

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

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

3. ROLLING THUNDER Program Begins: January –
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IV. C. 3.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

THE ROLLING THUNDER PROGRAM BEGINS

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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SUMMARY
AND ANALYSIS

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

THE ROLLING THUNDER PROGRAM BEGINS

SUMMARY and ANALYSIS

The United States decisions, in the early months of 1965, to launch a program of reprisal air strikes against North Vietnam, evolving progressively into a sustained bombing campaign of rising intensity, were made against a background of anguished concern over the threat of imminent collapse of the Government of South Vietnam and of its military effort against the Viet Cong. The air war against the North was launched in the hope that it would strengthen GVN confidence and cohesion, and that it would deter or restrain the DRV from continuing its support of the revolutionary war in the South. There was hope also that a quite modest bombing effort would be sufficient; that the demonstration of US determination and the potential risks and costs to the North implicit in the early air strikes would provide the US with substantial bargaining leverage; and that it would redress the "equation of advantage" so that a political settlement might be negotiated on acceptable terms.

Once set in motion, however, the bombing effort seemed to stiffen rather than soften Hanoi's backbone, as well as to lessen the willingness of Hanoi's allies, particularly the Soviet Union, to work toward compromise. Moreover, compromise was ruled out in any event, since the negotiating terms that the US proposed were not "compromise" terms, but more akin to a "cease and desist" order that, from the DRV/VC point of view, was tantamount to a demand for their surrender.

As Hanoi remained intractable in the face of a mere token demonstration of U.S. capability and resolve, U.S. policy shifted to a more deliberate combination of intensified military pressures and modest diplomatic enticements. The carrot was added to the stick in the form of an economic development gesture, but the coercive element remained by far the more tangible and visible component of U.S. policy. To the slowly but relentlessly rising air pressures against the North was added the deployment of US combat forces to the South. In response to public pressures, a major diplomatic opportunity was provided Hanoi for a quiet backdown through a brief bombing pause called in mid-May, but the pause seemed to be aimed more at clearing the decks for a subsequent intensified resumption than it was at evoking a reciprocal act of de-escalation by Hanoi. The U.S. initiative, in any event, was unmistakably rebuffed by North Vietnam and by its Communist allies, and the opposing positions were more hopelessly deadlocked than ever before.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

It is the purpose of this study to reconstruct the immediate circumstances that led up to the U.S. reprisal decision of February 1965, to retrace the changes in rationale that progressively transformed the reprisal concept into a sustained graduated bombing effort, and to chronicle the relationship between that effort and the military-political moves to shore up Saigon and the military-diplomatic signals to dissuade Hanoi, during the crucial early months of February through May of 1965.

* * * * *

Background to Pleiku. The growing realization, throughout 1964, that the final consolidation of VC power in South Vietnam was a distinct possibility, had led to a protracted US policy reassessment and a determined search for forceful military alternatives in the North that might help salvage the deteriorating situation in the South. The proposed program of graduated military pressures against North Vietnam that emerged from this reassessment in late 1964 had three major objectives: (1) to signal to the Communist enemy the firmness of U.S. resolve, (2) to boost the sagging morale of the GVN in the South, and (3) to impose increased costs and strains upon the DRV in the North. Underlying the rationale of the program was the hope that it might restore some equilibrium to the balance of forces, hopefully increasing the moment of US/GVN bargaining leverage sufficiently to permit an approach to a negotiated solution on something other than surrender terms.

Throughout the planning process, (and even after the initiation of the program) the President's principal advisors differed widely in their views as to the intensity of the bombing effort that would be desirable or required, and as to its likely effectiveness in influencing Hanoi's will to continue its aggression. The JCS, for example, consistently argued that only a most dramatic and forceful application of military power would exert significant pressure on North Vietnam, but firmly believed that such application could and would affect the enemy's will. Most civilian officials in State, OSD, and the White House, on the other hand, tended to favor a more gradual, restrained approach, "progressively mounting in scope and intensity," in which the prospect of greater pressure to come was at least as important as any damage actually inflicted. But these officials also tended, for the most part, to have much less confidence that such pressures would have much impact on Hanoi's course, making such equivocal assessments as: "on balance we believe that such action would have some faint hope of really improving the Vietnamese situation."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Reprisal Planning. In spite of these rather hesitant judgments, the graduated approach was adopted and a program of relatively mild military actions aimed at North Vietnam was set in motion beginning in December 1964. At the same time, detailed preparations were made to carry out bombing strikes against targets in North Vietnam in reprisal for any future attacks on U.S. forces. These preparations were made chiefly in connection with the occasional DESOTO Patrols that the US Navy conducted in the Gulf of Tonkin which had been fired upon or menaced by North Vietnamese torpedo boats on several previous occasions during 1964. In order to be prepared for an attack on any future patrol, a pre-packaged set of reprisal targets was worked up by CINCPAC on instructions from the JCS, and pre-assigned forces were maintained in a high state of readiness to strike these targets in accordance with a detailed strike plan that provided a range of retaliatory options.

In late January, a DESOTO Patrol was authorized to begin on Feb. 3 (later postponed to Feb. 7) and Operation Order FLAMING DART was issued by CINCPAC, providing for a number of alternative US air strike reprisal actions in the eventuality that the DESOTO Patrol were to be attacked or that any other provocation were to occur, such as a spectacular VC incident in South Vietnam. At the last moment, however, the Patrol was called off in deference to Soviet Premier Kosygin's imminent visit to Hanoi. U.S. officials hoped that the USSR might find it in its interest to act as an agent of moderation vis a vis Hanoi in the Vietnam conflict, and wished to avoid any act that might be interpreted as deliberately provocative. Nevertheless, it was precisely at the beginning of the Kosygin visit, during the early morning hours of February 7, the the VC launched their spectacular attack on US installations at Pleiku, thus triggering FLAMING DART I, the first of the new carefully programmed US/GVN reprisal strikes.

Imperceptible Transition. By contrast with the earlier Tonkin strikes of August, 1964 which had been presented as a one-time demonstration that North Vietnam could not flagrantly attack US forces with impunity, the February 1965 raids were explicitly linked with the "larger pattern of aggression" by North Vietnam, and were a reprisal against North Vietnam for an offense committed by the VC in South Vietnam. When the VC staged another dramatic attack on Qui Nhon on Feb. 10, the combined US/GVN response, named FLAMING DART II, was not characterized as an event-associated reprisal but as a generalized response to "continued acts of aggression." The new terminology reflected a conscious U.S. decision to broaden the reprisal concept as gradually and imperceptibly as possible to accommodate a much wider policy of sustained, steadily intensifying air attacks against North Vietnam, at a rate and on a scale to be determined by the U.S. Although discussed publicly in very muted

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

tones, the second FLAMING DART operation constituted a sharp break with past US policy and set the stage for the continuing bombing program that was now to be launched in earnest.

Differences in Advocacy. While all but one or two of the President's principal Vietnam advisors favored the initiation of a sustained bombing program, there were significant differences among them. McGeorge Bundy and Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, for example, both advocated a measured, controlled sequence of raids, carried out jointly with the GVN and directed solely against DRV military targets and infiltration routes. In their view, the intensity of the attacks was to be varied with the level of VC outrages in SVN or might be progressively raised. But whereas McGeorge Bundy's objective was to influence the course of the struggle in the South (boosting GVN morale, improving US bargaining power with the GVN, exerting a depressing effect on VC cadre), Ambassador Taylor's principal aim was "to bring increasing pressure on the DRV to cease its intervention." It was coercion of the North, rather than a rededication of the GVN to the struggle in the South that Taylor regarded as the real benefit of a reprisal policy. CINCPAC, on the other hand, insisted that the program would have to be a very forceful one -- a "graduated pressures" rather than a "graduated reprisal" philosophy -- if the DRV were to be persuaded to accede to a cessation on U.S. terms. The Joint Chiefs, in turn, (and especially Air Force Chief of Staff General McConnell) believed that the much heavier air strike recommendations repeatedly made by the JCS during the preceding six months were more appropriate than the mild actions proposed by Taylor and Bundy.

Initiating ROLLING THUNDER. A firm decision to adopt "a program of measured and limited air action jointly with the GVN against selected military targets in the DRV" was made by the President on February 13, and communicated to Ambassador Taylor in Saigon. Details of the program were deliberately left vague, as the President wished to preserve maximum flexibility. The first strike was set for February 20 and Taylor was directed to obtain GVN concurrence. A semi-coup in Saigon, however, compelled postponement and cancellation of this and several subsequent strikes. Political clearance was not given until the turbulence was calmed with the departure of General Nguyen Khanh from Vietnam on Feb 25. U.S. reluctance to launch air attacks during this time was further reinforced by a UK-USSR diplomatic initiative to reactivate the Cochairmanship of the 1954 Geneva Conference with a view to involving the members of that conference in a consideration of the Vietnam crisis. Air strikes executed at that moment, it was feared, might sabotage that diplomatic gambit, which Washington looked upon not as a potential negotiating opportunity, but as a convenient vehicle for public expression of a tough U.S.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

position. The Co-Chairmen gambit, however, languished -- and eventually came to naught. The first ROLLING THUNDER strike was finally rescheduled for Feb 26. This time adverse weather forced its cancellation and it was not until March 2 that the first of the new program strikes, dubbed ROLLING THUNDER V, was actually carried out.

In the closing days of February and during early March, the Administration undertook publicly and privately to defend and propound its rationale for the air strikes, stressing its determination to stand by the GVN, but reaffirming the limited nature of its objectives toward North Vietnam. Secretary Rusk conducted a marathon public information campaign to signal a seemingly reasonable but in fact quite tough US position on negotiations, demanding that Hanoi "stop doing what it is doing against its neighbors" before any negotiations could prove fruitful. Rusk's disinterest in negotiations at this time was in concert with the view of virtually all the President's key advisors, that the path to peace was not then open. Hanoi held sway over more than half of South Vietnam and could see the Saigon Government crumbling before her very eyes. The balance of power at this time simply did not furnish the U.S. with a basis for bargaining and Hanoi had no reason to accede to the hard terms the U.S. had in mind. Until military pressures on North Vietnam could tilt the balance of forces the other way, talk of negotiation could be little more than a hollow exercise.

