McNaughton VIII) (TOP SECRET) and McNamara, op. cit., 20 February 1968, pp. 10, 15, 17, 35-37.

94

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

26. Ibid. See also public accounts in New York Times and Baltimore Sun, 5 August 1964, in New York Herald Tribune, 9 August 1964, and in New York Times, 4 February 1968.
27. McNamara, op. cit., 20 February 1968, pp. 17, 18, 57, 66, 92. See also CTG 72.1 to CINCPACFLT, 041452Z, 041515Z, 041542Z and 041727Z August 1964 (SECRET).
28. McNamara, op. cit., 20 February 1968, pp. 10, 11, 48; see also chronology of the Tonkin crisis in New York Herald Tribune, 9 August 1964. Quotation from Finney, op. cit., 10 January 1968.
29. Ibid., pp. 11, 89.
30. Ibid., pp. 58-60, passim. See also CTG 72.1 to CINCPACFLT 041727Z, 041848Z August 1964; JCS to CINCPAC, 042119Z August 1964 (JCS 7720) (TOP SECRET).
31. Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 20 February 1968.
32. See accounts in the New York Times and The Washington Post, 5 August 1964; also the Chronology, New York Herald Tribune, 9 August 1964.
33. Quotations from Secretary McNamara's testimony before Congressional Committees, 6 August 1964 (TOP SECRET). See also McNamara, op. cit., 20 February 1968, pp. 14, 15, 26, 29-31.
34. See Paul W. Ward, Baltimore Sun, 6 August 1964 and James Reston, New York Times, 6 August 1964.
35. McNamara, op. cit., 20 February 1968, pp. 32 (The date given in the testimony is in error).
36. Ibid.
37. McNamara news conference, 5 August 1964, in New York Times, 6 August 1964. See also JCS to CINCS, 050043Z 4 August 1964 (JCS 7729) (SECRET).
38. See Solbert memorandum to SecDef, "Alert Posture for Southeast Asia," 26 September 1964, approved by Secretary McNamara on that date (in Vietnam 381: September file) (TOP SECRET). See also JCS to CINCPAC and CINCSTRIKE/CINCMEAFSA, 241630Z October 1964 (JCS 1177) (SECRET).
39. The Washington Post, 6 August 1964.
40. Congressional Record, House of Representatives, 7 August 1964, pp. 17954-17969, passim.
41. Committee on Foreign Relations Report, "Promoting the Maintenance of International Peace and Security in Southeast Asia," U.S. Senate, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, 6 August 1964.



95  
TOP SECRET - Sensitive

42. Floor debate on proposed Joint Congressional Resolution, U.S. Senate, 6 August 1964.
43. See United States-Vietnam Relations, IV.C.5., pp. 26, 31, 38-40, for a discussion of the rationale behind the initially proposed Congressional Resolution.
44. Text in New York Times, 6 August 1964.
45. Verbatim text of message handed directly to Canadian Embassy, Washington, D.C., for transmittal to Mr. Seaborn. State Department Drafting Office copy, 8 August 1964 (in State Department Materials, Vol I.) (TOP SECRET).
46. See account of U.S. calculations and policy decision in early June 1964 in United States-Vietnam Relations, IV.C.5., pp. 25-27, 34-40, (TOP SECRET).
47. Great Britain and the Soviet Union (Geneva Co-Chairmen); Canada, India and Poland (Members of the Geneva-appointed I.C.C.); and the tripartite Laotian government. See Ibid., p. 27.
48. Henry Tanner, New York Times, 27 July 1964.
49. Unger message to Secretary Rusk, 27 July 1964 (Vientiane 170) (in CF 15) (TOP SECRET).
50. William Bundy, "Memorandum on the Southeast Asia Situation," 12 June 1964 (in State Department Materials, Vol. I) (SECRET).
51. This viewpoint reflected in Department of State message to Vientiane, Saigon embassies and CINCPAC, 14 August 1964 (State 439) (in "Southeast Asia, August 1964," CF 16) (TOP SECRET).
52. The foregoing is available through public sources. See New York Times for the respective dates.
53. Bundy memorandum, 12 June 1964 (SECRET).
54. See Jack Langguth, New York Times, 31 July 1964.
55. Unger to Rusk, 27 July 1964 (TOP SECRET).
56. Henry Tanner, New York Times, 2 August 1964.
57. Department of State message to many addressees, 14 August 1964 (TOP SECRET). See also, Rusk message to Vientiane and other embassies, 7 August 1964 (State 136) (In "Southeast Asia, August 1964," CF 16) (SECRET).