Evolving a Continuing Program. Immediately after the launching of the first ROLLING THUNDER strike, efforts were set in motion to increase the effectiveness, forcefulness and regularity of the program. US aircraft loss rates came under McNamara's scrutiny, with the result that many restrictions on the use of U.S. aircraft and special ordnance were lifted, and the air strike technology improved. Sharp annoyance was expressed by Ambassador Taylor over what he considered an unnecessarily timid and ambivalent US stance regarding the frequency and weight of U.S. air attacks. He called for a more dynamic schedule of strikes, a several week program, relentlessly marching North, to break the will of the DRV. Army Chief of Staff General Johnson, returning from a Presidential survey mission to Vietnam in mid-March, supported Taylor's view and recommended increasing the scope and tempo of the air strikes as well as their effectiveness. The President accepted these recommendations and, beginning with ROLLING THUNDER VII (March 19), air action against the North was transformed from a sporadic, halting effort into a regular and determined program.

Shift to Interdiction. In the initial U.S. reprisal strikes and the first ROLLING THUNDER actions, target selection had been completely dominated by political and psychological considerations. With the gradual acceptance, beginning in March, of the need for a militarily more significant sustained bombing program, a refocusing

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of target emphasis occurred, stressing interdiction of the DRV's lines of communication (LOC's) -- the visible manifestations of North Vietnamese aggression. The JCS had called the SecDef's attention to this infiltration target complex as early as mid-February, and an integrated counter-infiltration attack plan against LOC targets south of the 20th parallel began to be developed by CINCPAC, culminating at the end of March in the submission of the JCS 12-week bombing program. This program was built around the "LOC-cut" concept developed by the Pacific Command and was strongly endorsed by General Westmoreland and Ambassador Taylor. The JCS recommended that only the first phase (third through fifth weeks) of the 12-week program be adopted, as they had not reached agreement on the later phases. The JCS submission, however, was not accepted as a program, although it strongly influenced the new interdiction-oriented focus of the attacks that were to follow. But neither the SecDef nor the President was willing to approve a multi-week program in advance. They preferred to retain continual personal control over attack concepts and individual target selection and to communicate their decisions through weekly guidance provided by the SecDef's ROLLING THUNDER planning messages.

April 1 Reassessment. By the end of March, in Saigon's view, the situation in South Vietnam appeared to have rebounded somewhat. Morale seemed to have been boosted, at least temporarily, by the air strikes, and Vietnamese forces had not recently suffered any major defeats. Washington, on the other hand, continued to regard the situation as "bad and deteriorating," and could see no signs of "give" on the part of Hanoi. None of the several diplomatic initiatives that had been launched looked promising, and VC terrorism continued unabated, with the March 29 bombing of the US embassy in Saigon being by far the boldest provocation.

Ambassador Taylor returned to Washington to participate in a Presidential policy review on April 1 and 2, in which a wide range of possible military and non-military actions in South and North Vietnam were examined. The discussions, however, did not deal principally with the air war, but focused mainly on the prospect of major deployments of US and Third Country combat forces to South Vietnam. As a result of the discussions, the far-reaching decision was made, at least conceptually, to permit US troops to engage in offensive ground operations against Asian insurgents. With respect to future air pressures policy, the actions adopted amounted to little more than a continuation of "roughly the present slowly ascending tempo of ROLLING THUNDER operations," directed mainly at the LOC targets that were then beginning to be struck. The Director of Central Intelligence John McCone demurred, arguing that a change in the US ground force role in the South also demanded comparably more forceful action against the North. He felt that the ground force decision was correct only "if our air strikes against the North are sufficiently heavy and damaging really to hurt the North Vietnamese."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

A "Carrot" at Johns Hopkins. Although devoting much effort to public explanation and private persuasion, the President could not quiet his critics. Condemnation of the bombing spread and the President was being pressed from many directions to make a major public statement welcoming negotiations. He found an opportunity to dramatize his peaceful intent in his renowned Johns Hopkins address of April 7, in which he (1) accepted the spirit of the 17-nation Appeal of March 15 to start negotiations "without posing any preconditions," (2) offered the vision of a "billion dollar American investment" in a regional Mekong River basin development effort in which North Vietnam might also participate, and (3) appointed the illustrious Eugene Black to head up the effort and to lend it credibility and prestige. The President's speech evoked much favorable public reaction throughout the world, but it failed to silence the Peace Bloc and it failed to move Hanoi. Premier Pham Van Dong responded to the President's speech by proposing his famous Four Points as the only correct way to resolve the Vietnam problem and, two days later, denounced the President's proposal as simply a "carrot" offered to offset the "stick" of aggression and to allay public criticism of his Vietnam policy. But this is as far as the President was willing to go in his concessions to the Peace Bloc. To the clamor for a bombing pause at this time, the Administration responded with a resounding "No."

Consensus at Honolulu. By mid-April, communication between Washington and Saigon had become badly strained as a result of Ambassador Taylor's resentment of what he regarded as Washington's excessive eagerness to introduce US combat forces into South Vietnam, far beyond anything that had been approved in the April 1-2 review. To iron out differences, a conference was convened by Secretary McNamara at Honolulu on April 20. Its main concern was to reach specific agreement on troop deployments, but it also sought to reaffirm the existing scope and tempo of ROLLING THUNDER. The conferees agreed that sufficient pressure was provided by repetition and continuation of the strikes, and that it was important not to "kill the hostage" by destroying the valuable assets inside the "Hanoi do-not." Their strategy for victory was "to break the will of the DRV/VC by denying them victory." Honolulu apparently succeeded in restoring consensus between Washington and Saigon. It also marked the relative downgrading of pressures against the North, in favor of more intensive activity in the South. The decision, at this point, was to "plateau" the air strikes more or less at the prevailing level, rather than to pursue the relentless dynamic course ardently advocated by Ambassador Taylor and Admiral Sharp in February and March, or the massive destruction of the North Vietnamese target complex consistently pressed by the Joint Chiefs.

Following Honolulu, it was decided to publicize the fact that "interdiction" was now the major objective of the bombing, and Secretary McNamara devoted a special Pentagon briefing for the press corps to that issue.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

First Bombing Pause. Pressure for some form of bombing halt had mounted steadily throughout April and early May and, although the President did not believe that such a gesture would evoke any response from Hanoi he did order a brief halt effective May 13, "to begin" as he expressed it "to clear a path either toward restoration of peace or toward increased military action, depending on the reaction of the Communists." The political purpose of the pause -- to test Hanoi's reaction -- was kept under very tight wraps, and the project was given the code name MAYFLOWER. A great effort was made to inform Hanoi of the fact of the pause and of its political intent. Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin was given an oral explanation by Secretary Rusk, confirmed by a tough written statement, reasserting Rusk's public position that the cessation of the DRV's attacks upon South Vietnam was the only road to peace and that the US would be watchful, during the pause, for any signs of a reduction in such attacks. A similar statement was sent to U.S. Ambassador Kohler in Moscow, for personal transmittal to the DRV Ambassador there. Kohler, however, met with refusal both from the DRV Ambassador to receive, and from the Soviet Foreign Office to transmit, the message. A written note, sent to the DRV embassy, was returned ostensibly unopened. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that Hanoi was more than adequately advised of the contents of the U.S. message through the various diplomatic channels that were involved.

Given the "rather strenuous nature" of the U.S. note to Hanoi and the briefness of the pause, it is hardly surprising that the initiative encountered no receptivity from the Soviet government and evoked no positive response from Hanoi. The latter denounced the bombing halt as "a worn out trick of deceit and threat ..." and the former, in the person of Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko in a conversation with Rusk in Vienna, branded the U.S. note to Hanoi as "insulting".

Having thus been unmistakably rebuffed, the President ordered the resumption of the bombing raids effective May 18. The entire pause was handled with a minimum of public information, and no announcement was made of the suspension or of the resumption. But prime ministers or chiefs of state of a half dozen key friendly governments were briefed fully after the event. A still somewhat ambiguous diplomatic move was made by Hanoi in Paris on May 18, a few hours after the bombing had been resumed, in which Mai Van Bo, the DRV economic delegate there seemed to imply a significant softening of Hanoi's position on the Four Points as "prior conditions." But subsequent attempts at clarification left that issue as ambiguous as it had been before.

CHRONOLOGY

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

IV. C.

A: CHRONOLOGY OF ROLLING THUNDER MISSIONS
FEBRUARY - JUNE, 1965

CHRONOLOGY

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
6 Jan 1965	William Bundy Memorandum for Rusk	Taking note of the continued political deterioration in SVN, Bundy concludes that, even though it will get worse, the US should probably proceed with Phase II of the December pressures plan, the escalating air strikes against the North.
8 Jan 1965	2,000 Korean troops arrive in SVN	South Korea sends 2,000 military advisors to SVN, the first such non-US support.
27 Jan 1965	Huong Government ousted	General Khanh ousts the civilian government headed by Huong and assumes powers of government himself.
	McNaughton Memorandum for Secretary of Defense	McNaughton is as pessimistic as William Bundy about prospects in the South. He feels the US should evacuate dependents and respond promptly at the next reprisal opportunity. McNamara's pencilled notes reveal more optimism about the results of air strikes than McNaughton.
28 Jan 1965	JCS message 4244 to CINCPAC	A resumption of the DESOTO Patrols on or about 3 February is authorized.
29 Jan 1965	JCSM-70-65	The JCS urge again that a strong reprisal action be taken immediately after the next DRV/VC provocation. In particular, they propose targets and readiness to strike should the forthcoming resumption of the DESOTO Patrols be challenged.
4 Feb 1965	CJCS message 4612 to CINCPAC	In view of Kosygin's impending visit to Hanoi, authority for the DESOTO Patrol is cancelled.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
4 Feb 1965 (Continued)	SNIE 53-65 "Short Term Prospects in South Vietnam"	The intelligence community does not see the conditions of political instability in SVN improving in the months ahead. The political base for counterinsurgency will remain weak.
6 Feb 1965	Kosygin arrives in Hanoi	Soviet Premier Kosygin arrives in Hanoi for a state visit that will deepen Soviet commitment to the DRV, and expand Soviet economic and military assistance.
7 Feb 1965	VC attack US base at Pleiku	Well-coordinated VC attacks hit the US advisors' barracks at Pleiku and the helicopter base at Camp Holloway.
	President decides to retaliate	The NSC is convened in the evening (6 Feb. Washington time) and with the recommendation of McGeorge Bundy, Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland from Saigon, decides on a reprisal strike against the North in spite of Kosygin's presence in Hanoi.
	McGeorge Bundy Memorandum to the President: "The Situation in South Vietnam"	Completing a fact-gathering trip to SVN on the very day of the Pleiku attack, Bundy acknowledges the bad state of the GVN both politically and militarily, but nevertheless recommends that the US adopt a policy of "sustained reprisal" against the North and that we evacuate US dependents from Saigon. The reprisal policy should begin from specific VC attacks but gradually escalate into sustained attacks as a form of pressure on the DRV to end its support of the VC and/or come to terms with the US.
8 Feb 1965	FLAMING DART I	49 US Navy jets conduct the first FLAMING DART reprisal-attack on the Dong Hoi army barracks; a scheduled VNAF attack is cancelled because of bad weather.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
9 Feb 1965	VNAF strikes North	The previously aborted VNAF strike is carried out against the Vu Con Barracks with US aircraft flying cover.
	Embassy Saigon message 2445	Taylor cables his support of the McGeorge Bundy proposal but lays his stress on the sustained air campaign as a means of pressuring the DRV to "cease its intervention," rather than as a means of strengthening the allied position in the South.
10 Feb 1965	VC attack US billet in Qui Nhon	In an act of defiance, the VC bomb a US enlisted men's billet in Qui Nhon, killing 23 Americans.
11 Feb 1965	FLAMING DART II	Within 24 hours of the VC attack, the US retaliates in an air attack on the Chap Le and Chanh Hoa Army Barracks. The attack is not linked specifically by the White House to Qui Nhon but to a list of VC incidents.
	Embassy Saigon message 2495	Taylor outlines tough terms for any end to the bombing. The DRV must cease its intervention, the VC end the insurgency, both return to the 1954 and 1962 accords.
	JCSM-100-65	Responding to a McNamara request and within his limitations, the JCS recommend an 8-week air campaign against the North confined mostly to panhandle targets and with targets to be attacked in the order of ascending risk. General McConnell did not feel the proposal was adequate. To carry out the program, additional deployments are requested.
12 Feb 1965	Embassy Saigon message 2536	Taylor further spells out his "graduated reprisal" concept, giving as its objectives in the order of their importance: (1) to affect the will of Hanoi; (2) to bolster GVN morale; and (3) to physically damage the DRV and thereby reduce its ability to support the VC.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
13 Feb 1965	B-52s sent to area	Approval is given for the dispatch of 30 B-52s to Guam and 30 KC-135s to Okinawa for contingency use in Vietnam.
	ROLLING THUNDER approved by President; DEPTEL to Saigon 1718	The President decides to inaugurate ROLLING THUNDER sustained bombing of the North under strict limitations with programs approved on a week-by-week basis.
17 Feb 1965	CINCPAC message 170217 February to JCS	Admiral Sharp urges that the strikes be conceived as "pressures" not "reprisals" and that any premature discussions or negotiations with the DRV be avoided. We must convince them that the cost of their aggression is prohibitive.
	UK reports Soviet interest in Geneva Talks	The UK Ambassador, Lord Harlech, informs Rusk that the Soviets have approached the UK about reactivating the 1954 Geneva Conference in the current Vietnam crisis. After an initial US interest, the Soviets back off and the matter dies.
18 Feb 1965	President schedules ROLLING THUNDER	President Johnson sets February 20 as the date for the beginning of ROLLING THUNDER and informs US Ambassadors in Asia.
	SNIE 10-3/1-65	The intelligence community gives its view that sustained attacks on the DRV would probably cause it to seek a respite rather than to intensify the struggle in the South.
19 Feb 1965	Thao "semi-coup"	Colonel Thao, a longtime conspirator, launches a "semi-coup" against Khanh, designed to remove him but not the Armed Forces Council. He is quickly defeated but the AFC decides to use the incident to remove Khanh itself. The events drag on for several days.
	Embassy Saigon message 2665	Taylor recommends urgently that the ROLLING THUNDER strike be cancelled until the political situation in Saigon has clarified. The President agrees.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
19 Feb 1965 (Continued)	CM-438-65	In a memo to McNamara, Wheeler proposes a systematic attack on the DRV rail system as the most vulnerable link in the transportation system. Military as opposed to psychological value of targets is already beginning to enter discussions.
21 Feb 1965	Khanh resigns	Unable to rally support in the Armed Forces Council, Khanh resigns.
24 Feb 1965	U.S. reassures Peking	In a meeting in Warsaw the Chinese are informed that while the U.S. will continue to take those actions required to defend itself and South Vietnam, it has no aggressive intentions toward the DRV.
27 Feb 1965	State Dept. issues "White Paper" on DRV aggression	The State Department issues a "White Paper" detailing its charges of aggression against North Vietnam.
28 Feb 1965	ROLLING THUNDER announced	U.S. and GVN make simultaneous announcement of decision to open a continuous limited air campaign against the North in order to bring about a negotiated settlement on favorable terms.
2 Mar 1965	First ROLLING THUNDER strike	104 USAF planes attack Xom Bang ammo depot and 19 VNAF aircraft hit the Quang Khe Naval Base in the first attacks of ROLLING THUNDER.
	President decides to send CSA, H.K. Johnson, to Vietnam	The President decides to send Army Chief of Staff, Gen. H.K. Johnson, to Saigon to explore with Taylor and Westmoreland what additional efforts can be made to improve the situation in the South, complementarily to the strikes against the North.
3 Mar 1965	Tito letter to Johnson	Yugoslav President Tito, in a letter to Johnson, urges immediate negotiation on Vietnam without conditions on either side.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
5-12 Mar 1965	Gen. Johnson trip to Vietnam	Army Chief of Staff, Gen. H.K. Johnson, tours Vietnam on a mission for the President.
6 Mar 1965	Marines sent to DaNang	Two Marine Battalion Landing Teams are ordered to Da Nang by the President to take up base security functions in the Da Nang perimeter.
8 Mar 1965	Marines land at Da Nang	The two Marine battalions land at Da Nang and set up defensive positions.
	Embassy Saigon msgs. 2888, and 2889	Taylor expresses sharp annoyance at what seemsto him an unnecessarily timid and ambivalent U.S. stance on air strikes. The long delay between strikes, the marginal weight of the attacks, and the great ado about diplomatic feelers were weakening our signal to the North. He calls for a more dynamic schedule of strikes, amultiple week program relentlessly marching North to break Hanoi's will.
	U Thant proposes big power conference	U Thant proposes a conference of the big powers with North and South Vietnam to start preliminary negotiations.
9 Mar 1965	U.S. rejects Thant proposal	The U.S. rejects Thant's proposal until the DRV stops its aggression.
	Some bombing restrictions lifted	The President lifts the restriction on the use of napalm in strikes on the North, and eliminates the requirement for Vietnamese co-pilots in FARMGATE missions.
10 Mar 1965	CJCS memo to SecDef CM-469-65	In a memo to SecDef with preliminary reports on U.S. aircraft losses in hostile action, Wheeler requests better ordnance, more recce, and greater field command flexibility in alternate target selection for weather problems.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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12 Mar 1965	State msg. 1975 to Saigon	ROLLING THUNDER VI is authorized for the next day; it is subsequently delayed until the 14th because of weather.
	President replies to Tito	In his reply to Tito the President indicates the only bar to peace is DRV aggression which must stop before talks can begin.
13 Mar 1965	Embassy Saigon msg. 2949	Taylor complains about the postponement of RT VI, stating that too much attention is being paid to the specific target, any target will do since the important thing is to keep up the momentum of the attacks.
13-18 Mar 1965	Conference of non-aligned nations in Belgrade	Tito calls a meeting of 15 non-aligned nations in Belgrade. The declaration calls for negotiations and blames "foreign intervention" for the aggravation of the situation.
14-15 Mar 1965	ROLLING THUNDER VI	The delayed RT VI is carried out and is the heaviest attack thus far with over 100 U.S. aircraft and 24 VNAF planes hitting two targets.
14 Mar 1965	Gen. Johnson submits his report to SecDef	Gen. Johnson submits a 21-recommendation report including a request that the scope and tempo of strikes against the North be increased and that many of the restrictions on the strikes be lifted.
15 Mar 1965	President approves most of Johnson report	Having reviewed the Johnson report, the President approves most of his recommendations including those for expanding and regularizing the campaign against the North. The new guidelines apply to RT VII on 19 Mar.
19 Mar 1965	ROLLING THUNDER VII	The first week's program of sustained bombing under the name ROLLING THUNDER VII begins.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
20 Mar 1965	STEEL TIGER Begins	Acting on a CINCPAC recommendation the Administration had approved the separation of the anti-infiltration bombing in the Laotian panhandle from the BARRELL ROLL strikes in support of Laotian forces. The former are now called STEEL TIGER.