96

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

58. Rusk to Vientiane, et. al., 7 August 1964 (SECRET).
59. See New York Times, 9 and 21 August 1964; Christian Science Monitor, 10 August 1964.
60. Rusk to Vientiane, et. al., 7 August 1964 (SECRET).
61. Compare last paragraph in Ibid. with arguments in Bundy memorandum, 12 June 1964 (SECRET).
62. Taylor message to Secretary Rusk, 9 August (Saigon 363) (in CF 16) (SECRET).
63. See Ibid.; Rusk message to Vientiane, et. al., 7 August 1964; CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," 14 August 1964 (JCSM-701-64) (in Vietnam 381: August file); CINCPAC message to JCS, "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," 17 August 1964 (in CG 16) (TOP SECRET).
64. Taylor to Rusk, 9 August 1964 (SECRET).
65. U.S. Mission message to Department of State, 18 August 1964 (Saigon 465) (in CF 16) (TOP SECRET).
66. William Bundy memorandum to SecDef, et. al., "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia," 11 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file) (SECRET). These views were later expressed in a Department of State message to several addressees, requesting comments.
67. CINCPAC to JCS, 17 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
68. CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Recommended Courses of Action - Southeast Asia," 26 August 1964 (JCSM-746-64) (TOP SECRET). See also JCSM-701-64.
69. CINCPAC to JCS, 17 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
70. See United States-Vietnam Relations, IV.C.5., pp. 35-36 (TOP SECRET).
71. Excerpts from the Rostow thesis in "Analysis of the Rostow Thesis," attachment to Rowen memorandum to JCS, et. al., "The Rostow Thesis," 21 August 1964 (I-27278/64) (SECRET).
72. Ibid., p. 2 (SECRET).
73. Department of State to several addressees, 14 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
74. McNaughton letter to Assistant Secretary of State Bundy, 11 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file) (TOP SECRET).

97

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

75. CINCPAC message to JCS, "Rules of Engagement," 5 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file) (TOP SECRET).
76. JCS message to CINCPAC, "Rules of Engagement," 15 August 1964 (JCS 7947) (in Vietnam 381: August file) (TOP SECRET).
77. COMUSMACV message to CINCPAC, "Cross-Border Operations," 16 August 1964 (in CF 16) (TOP SECRET).
78. CINCPAC message to JCS, "Immediate Actions to be taken in South Vietnam," 31 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file) (TOP SECRET).
79. "Ambassador Taylor's Situation Report on the RVN," attachment to SACSA memorandum to Colonel Alfred J. Moody, Military Assistant to SecDef, 14 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file) (SECRET). See also Department of State to several addressees, 14 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
80. Bureau of Intelligence and Research memorandum, Department of State, 24 August 1964 (in Department of State Materials, "Working Papers") (SECRET).
81. Taylor message to Department of State, 14 October 1964 (Saigon 1129) (in "Southeast Asia -- October 1964," CF 18) (TOP SECRET). The data reflected in this cable may have been assembled for "Infiltration Study, Viet Cong Forces, Republic of Viet Nam," attachment to MACV (Asst C/S, Intelligence) letter to JCS, "Viet Cong Infiltration," 31 October 1964 (JCS 2343/490, 13 November 1964) (SECRET).
82. Reported in JCSM-746-64 (TOP SECRET).
83. Department of State to several addressees, 14 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
84. Joint State/Defense message to Saigon Embassy, 20 August 1964 (in CF 16) (SECRET).
85. JCSM-746-64, 26 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
86. Assistant Secretary McNaughton, "Plan of Action for South Vietnam" (2nd Draft), 3 September 1964 (in State Department Materials, Vol. II) (TOP SECRET).
87. JCS Talking Paper for CJCS, "Next Courses of Action for RVN," 7 September 1964 (in Vietnam 381: Sensitive files) (TOP SECRET).
88. Ibid., (TOP SECRET).
89. Handwritten notes of the White House meeting, 7 September 1964 (SECRET).