21 Mar 1965	CINCPAC msg. to JCS 210525 Mar.	In a long cable, CINCPAC proposes a program for cutting, in depth, the DRV logistical network, especially below the 20th parallel. The plan calls for initial intensive strikes to cut the system and then regular armed recce to eliminate any residual capacity, or repair efforts.
24 Mar 1965	McNaughton memo "Plan of Action for South Vietnam"	McNaughton concludes that the situation in SVN probably cannot be improved without extreme measures against the DRV and/or the intervention of US ground forces. He gives a thorough treatment to the alternatives and risks with particular attention to the strong air campaign on the North. He takes note of the various escalation points and tries to assess the risks at each level. He evaluates the introduction of US troops and a negotiations alternative in the same manner.
27 Mar 1965	JCSM-221-65	The JCS formally propose to SecDef a plan already discussed with him for an escalating 12-week air campaign against the North with a primarily military-physical destruction orientation. Interdiction is the objective rather than will-breaking.
29 Mar 1965	VC bomb US Embassy	In a daring bomb attack on the US Embassy, the VC kill many Americans and Vietnamese and cause extensive damage. Taylor leaves almost simultaneously for talks in Washington.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
31 Mar 1965	CINCPAC msg. to JCS 310407 Mar.	CINCPAC recommends a spectacular attack against the North to retaliate for the bombing of the Embassy. The President rejects the idea.
	NSC meeting with Taylor	The President meets with Taylor and the NSC to begin a major policy review.
1 Apr 1965	McGeorge Bundy memo	Bundy recommends little more than a continuation of the ongoing modest RT program, gradually hitting the LOC choke points. He does, however, recommend removing the restriction on the Marines to static defense. Focus is on winning in SVN.
	NSC meeting	The White House policy review continued with another meeting of the principals.
	Rostow memo to SecState	In a memo to Rusk, Walt Rostow proposes knocking out the DRV electric power grid as a means of bringing her whole urban industrial sector to a halt.
2 Apr 1965	NSC meeting	At the NSC meeting the President approves the Bundy recommendations including the proposal to allow US troops in Vietnam a combat role.
	McCone dissents from Presidential decision	CIA director McCone circulates a memo dissenting from the Presidential decision to have US troops take part in active combat. He feels that such action is not justified and wise unless the air attacks on the North are increased sufficiently to really be physically damaging to the DRV and to put real pressure on her.
	Canadian Prime Minister suggests pause	Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson in a speech in Philadelphia suggests that the US call a halt to the bombing in the interests of getting negotiations started.
5 Apr 1965	JCSM-265-65	The JCS report confirmation of the construction of a SAM missile site near Hanoi and request authority to strike it before it becomes operational. Their request is not acted on at the time.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
6 Apr 1965	NSAM 328	The Presidential decisions of April 2 are promulgated using the verbatim language of the Bundy memo.
7 Apr 1965	President's Johns Hopkins Speech	In a major speech at Johns Hopkins University, the President outlines his hope for a peaceful, negotiated settlement in Vietnam. He names Eugene Black as the US negotiator and offers to assist both North and South Vietnam on a regional basis to the tune of \$1 billion in the post-war reconstruction and economic development of SEA.
8 Apr 1965	Pham van Dong's "Four Points"	Rejecting to the President's initiative, the DRV Foreign Minister, Pham van Dong announces his famous "Four Points" for the settlement of the war. Each side sees settlement in the capitulation of the other. Peking denounces the President's speech also.
17 Apr 1965	Presidential press conference	In a press conference the President acknowledges the failure of his most recent peace overtures.
	Rusk press conference	Secretary Rusk rejects suggestions from Canada and others to suspend the bombing in order to get peace talks started. He reiterates the President's view that Hanoi does not want peace.
18 Apr 1965	Taylor opposes the ground build-up	Having been bombarded with cables from Washington about a build-up in ground forces to carry out NSAM 328, Taylor reacts opposing the idea in a cable to McGeorge Bundy.
19 Apr 1965	Hanoi rejects 17-nation appeal	Hanoi rejects the proposal of the 17 non-aligned nations for a peace conference without pre-conditions by either side.
20 Apr 1965	Honolulu Conference	Secretary McNamara meets with Taylor, Westmoreland, Sharp, Wm. Bundy, and McNaughton in Honolulu to review the implementation and interpretation of NSAM.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		328. A plateau on air strikes, more effort in the South, and the specifics of force deployments are agreed to.
21 Apr 1965	SecDef memo to the President	Secretary McNamara reports the results of the Honolulu Conference to the President and indicates that harmony has been restored among the views of the various advisors.
22 Apr 1965	Intelligence assessment TS #185843-c	The intelligence community indicates that without either a massive increase in the air campaign or the introduction of US combat troops, the DRV would stick to its goal of military victory.
23 Apr 1965	Rusk Speech	In a speech before the American Society of International Law, Rusk makes first public mention of interdiction and punishment as the purposes of the US bombing rather than breaking Hanoi's will.
24 Apr 1965	U Thant calls for pause	U Thant asks the US to suspend the bombing for three months in an effort to get negotiations. The proposal is rejected in Washington.
25 Apr 1965	McGeorge Bundy memo	In an effort to clarify internal government thinking about negotiations, Bundy outlines his view of US goals. His exposition is a maximum US position whose acceptance would amount to surrender by the other side.
26 Apr 1965	McNamara press briefing	In a special briefing for the press complete with maps and charts, McNamara goes into considerable depth in explaining the interdiction purposes of the US strikes against the North.
28 Apr 1965	McCone resigns and submits last memo	McCone who is leaving his post as CIA Director (to be replaced by Admiral Raborn) submits a last memo to the President opposing the build-up of ground forces in the absence of a greatly intensified campaign against the North.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
4 May 1965	President denies DRV willingness to negotiate	In a speech at the White House, the President indicates that the DRV has turned back all peace initiatives, either from the US or from neutral parties.
	Embassy Saigon msg. 3632	Taylor confirms the President's view about the DRV by noting that in Hanoi's estimates they are still expecting to achieve a clear-cut victory and see no reason to negotiate.
6 May 1965	CIA Director Raborn assessment	Commenting, at the President's request, on McCone's parting memo on Vietnam, Raborn agrees with the assessment that the bombing had thus far not hurt the North and that much more would be needed to force them to the negotiating table. He suggests a pause to test DRV intentions and gain support of world opinion before beginning the intensive air campaign that he believes will be required.
	CM-600-65	The Chairman of the JCS recommends to the Secretary that the SAM sites already identified be attacked.
10 May 1965	State Department msg. 2553	The President informs Taylor of his intention to call a temporary halt to the bombing and asks Taylor to get PM Quat's concurrence. The purpose of the pause is to gain flexibility either to negotiate if the DRV shows interest, or to intensify the air strikes if they do not. He does not intend to announce the pause but rather to communicate it privately to Moscow and Hanoi and await a reply.
11 May 1965	Embassy Saigon msg. 3731	Taylor reports Quat's agreement but preference not to have the pause linked to Buddha's birthday.
	State Department msg. 2557	State confirms the decision, agrees to avoid reference to the Buddhist holiday, and indicates that the pause will begin on May 13 and last for 5-7 days.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
	Department of State msg. 3101	Kohler in Moscow is instructed to contact the DRV Ambassador urgently and convey a message announcing the pause. Simultaneously, Rusk was transmitting the message to the Soviet Ambassador in Washington.
12 May 1965	Embassy Moscow msg. 3391	In Moscow, the DRV Ambassador refuses to see Kohler or receive the message. A subsequent attempt to transmit the message through the Soviet Foreign Office also fails when the Soviets decline their assistance.
13 May 1965	Presidential speech	The President avoids reference to the pause in a major public speech, but does call on Hanoi to consider a "political solution" of the war.
14 May 1965	Embassy Moscow msg. 3425	Kohler suggests that the language of the message be softened before it is transmitted to Hanoi via the British Consul in the DRV capital.
	British Consul-Hanoi transmits the pause msg.	Having rejected Kohler's suggestion, State has the British Consul in Hanoi transmit the message. The DRV refuses to accept it.
	MACV msg. 16006	Westmoreland, with Taylor's concurrence, recommends the use of B-52s for patterned saturation bombing of VC headquarters and other area targets in South Vietnam.
15 May 1965	Rusk-Gromyko meet in Vienna	In a meeting between the two men in Vienna, Gromyko informs Rusk that the Soviet Union will give firm and full support to the DRV as a "fraternal socialist state."
16 May 1965	Embassy Saigon msg. 3781	Taylor suggests that the DRV's cold response to our initiative warrants a resumption of the bombing. The level should be linked directly to the intensity of VC activity in the South during the pause.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
	President decides to resume bombing	The President decides that Hanoi's response can be regarded as negative and orders the bombing to resume on May 18.
17 May 1965	Allies informed of impending resumption	US Asian and European allies are forewarned of the impending resumption of bombing. In a separate msg. the President authorizes the radar recce by B-52s of potential SEA targets.
18 May 1965	Bombing resumes	After five days of "pause" the bombing resumes in the North.
	Hanoi denounces the pause	On the evening of the resumption, the DRV Foreign Ministry issues a statement describing the pause as a "deceitful maneuver" to pave the way for further US acts of war.
	Hanoi's Paris demarche	Somewhat belatedly the DRV representative in Paris, Mai Van Bo discusses the "four points" with the Quai somewhat softening their interpretation and indicating that they are not necessarily preliminary conditions to negotiations.
20 May 1965	Rostow memo "Victory and Defeat in Guerilla Wars"	In a memo for the Secretary of State Rostow argues that a clear-cut US victory in SVN is possible. It requires mainly more pressure on the North and effective conduct of the battle in the South.
21 May 1965	Peking denounces the pause	Declaring its support for the DRV, Peking denounces the President's bombing pause as a fraud.
2 Jun 1965	SNIE 10-6-65	The intelligence community gives a pessimistic analysis of the likelihood that Hanoi will seek a respite from the bombing through negotiation.
3 Jun 1965	ICC Commissioner Seaborn sees Pham Van Dong	In a meeting in Hanoi with DRV Foreign Minister Pham Van Dong, ICC Commissioner Seaborn (Canada) confirms Hanoi's rejection of current US peace initiatives.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
12 Jun 1965	SVN Premier Quat resigns	SVN Premier Quat hands his resignation to the Armed Forces Council.
15 Jun 1965	SecDef memo to JCS	McNamara disapproves the JCS recommendation for air strikes against the SAM sites and IL 28s at DRV air bases since these might directly challenge the Soviet Union.
24 Jun 1965	Ky assumes power	Brig. Gen. Nguyen Cao Ky assumes power and decrees new measures to strengthen GVN prosecution of the war.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

A CHRONOLOGY OF ROLLING THUNDER MISSIONS

FEBRUARY - JUNE, 1965 *

ROLLING THUNDER 1 was scheduled on 20 February 1965 as a one-day reprisal strike by U.S. and VNAF forces, against Quang Khe Naval Base and Vu Con Barracks. Two barracks and an airfield were authorized as weather alternates. ROLLING THUNDER 1 was cancelled because of a coup in Saigon and diplomatic moves between London and Moscow. ROLLING THUNDER 2, 3, and 4 were planned as reprisal actions, but subsequently cancelled because of continued political instability in Saigon, during which VNAF forces were on "coup alert." Joint participation with VNAF was desired for political reasons.

The first actual ROLLING THUNDER strike was ROLLING THUNDER 5, a one-day, no recycle strike on 2 March 1965. Targets were one ammo depot and one naval base as primary U.S. and VNAF targets. Four barracks were authorized as weather alternates. VNAF participation was mandatory. The approved effort for the week was substantially below the level recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

ROLLING THUNDER 6 (14-15 March) was a far more forceful one-day fixed-target program representing a week's weight of attack. Napalm was authorized for the first time, but aircraft recycle was prohibited.

ROLLING THUNDER 7 (19-25 March) relaxed the mandatory one-day strike execution to a week's period, with precise timing being left to field commanders. It included five primary targets with weather alternates. The requirement for concurrent timing of U.S. and VNAF strikes was removed. One U.S. and two VNAF armed recce missions were authorized during the seven-day period. Specified route segments were selected in southern North Vietnam authority was given to strike three fixed radar sites located one on each route. The strikes were no longer to be specifically related to VC atrocities and publicity on them was to be progressively reduced.

ROLLING THUNDER 8 (26 March - 1 April) included nine radar sites for U.S. strike, and a barracks for VNAF. The radar targets reflected primarily policy-level interest in additional purely military targets in southern NVN. Three armed recce missions were again authorized, against specified route segments with U.S. armed recce conducted against NVN patrol craft, along the coast from Tiger Island north to 20° and authority granted to restrike operational radar sites. VNAF armed recce was conducted along Route 12 from Ha Tinh to two miles east of Mu Gia Pass.

ROLLING THUNDER 9 (2-8 April) inaugurated a planned LOC interdiction campaign against NVN south of latitude 20°. The Dong Phuong (JCS

*Based on information in JCS compilations and ROLLING THUNDER execute messages.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

target No. 18.8) and Thanh Hoa bridges (JCS target No. 14) were the northernmost fixed-target strikes in this campaign to be followed by additional armed reconnaissance strikes to sustain the interdiction. ROLLING THUNDER 9 (2-8 April) through ROLLING THUNDER 12 (23-29 April) completed the fixed-target strikes against 26 bridges and seven ferries.

a. ROLLING THUNDER 9 permitted three armed recce missions on specified route segments. Sorties were increased to not more than 24 armed recce strike sorties per 24-hour period in ROLLING THUNDER 10 through ROLLING THUNDER 12. This effort was still far short of the level considered by the JCS to be "required for significant effectiveness."

b. Prior to ROLLING THUNDER 10, armed recce targets were limited to locomotives, rolling stock, vehicles, and hostile NVN craft. For ROLLING THUNDER 10 through ROLLING THUNDER 12 the rules were changed to provide day and night armed recce missions to obtain a high level of damage to military movement facilities, ferries, radar sites, secondary bridges, and railroad rolling stock. It also included interdiction of the IOC by cratering, re-striking and seeding choke-points as necessary.

c. From the beginning, armed recce geographical coverage was limited to specified segments of designated routes. By ROLLING THUNDER 9 it had increased to one-time coverage of Routes 1 (DMZ to 19-58-36N), 7, 8, 15, 101, and lateral roads between these routes.

d. The dropping of unexpended ordnance on Tiger Island was authorized in this period. Prior to this time, ordnance was jettisoned in the sea.

ROLLING THUNDER 13 (30 April - May 1965) through ROLLING THUNDER 18 (11-17 June) continued U.S. and VNAF strikes against 52 fixed military targets (five restrikes) as follows: six ammo depots, five supply depots, 21 barracks, two airfields, two POL storages, two radio facilities, seven bridges, two naval bases, one railroad yard, two thermal power plants, one port facility, and one ferry. It was argued by the JCS that, as some barracks and depots had been vacated, political insistence on hitting only military targets south of latitude 20° was "constraining the program substantially short of optimum military effectiveness."

a. During this six-week period armed recce sorties were expanded to a maximum allowable rate of 40 per day and a maximum of 200 per week (60 additional armed recce sorties were authorized for ROLLING THUNDER 17). Although this period saw a significant increase in armed recce, the new level was well below existing capabilities and, so the JCS argued, "the increase was authorized too late to achieve tactical surprise."

b. With ROLLING THUNDER 13 armed recce authorizations changed from stated routes, etc., to more broadly defined geographical areas, in this case the area south of 20°.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

c. Air strikes against fixed targets and armed recce were suspended over NVN during the five-day and twenty-hour bombing pause of 13-17 May.

d. Authority was requested to strike the first SAM site during the ROLLING THUNDER 15 period (immediately following the bombing pause) but it was denied.

e. Armed recce targets were expanded during this six-week period to include railroad rolling stock, trucks, ferries, lighters, barges, radar sites, secondary bridges, road repair equipment, NVN naval craft, bivouac and maintenance areas. Emphasis was placed on armed recce of routes emanating from Vinh in order to restrict traffic in and out of this important LOC hub. ROLLING THUNDER 18 added the provision that authorized day armed route recce sorties could include selected missions to conduct small precise attacks against prebriefed military targets not in the JCS target list, and thereafter conduct armed route recce with residual capability.

f. ROLLING THUNDER 14 added authority for returning aircraft to use unexpended ordnance on Hon Nieu Island Radar Site, Hon Matt Island Radar Site, Dong Hoi Barracks, or rail and highway LOC's targets, in addition to Tiger Island previously authorized for this purpose.

TABLE OF CONTENTS
AND TEXT

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

THE ROLLING THUNDER PROGRAM BEGINS

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND OUTLINE

I.	INTRODUCTION--Pleiku Pulls The Trigger	1
II.	THE LONG ROAD TO PLEIKU--A Retrospective View	2
	A. 1964: Year of Political and Military Decline	2
	B. Evolution of a New Policy	2
	C. Signals to Hanoi	6
	D. Ominous Developments in Saigon	8
	E. More Agonizing over Additional Pressures	11
III.	DESOTO PATROL AS A REPRISAL OPPORIUNITY--AND THE DECISION TO SUSPEND	16
IV.	FLAMING DART I AND II--THE IMPERCEPTIBLE TRANSITION	23
	A. The First Reprisal	23
	B. Timing of Pleiku and the Kosygin Visit	23
	C. The Reprisal Rationale and its Public Handling	24
	D. An Act of Defiance	27
	E. Reactions at Home and Abroad	29
V.	"SUSTAINED REPRISAL" AND ITS VARIANTS--ADVOCACY SHIFTS INTO HIGH GEAR	31
	A. The McGeorge Bundy Recommendation	31
	B. The Taylor Conception of "Graduated Reprisals"	39
	C. CINCPAC's "Graduated Pressures" Philosophy	43
	D. JCS Eight-Week Program	44
VI.	INITIATION OF "ROLLING THUNDER"--18 DAYS OF MANEUVER AND DELAY	48
	A. The Presidential Decision and Taylor's Response	48
	B. ROLLING THUNDER I is Laid On--and Cancelled	52
	C. The UK/USSR Co-Chairmen Gambit	53

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

D.	Efforts at Public Justification and Persuasion	59
VII.	ROLLING THUNDER BECOMES A CONTINUING PROGRAM	64
A.	McNamara's Concern Over Cost-Ineffectiveness of Strikes	64
B.	Taylor's Concern Over Feeble, Irresolute Action	66
C.	President's Concern Over Insufficient Pressure in South Vietnam	69
D.	Rolling Thunder VII--Enter "Regularity" and "Determination"	71
VIII.	TARGET RATIONALE SHIFTS TOWARD INTERDICTION	74
IX.	REASSESSMENT AS OF APRIL 1 AND THE NSAM 328 DECISIONS	81
A.	The Situation in South Vietnam	81
B.	International Diplomatic Moves	83
C.	An End to "Reprisal"	84
D.	NSAM 328--Issues Posed and Decisions Made	85
E.	The Director of Central Intelligence Demurs	90
X.	APRIL 7th INITIATIVE--THE BILLION DOLLAR CARROT	94
A.	Mounting Public Criticism	94
B.	Ingredients for Johns Hopkins	95
C.	Hanoi and Peking "Close the Door"	96
D.	President's Reprise: Tragedy, Disappointment-- But No Bombing Pause	97
XI.	HONOLULU, APRIL 20th--IN SEARCH OF CONSENSUS	99
A.	Background and Conclusions of Conference	99
B.	Interdiction is Surfaced	101
C.	Political Objectives are Reviewed	102

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

XII. PROJECT MAYFLOWER--THE FIRST BOMBING PAUSE	106
A. The Background	106
B. Setting the Stage	110
C. Transmitting the Message	116
D. Awaiting a Response	122
E. Resuming the Bombing	126
F. The Aftermath	128
XIII. DEBATE OVER BOMBING STRATEGY AND EFFECTIVENESS CONTINUES	131
A. The Rostow "Victory" Thesis	131
B. "ARC LIGHT" Comes to <u>South</u> Vietnam--Attacks on the <u>North</u> Edge Upward	133
C. McNamara Reviews the Program	135
FOOTNOTES	141

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

THE ROLLING THUNDER PROGRAM BEGINS

I. INTRODUCTION--Pleiku Pulls the Trigger

At 2:00 a.m. on the morning of February 7, 1965, at the end of five days of Tet celebrations and only hours after Kosygin had told a cheering crowd in Hanoi that the Soviet Union would "not remain indifferent" if "acts of war" were committed against North Vietnam, Viet Cong guerrillas carried out well-coordinated raids upon a U.S. advisers' barracks in Pleiku and upon a U.S. helicopter base at Camp Holloway, some four miles away. Of the 137 American soldiers hit in the two attacks, nine eventually died and 76 had to be evacuated; the losses in equipment were also severe: 16 helicopters damaged or destroyed and six fixed-wing aircraft damaged, making this the heaviest communist assault up to that time against American installations in South Vietnam.