98

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

90. William Bundy memorandum to SecDef, et. al., "Courses of Action of Action for South Vietnam," 8 September 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file) (SECRET).
91. McNaughton, "Plan of Action for South Vietnam," (TOP SECRET).
92. Bundy memo, 8 September 1964 (SECRET).
93. Ibid., (SECRET).
94. Handwritten notes (SECRET).
95. Ibid.
96. Bundy memo, 8 September 1964 (SECRET).
97. White House memorandum to SecState and SecDef, "National Security Action Memorandum No. 314," 10 September 1964 (NSAM 314) (in Vietnam 381: September file) (TOP SECRET).
98. CTU 77.6/6 message to COMUSMACV, "Amplifying Report on DE SOTO 181327Z SITREP," 18 September 1964 (in McNaughton VIII) (SECRET).
99. NSC Working Group Working Paper, Part VIII, "Immediate Actions in the Period Prior to Decision," 7 November 1964 (in State Department Materials, Vol II) (TOP SECRET).
100. Vance memorandum to Assistant Secretary McNaughton, 30 September 1964. See also L. Thompson letter to Deputy Secretary Vance, 25 September 1964 (Both in Vietnam 381: September file) (SECRET).
101. Taylor message to SecState, Section One, 19 September 1964 (Saigon 913) (in Vietnam 381: September file) (TOP SECRET).
102. Taylor to SecState, Section Two, 19 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).
103. Ibid.
104. Vientiane Embassy message to SecState (Vientiane 448), described in Section One, 19 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).
105. Section Two, 19 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).
106. CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Cross-Border Operations," 30 September 1964 (JCSM-835-64) (TOP SECRET).
107. Joint State/Defense message to Vientiane Embassy, 6 October 1964 (State 313) (in "Southeast Asia, September 1964," CF 17) (TOP SECRET).
108. SNIE 10-3-64, "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible U.S./GVN Courses of Action," 9 October 1964, p. 6 (TOP SECRET).

99

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

109. State/Defense to Vientiane, 6 October 1964 (TOP SECRET).
110. Unger message to Secretary Rusk and McNamara, 13 October 1964 (Vientiane 609) (in Vietnam 381: October file) (TOP SECRET).
111. Taylor message to Secretary Rusk, 9 October 1964 (Saigon 1068) (in "Southeast Asia - October 1964," CF 18) TOP SECRET).
112. NSC Working Group Working Paper, Part VIII, 7 November 1964 (TOP SECRET).
113. Henry Kamm, New York Times, 3 and 8 September 1964.
114. Drew Middleton, New York Times, 16, 17, 18 and 22 September 1964.
115. Unger message to Department of State, 17 August 1964 (Vientiane 310) (in CF 16) (TOP SECRET).
116. Bundy memo to SecDef et. al., 11 August 1964 (SECRET).  
For evidence of recognition by the Vientiane Embassy of the intent of U.S. policies, see Unger to Department of State, 17 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
117. Ambassador Unger, in interview with the writer, 6 March 1967 (CONFIDENTIAL).
118. Bundy memo, 11 August 1964 (SECRET).
119. Ibid.
120. U.S. Mission (Saigon) to Department of State, 18 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
121. Rostow letter to Ambassador Taylor, 23 September 1964, attachment to a Rostow memorandum to Secretary McNamara, 23 September 1964 (in Vietnam 381: September file) (SECRET).
122. See United States - Vietnam Relations, IV.C.5., pp. 25-26 (TOP SECRET).
123. Taylor message to White House, 10 August 1964 (Saigon 364) (in CF 16) (TOP SECRET). See also Rusk message to Saigon Embassy, 20 August 1964 (State 481) (in CF 16) (SECRET).
124. Bundy memo to SecDef, et. al., 11 August 1964; Department of State to several addressees, 14 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
125. Department of State to several addressees, 14 August 1964 (TOP SECRET). The working paper omitted the phrase, "for planning purposes."
126. Bundy to SecDef, et. al., 11 August 1964 (SECRET).