The first flash from Saigon about the assault came on the ticker at the National Military Command Center at the Pentagon at 2:38 p.m. Saturday, February 6, Washington time. It triggered a swift, though long-contemplated Presidential decision to give an "appropriate and fitting" response. Within less than 14 hours, by 4:00 p.m. Sunday, Vietnam time, 49 U.S. Navy jets -- A-4 Skyhawks and F-8 Crusaders from the Seventh Fleet carriers USS Coral Sea and USS Hancock -- had penetrated a heavy layer of monsoon clouds to deliver their bombs and rockets upon North Vietnamese barracks and staging areas at Dong Hoi, a guerrilla training garrison 40 miles north of the 17th parallel. On the following afternoon, a flight of 24 VNAF A-1H Skyraiders, cancelled the previous day because of poor weather, followed up the attack by striking a military communications center in the Vinh Linh area just north of the border.

Though conceived and executed as a limited one-shot tit-for-tat reprisal, the dramatic U.S. action, long on the military planners' drawing boards under the operational code name FLAMING DART, precipitated a rapidly moving sequence of events that transformed the character of the Vietnam war and the U.S. role in it. It was also the opening move in what soon developed into an entirely new phase of that war: the sustained U.S. bombing effort against North Vietnam. It is the purpose of this paper to reconstruct the immediate circumstances that led up to the FLAMING DART decision, to retrace the changes in rationale that progressively transformed the reprisal concept into a sustained graduated bombing effort, and to chronicle the relationship between that effort and the military-political moves to shore up Saigon and the military-diplomatic signals to dissuade Hanoi, during the crucial early months of February through May of 1965.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. THE LONG ROAD TO PLEIKU--A Retrospective View

A. 1964: Year of Political and Military Decline

The year 1964 was marked by a gradual American awakening to the fact that the Viet Cong were winning the war in South Vietnam. Almost uninterrupted political upheaval in Saigon was spawning progressive military dissolution in the countryside. Constant changes within the Vietnamese leadership were bringing GVN civil administration into a state of disarray and GVN military activities to a near-standstill. ARVN forces were becoming more and more defensive and demoralized. At the same time, the communists were visibly strengthening their support base in Laos, stepping up the rate of infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam, and mounting larger and more aggressive attacks. The GVN was still predominant, though not unchallenged, in the urban population centers; there were also a few areas where traditional local power structures (the Hoa Hao, the Cao Dai, etc.) continued to exercise effective authority. But the rest of the country was slipping, largely by default, under VC control. By the end of 1964, all evidence pointed to a situation in which a final collapse of the GVN appeared probable and a victorious consolidation of VC power a distinct possibility.

Ironically, it was left to Senator Fulbright to state the harsh realities in terms which set the tone for much of Administration thinking as it was to emerge in the months to come -- though his views then were hardly consistent with the opposition role he was increasingly to take later on. As early as March 1964, in a celebrated speech entitled "Old Myths and New Realities" he observed that "the hard fact of the matter is that our bargaining position is at present a weak one; and until the equation of advantage between the two sides has been substantially altered in our favor, there can be little prospect of a negotiated settlement."

B. Evolution of a New Policy

With the growing realization that the ally on whose behalf the United States had steadily deepened its commitment in Southeast Asia was in a near state of dissolution, Washington launched a protracted reassessment of the future American role in the war and began a determined search for new pressures to be mounted against the communist enemy, both within and outside of South Vietnam. High level deliberations on alternative U.S. courses of action in Southeast Asia were started as early as March 1964, and a military planning process was set in motion in which much attention was given to the possibility of implementing some sort of pressures or reprisal policy against North Vietnam.

The first of these planning efforts, authorized by the President on 17 March 1964 (NSAM 288), led to the development of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, a three-phase plan covering operations against VC infiltration routes in Laos and Cambodia and against targets in North Vietnam. Phase I provided for air and ground strikes against selected targets in Laos, together with

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

hot pursuit actions into Laotian and Cambodian border areas. Phase II provided for "tit-for-tat" air strikes, airborne/amphibious raids, and aerial mining operations against targets in North Vietnam. Phase III provided for increasingly severe air strikes and other actions against North Vietnam, going beyond the "tit-for-tat" concept. According to the plan, air strikes would be conducted primarily by GVN forces, assisted by U.S. aircraft.

As part of OPIAN 37-64, a detailed list of specific targets for air attack in North Vietnam was drawn up, selected on the basis of three criteria: (a) reducing North Vietnamese support of communist operations in Laos and South Vietnam, (b) limiting North Vietnamese capabilities to take direct action against Laos and South Vietnam, and finally (c) impairing North Vietnam's capacity to continue as an industrially viable state. Detailed characteristics were provided for each target, together with damage effects that could be achieved by various scales of attack against them. This target list, informally called the "94 Target List," became the basic reference for much of the subsequent planning for air strikes against North Vietnam, when target selection was involved. 1/

The Tonkin Gulf incident of 4-5 August, which precipitated the first U.S. reprisal action against North Vietnam, had enabled the Administration to obtain a broad Congressional Resolution of support and had brought with it a prompt and substantial forward deployment of U.S. military forces in Southeast Asia, to deter or deal with possible communist reactions to the U.S. reprisal strike. Encouraged somewhat by the fact that no such reaction occurred, U.S. officials began to look more hopefully toward forceful military alternatives that might help salvage the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam. A new wave of disorders and governmental eruptions in Saigon gave added impetus to a succession of JCS proposals for intensified harassing and other punitive operations against North Vietnam. Their recommendations included retaliatory actions for stepped up VC incidents, should they occur, and initiation of continuing air strikes by GVN and U.S. forces against North Vietnamese targets. 2/

A Presidential decision was issued on 10 September.* Besides some modest additional pressures in the Lao panhandle and covert actions against North Vietnam, it authorized only preparations for retaliatory actions against North Vietnam in the event of any attack on U.S. units or any extraordinary North Vietnamese/VC action against South Vietnam. The forward deployments that had been carried out in connection with the Tonkin incident and in accordance with OPIAN 37-64 were kept in place, but the forces involved were precluded from action in South Vietnam and no decision was made to utilize them in operations in Laos or North Vietnam.

Throughout September and October, the JCS continued to urge stronger U.S. action not only in North Vietnam, but also in Laos, where infiltration was clearly on the increase, and in South Vietnam, where GVN survival was becoming precarious and time seemed to be running out.

* National Security Action Memorandum No. 314, 10 September 1964 (TS)

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

These urgings reached a crescendo on 1 November 1964 when, just three days prior to the U.S. Presidential elections, the VC executed a daring and dramatic mortar attack on the U.S. air base at Bien Hoa, killing five Americans, wounding 76, and damaging or destroying 27 of the 30 B-57's that had been deployed to South Vietnam to serve notice upon Hanoi that the United States had readily at hand the capacity to deliver a crushing air attack on the North. The attack was the most spectacular anti-American incident to date and was viewed by the JCS as warranting a severe punitive response. Their recommendation, accordingly, went far beyond a mere reprisal action. It called for an initial 24-36 hour period of air strikes in Laos and low-level air reconnaissance south of the 19th parallel in North Vietnam, designed to provide a cover for the introduction of U.S. security forces to protect key U.S. installations, and for the evacuation of U.S. dependents from Saigon. This would be followed, in the next three days, by a B-52 strike against Phuc Yen, the principal airfield near Hanoi, and by strikes against other airfields and major POL facilities in the Hanoi/Haiphong area; and subsequently by armed reconnaissance against infiltration routes in Laos, air strikes against infiltration routes and targets in North Vietnam, and progressive PACOM and SAC strikes against remaining military and industrial targets in the 94 Target List. 3/

That the JCS recommendations were not accepted is hardly surprising, considering the magnitude and radical nature of the proposed actions and the fact that these actions would have had to be initiated on the eve of the election by a President who in his campaign had plainly made manifest his disinclination to lead the United States into a wider war in Vietnam, repeatedly employing the slogan "we are not going North." In any event, as subsequent developments indicate, the President was not ready to approve a program of air strikes against North Vietnam, at least until the available alternatives could be carefully and thoroughly re-examined.

Such a re-examination was initiated immediately following the election, under the aegis of a NSC interagency working group chaired by Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy. After a month of intensive study of various options, ranging from an intensification of existing programs to the initiation of large-scale hostilities against North Vietnam, the working group recommended a graduated program of controlled military pressures designed to signal U.S. determination, to boost morale in the South and to increase the costs and strains upon the North. A basic aim of the program was to build a stronger bargaining position, to restore an "equilibrium" in the balance of forces, looking toward a negotiated settlement.

The recommended program was in two phases: Phase I, which was to last about 30 days, consisted of little more than an intensification of earlier "signals" to Hanoi that it should cease supporting the insurgency in the South or face progressively higher costs and penalties. Thus the program upped several of the military pressures already being applied, and added armed aerial reconnaissance missions against infiltration routes and facilities in Laos; it also provided for possible individual reprisals for

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

future VC provocations similar to the attack on Bien Hoa. Coupled with these military measures was to be a continuous declaratory policy communicating our willingness to negotiate on the basis of the Geneva accords. It was recommended that successive actions would be undertaken only after waiting to discern Hanoi's reactions to previous actions, with the commitment to later stages, such as initiation of air strikes against infiltration targets across the 17th parallel, kept unspecific and dependent upon enemy reactions.

The recommended program also included a Phase II, a continuous program of progressively more serious air strikes possibly running from two to six months. The attacks would at first be limited to infiltration targets south of the 19th parallel, but would gradually work northward, and could eventually encompass all major military-related targets, aerial mining of ports, and a naval blockade, with the weight and tempo of the action being adjusted to the situation as it developed. The approach would be steady and deliberate, "progressively mounting in scope and intensity," with the U.S. retaining the option to proceed or not, escalate or not, or quicken the pace or not, at any time. It was agreed, however, that this second phase would not be considered for implementation until after the GVN had demonstrated considerable stability and effectiveness.

As part of this "progressive squeeze," the working group recommended that the U.S. be willing to pause to explore negotiated solutions, should North Vietnam show any signs of yielding, while maintaining a credible threat of still further pressures. In the view of the working group, the prospect of greater pressures to come was at least as important as any damage actually inflicted, since the real target was the will of the North Vietnamese government to continue the aggression in the South rather than its capability to do so. Even if it retained the capability, North Vietnam might elect to discontinue the aggression if it anticipated future costs and risks greater than it had bargained for. 4/

The JCS dissented from the working group's program on the grounds that it did not clearly provide for the kinds and forms of military pressures that might achieve U.S. objectives. They recommended instead a more accelerated program of intensive air strikes from the outset, along lines similar to the actions they had urged in response to the Bien Hoa incident. Their program was in consonance with the consistent JCS view that the way to exert significant military pressure on North Vietnam was to bring to bear the maximum practicable conventional military power in a short time. 5/

The working group's proposals for a graduated approach were hammered out in a series of policy conferences with Ambassador Taylor, who had returned to Washington for this purpose at the end of November, and were then presented to the President, who approved them conditionally on 1 December, without, however, setting a timetable or specifying precise implementing actions. Allies had to be brought in line, and certain other

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

diplomatic preliminaries had to be arranged, before the program could be launched. More important, it was feared that possible enemy reactions to the program might subject the GVN to severe counter-pressures which, in its then enfeebled state, might be more than it could bear. Thus securing some GVN leadership commitment to improved performance was made a prerequisite to mounting the more intensive actions contemplated. In fact, Ambassador Taylor returned to Saigon with instructions to hold out the prospect of these more intensive actions as an incentive to the GVN to "pull itself together" and, indeed, as a quid pro quo, for achieving, in some manner, greater stability and effectiveness. The instructions, however, contained no reference to U.S. intentions with respect to negotiations. Any mention of U.S. interest in a negotiated settlement before the initiation of military operations against North Vietnam was regarded as likely to have the opposite effect from the desired bolstering of GVN morale and stamina, as well as being premature in terms of the hoped-for improvement in the U.S. bargaining position vis-a-vis Hanoi that might result from the actions.

The President's 1 December decisions were extremely closely held during the ensuing months. The draft NSAM that had been prepared by the working group was never issued and the decisions were only informally communicated. Ambassador Taylor, upon returning to Saigon, began his discussions of the proposed actions with the GVN, and received certain assurances. Several allies, including the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, were given a fairly complete description of U.S. intentions. Others, such as Thailand and Laos, were informed about Phase I only. Still others, like Nationalist China, Korea, and the Philippines, were simply given a vague outline of the projected course of action. 6/

The first intensified military pressures in the program--more high level reconnaissance missions over North Vietnam, more extensive 3⁴A maritime operations with VNAF cover south of the 18th parallel, and RIAF air strikes against PL/NVA forces in Laos--were begun on 14 December, along with a new program of limited USAF-Navy armed reconnaissance missions against infiltration routes and facilities in Northern Laos under the code name BARREL ROLL. The strikes were not publicized and were not expected to have a significant military interdiction effect. They were considered useful primarily for their political value as another of a long series of signals to Hanoi to the effect that the U.S. was prepared to use much greater force to frustrate a communist take-over in South Vietnam.

C. Signals to Hanoi

Throughout 1964, a basic U.S. policy in Vietnam was to severely restrain any expansion of the direct U.S. combat involvement, but to carry out an essentially psychological campaign to convince Hanoi that the United States meant business. The campaign included repeated reaffirmations of the U.S. commitment to the defense of Southeast Asia, made both in public and in diplomatic channels; hints and warnings that the U.S. might expand

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

the war with countermeasures against North Vietnam, such as guerrilla raids, air attacks, naval blockade, or even land invasion, if the aggression persisted; and a number of overt military actions of a precautionary nature, intended more to demonstrate U.S. resolve than to affect the military situation. Taken together, however, the signals were somewhat ambiguous.

Among the more important military-political actions, carried out with considerable publicity, were the accelerated military construction effort in Thailand and South Vietnam, the prepositioning of contingency stockpiles in Thailand and the Philippines, the forward deployment of a carrier task force and land-based tactical aircraft within close striking distance of relevant enemy targets, and the assignment of an unprecedentedly high-level "first team" to man the U.S. Diplomatic Mission in Saigon. These measures were intended both to convince Hanoi and to reassure the GVN of the seriousness and durability of the U.S. commitment.

In addition, the U.S. undertook a number of unpublicized and more provocative actions, primarily as low-key indications to the enemy of the U.S. willingness and capability to employ increased force if necessary. Chief among these were the occasional DE SOTO Patrols (U.S. destroyer patrols conducted deep into the Gulf of Tonkin along the coast of North Vietnam), both as a "show of strength" and as an intelligence gathering device; Laotian air strikes and limited GVN cross-border operations against VC infiltration routes in Laos; GVN maritime raids and other harassing actions against North Vietnam; YANKEE TEAM, low-level photo reconnaissance missions over Laos, conducted by U.S. jet aircraft with fighter escorts for suppressive or retaliatory action against enemy ground fire; and finally, the initiation at the very end of 1964 of BARREL ROLL, armed reconnaissance missions by U.S. jet fighters against VC infiltration routes and facilities in Laos.

The fact that these actions were not publicized--although most of them eventually became public knowledge--stemmed in part from a desire to communicate an implicit threat of "more to come" for Hanoi's benefit, without arousing undue anxieties domestically in the United States in a Presidential election year in which escalation of the war became a significant campaign issue. 7/

Within this general pattern of subtle and not-so-subtle warning signals, the U.S. reprisal strike, following the controversial Gulf of Tonkin incident of 4-5 August, stands out as a single forceful U.S. reaction, the portent of which could hardly have escaped Hanoi. Its effect, however, may have been gradually diluted, first by the care that was taken to allay public fears that it represented anything more than an isolated event, and subsequently by the failure of the U.S. to react to the November 1 attack at Bien Hoa or to the Christmas Eve bombing of the Brink BOQ. 8/ Even this signal, therefore, may not have been, in Hanoi's reading, entirely unambiguous.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

For Hanoi, the U.S. public declaratory policy during most of 1964 must have been a major source of confusion. Presidential statements alternated between hawk-like cries and dove-like coos. Thus, in February 1964, in a University of California speech, the President issued the thinly veiled threat that "those engaged in external direction and supply would do well to be reminded and to remember that this type of aggression is a deeply dangerous game." But for the rest of the year and particularly during the election campaign, the President was saying, emphatically and repeatedly, that he did not intend to lead the United States into a wider war in Vietnam. He ridiculed the pugnacious chauvinism of Barry Goldwater and contrasted it with his own restraint. "There are those that say I ought to go north and drop bombs, to try to wipe out the supply lines, and they think that would escalate the war," he said in a speech on September 25. "But we don't want to get involved in a nation with seven hundred million people and get tied down in a land war in Asia."

But if there was reason for confusion in Hanoi's reading of the public declaratory signals, there was no shortage of opportunities for transmitting more unequivocal signals through quiet diplomatic channels. The clearest explanations of U.S. policy, and warnings of U.S. intent, were communicated to Hanoi on June 18, 1964, by the Canadian International Control Commissioner Seaborn. In a long meeting with Premier Pham Van Dong, Seaborn presented a carefully prepared statement of U.S. views and intentions to the North Vietnamese Premier, clearly warning him of the destructive consequences for the DRV of a continuation of its present course. Pham Van Dong fully understood the seriousness and import of the warning conveyed by Seaborn. But in this, as in a subsequent meeting with Seaborn on August 15, Pham Van Dong showed himself utterly unintimidated and calmly resolved to pursue the course upon which the DRV was embarked to what he confidently expected would be its successful conclusion.

On balance, while U.S. words and actions were not always in consonance, while public and private declarations were much in conflict, and while U.S. reactions fluctuated between the unexpectedly forceful and the mystifyingly hesitant, the action-signals were sufficiently numerous and the warnings sufficiently explicit to have given Hanoi a fair awareness that the U.S. was likely to respond to the deteriorating situation by intensifying the conflict. How far this intensification would go, neither Hanoi nor the U.S. could have foreseen.