100

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

127. U.S. Mission (Saigon) to Department of State, 18 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
128. McNaughton, "Plan of Action for South Vietnam," (TOP SECRET).
129. Bundy memo, 8 September 1964 (SECRET).
130. Ibid.; see also NSAM 314, 10 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).
131. See Joint State/Defense message to Ambassador Taylor, 29 October 1964 (State 937) (in CF 18) (TOP SECRET).
132. "Summary" in "Analysis of the Rostow Thesis," pp. 2-3 (SECRET).
133. Ibid., p. 2 (SECRET).
134. Ibid., pp. 3-4 (SECRET).
135. "Analysis of the Rostow Thesis," pp. 13-14, 24, 25, (SECRET).
136. "Summary" in Ibid., p. 5.
137. CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Courses of Action for South Vietnam," 9 September 1964 (CM-124-64) (in Vietnam 381: September file). See also, CINCPAC to JCS, 17 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
138. JCSM-746-64, 26 August 1964; CJCS Talking Paper, 7 September 1964; CM-124-64; CM-124-64, 9 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).
139. McNaughton memorandum to Secretary McNamara, "Air Force Study on Tactical Air Capability in Southeast Asia," 8 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file); MACV 150123Z and CINCPAC 182314Z, in William Bundy memorandum, "Issues Concerning Next Courses of Action," 25 August 1964, Items G and H (in State Department Materials, Book I); CINCPAC to JCS, 17 August 1964; CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Improvement of U.S. Security Posture in South Vietnam," 24 August 1964 (JCSM-731-64); CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Air Force Tactical Air Relationships Study (Southeast Asia)," 4 September 1964 (JCSM-763-64) (TOP SECRET).
140. JCSM-701-64, 14 August 1964; CINCPAC to JCS, 17 August 1964; JCSM-746-64, 26 August 1964; CJCS Talking Paper, 7 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).
141. Saigon 457 and Saigon 538 cited in Bundy memo, 25 August 1964; U.S. Mission (Saigon) to Department of State, 18 August 1964 (TOP SECRET).
142. U.S. Mission to Department of State, 18 August 1964; Bundy memo, 25 August 1964; Handwritten notes, 7 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).



101

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

143. U.S. Mission to Department of State, 18 August 1964; Handwritten notes, 7 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).
144. Bundy memo, 25 August 1964; McNaughton draft, "Aims and Options in Southeast Asia," 13 October 1964 (in "Drafts 1965," McNaughton II) (TOP SECRET).
145. Pencil notes on Bundy memo to SecDef, *et. al.*, 11 August 1964; McNaughton, *op. cit.*; McNaughton, "Plan of Action for South Vietnam," 3 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).
146. McNamara memorandum to CJCS, "JCSM-729-64: Target Study - North Vietnam (SECRET)," 31 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file); McNaughton, "Plan of Action for South Vietnam," 3 September 1964; McNaughton draft, 13 October 1964 (TOP SECRET).
147. Roche memorandum to JCS, "Draft Scenarios for Recommendation 12 (NSAM 288)," 14 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file); McNaughton, "Plan of Action for South Vietnam," 3 September 1964; Bundy draft memorandum "Courses of Action for South Vietnam," (undated, with penciled notations) (in Vietnam 381: September file) (TOP SECRET).
148. McNaughton to McNamara, 8 August 1964; Hitch memorandum to Secretary McNamara, "Review of USAF Study: Relationships of Tactical Air to Ground Forces, SEA, 1964 and 1969 (U)," 24 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file); McNamara memorandum to CJCS, "Improvement of U.S. Security Posture in South Vietnam," 31 August 1964 (in Vietnam 381: August file) (TOP SECRET).
149. Department of State to several addressees, 14 August 1964; Bundy memo, 25 August 1964; Handwritten notes, 7 September 1964 (TOP SECRET).
150. NSAM 314, 10 September 1964; Joint State/Defense to Taylor, 29 October 1964 (TOP SECRET).
151. See McNaughton to McNamara, 8 August 1964; also, Department of State to several addressees, 14 August 1964; Bundy memo, 8 September 1964, particularly in comparison with Bundy draft memo (undated, with pencil notes) (SECRET).
152. SNIE 10-3-64, 9 October 1964, pp. 5, 6 (TOP SECRET).
153. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11 (TOP SECRET).
154. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12 (TOP SECRET).
155. *Ibid.*, p. 2; Handwritten notes, 7 September 1964; SNIE 53-2-64, "The Situation in South Vietnam," 1 October 1964, p. 1 (TOP SECRET).