D. Ominous Developments in Saigon

The first of the new military pressures against the North--BARREL ROLL air strikes in Laos--authorized in the 1 December decision, went into effect on 14 December. The hoped-for improvement in GVN stability, however, did not materialize. To the contrary, on 20 December the erratic SVN Premier Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh abruptly dissolved the High National Council which the U.S. Mission had been supporting as a device for encouraging a transition from military to civilian rule. As a result, U.S.-GVN relations were placed under extreme strain including, among other things, an open personal rift between General Khanh and Ambassador Taylor.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The crisis of confidence that developed was one reason for the lack of a U.S. response to the bombing of the Brink BOQ in Saigon on Christmas Eve. As pointed out earlier, it was the kind of incident which had been contemplated in the approved Phase I guidelines as warranting a U.S. reprisal action, and the JCS did recommend such an action. They proposed an immediate air strike against Vit Thu Lu army barracks just north of the 17th parallel, employing up to 40 aircraft sorties, with Vietnamese participation if feasible. It was to be a one-day strike, on a much smaller scale than those recommended by the JCS on earlier occasions. 9/ However, both because of the unsettled situation in Vietnam and because of the Christmas Season--which caught the President and the Secretary of Defense out of town and Congress in recess--Washington was hesitant and reluctant to press for a prompt reaction. By the time the issue was discussed with the President on 29 December, it seemed too late for an event-associated reprisal and the decision was negative.

In the meantime, GVN forces had experienced major reverses. ARVN as well as the Regional and Popular Forces had been seriously weakened by defeat and desertions in the last few months of 1964. A highly visible setback occurred from 26 December to 2 January 1965 at Binh Gia, where the VC virtually destroyed two Vietnamese Marine battalions. Viet Cong strength, augmented by infiltrating combat forces from North Vietnam, increased, and their hit-and-run tactics were increasingly successful.

The government of Tran Van Huong came to an abrupt end on 27 January 1965 when the Vietnamese Armed Forces Council ousted him, leaving only a facade of civilian government. The continuing power struggle clearly impeded military operations. Large elements of VNAF, for example, were maintained on constant "coup alert." 10/

Washington reacted to these developments with considerable anguish. "I think we must accept that Saigon morale in all quarters is now very shaky indeed...." wrote Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy on January 6, and he continued:

We have not yet been able to assess the overall impact of the continuing political crisis and of the Binh Gia military defeat, but there are already ample indications that they have had a sharp discouraging effect just in the last two weeks. By the same token, it is apparent that Hanoi is extremely confident, and that the Soviets are being somewhat tougher and the Chinese Communists are consolidating their ties with Hanoi...they see Vietnam falling into their laps in the fairly near future....The sum total of the above seems to us to point...to a prognosis that the situation in Vietnam is now likely to come apart more rapidly than we had anticipated in November. 11/

A similarly gloomy view was taken by Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton. In a February 1965 memorandum (no exact date), 12/ he characterized the situation as "deteriorating":

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"Bien Hoas" cannot be prevented; the new government will probably be unstable and ineffectual, and the VC will probably continue to extend their hold over the population and territory. It can be expected that soon (6 months? two years?) (a) government officials at all levels will adjust their behavior to an eventual VC take-over, (b) defections of significant military forces will take place, (c) whole integrated regions of the country will be totally denied to the GVN, (d) neutral and/or left-wing elements will enter the government, (e) a popular-front regime will emerge which will invite the US out, and (f) fundamental concessions to the VC and accommodations to the DRV will put South Vietnam behind the Curtain.

These views were fully consistent with USIB-approved national intelligence estimates which, as early as October 1964, predicted:

...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.... 13/

By February 1965, the intelligence community saw "the present political arrangements in Saigon [as] avowedly temporary" and detected no more than "a faint chance that the scenario announced for the ensuing weeks [would] hold promise for improved political stability in SVN." It judged the odds as "considerably less than even...[that] the spring and summer might see the evolution of a stronger base for prosecuting the counter-insurgency effort than has heretofore existed." 14/

These views were most authoritatively endorsed by the President's highest national security staff advisor, McGeorge Bundy, who undertook an urgent fact-finding trip to South Vietnam at the beginning of February. In a pivotal memorandum to the President 15/ (which will be referred to in greater detail subsequently) he characterized the general situation as follows:

For the last year--and perhaps for longer--the overall situation in Vietnam has been deteriorating. The Communists have been gaining and the anti-Communist forces have been losing. As a result there is now great uncertainty among Vietnamese as well as Americans as to whether Communist victory can be prevented. There is nervousness about the determination of the U.S. Government. There is recrimination and fear among Vietnamese political leaders. There is an appearance of weariness among some military leaders. There is a worrisome lassitude among the Vietnamese generally. There is a distressing absence of positive commitment to any serious social or political purpose. Outside observers are ready to write the patient off. All of this tends to bring latent anti-Americanism dangerously near to the surface.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

To be an American in Saigon today is to have a gnawing feeling that time is against us. Junior officers in all services are able, zealous and effective within the limits of their means. Their morale is sustained by the fact that they know that they are doing their jobs well and that they will not have to accept the responsibility for defeat. But near the top, where responsibility is heavy and accountability real, one can sense the inner doubts of men whose outward behavior remains determined.

Interestingly, McGeorge Bundy saw the military situation as moderately encouraging and the Vietnamese people still remarkably tough and resilient, though the social and political fabric was stretched thin. "Nevertheless," he warned, "...extremely unpleasant surprises are increasingly possible--both political and military."

E. More Agonizing over Additional Pressures

In the face of these uniformly discouraging appraisals, both Saigon and Washington continued their long debate over ways and means of mounting new or more intensive pressures against the enemy--and most notably over the desirability and likely effectiveness of reprisal strikes and "Phase II operations" against the DRV. But enthusiasm for these operations was far from boundless.

The intelligence community, for example, had expressed, ever since May of 1964, very little confidence that such added pressures would have much impact on Hanoi's course. The 9 October 1964 national estimate considered probable communist reactions to "a systematic program of gradually intensifying US/GVN [air] attacks against targets in the DRV...." The estimate tended only very hesitantly to the judgment that such a program of air attacks, if protracted, might "on balance" cause the DRV to stop its military attacks in SVN, to press for a negotiated cease-fire in the South, and to try to promote an international conference to pursue their ends, expecting, however, to fight another day. State dissented from even this ambivalent judgment, believing that the DRV would carry on the fight regardless of air attacks. 16/

In February 1965, they reiterated this hesitant view, again with State dissenting:

If the United States vigorously continued in its attacks and damaged some important economic or military assets, the DRV...might decide to intensify the struggle, but...it seems to us somewhat more likely that they would decide to make some effort to secure a respite from US attack.... 17/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Parenthetically, even this equivocal judgment was reversed in effect, though not explicitly, in a June, 1965 estimate, this time with USAF ACS/I dissenting:

Our present estimate is that the odds are against the postulated US attacks leading the DRV to make conciliatory gestures to secure a respite from the bombing; rather, we believe that the DRV would persevere in supporting the insurgency in the South. 18/

On top of these by no means reassuring estimates, Ambassador Taylor's hopes for a more stable GVN had been badly shaken by his abrasive experiences with General Khanh during the late-December episode. The Ambassador-Premier relationship was now ruptured beyond repair, and highest-level contacts between the USG and the GVN had to be carried on through Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson. For the first time Maxwell Taylor talked seriously of possible U.S. disengagement, and even suggested a new role for air attacks on the North in such a context.

In a year-end joint Taylor-Johnson cable to the Secretary of State, 19/ the Mission leadership actually suggested, as one possible alternative, "disengaging from the present intimacy of relationship with the GVN, withdrawing the bulk of our advisers...while continuing sufficient economic and MAP aid to keep the GVN going." In such a situation, they would shrink MACV to the status of a MAAG and USOM to that of an economic-budgetary advisory group, but continue to accept responsibility for air and maritime defense of South Vietnam against the DRV. The danger in such a course, however, would be that "panicked by what would be interpreted as abandonment, the GVN leaders here would rush to compete with each other in making deals with the NLF." Taylor and Johnson, however, believed that this danger could be offset by an energetic U.S. program of reprisal attacks and Phase II operations against the DRV.

Thus, in the Taylor/Johnson view, there were now three conditions in which reprisal attacks and Phase II operations might be conducted:

(i) In association with the GVN after the latter had proven a reasonably stable government "able to control its armed forces" -- the condition originally laid down in the President's 1 December decision, but which now appeared unlikely to be attained.

(ii) Under the prevailing acutely unstable conditions "as an emergency stimulant hopefully to create unity at home and restore failing morale."

(iii) As a unilateral U.S. action "to compensate for reduced in-country U.S. presence," if such reduction were to be undertaken.

A similarly unprepossessing view of "stronger action" alternatives was probably presented to the President by Rusk. The files contain no

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

direct record of the Secretary's presentation to the President during this period, but a set of notes 20/ put together in preparation for a Rusk meeting with the President on January 6 by Assistant Secretary William Bundy, Special Assistant Michael Forrestal and Deputy Assistant Secretary Leonard Unger, laid out the alternatives in some detail. Recognizing that a "coming apart" of the GVN would most likely take the form of covert negotiations by key governmental groups with the NLF, leading eventually to the U.S. being invited out, Rusk's principal Vietnam advisers argued that this was one possible "Vietnamese solution," but hardly a desirable one:

It would still be virtually certain that Laos would then become untenable and that Cambodia would accommodate in some way. Most seriously, there is grave question whether the Thai in these circumstances would retain any confidence at all in our continued support. In short, the outcome would be regarded in Asia, and particularly among our friends, as just as humiliating a defeat as any other form. As events have developed, the American public would probably not be too sharply critical, but the real question would be whether Thailand and other nations were weakened and taken over thereafter.

The alternative of stronger action obviously has grave difficulties. It commits the US more deeply, at a time when the picture of South Vietnamese will is extremely weak. To the extent that it included actions against North Vietnam, it would be vigorously attacked by many nations and disapproved initially even by such nations as Japan and India, on present indications. Most basically, its stiffening effect on the Saigon political situation would not be at all sure to bring about a more effective government, nor would limited actions against the southern DRV in fact sharply reduce infiltration or, in present circumstances, be at all likely to induce Hanoi to call it off.

Nonetheless, on balance we believe that such action would have some faint hope of really improving the Vietnamese situation, and, above all, would put us in a much stronger position to hold the next line of defense, namely Thailand. Accepting the present situation--or any negotiation on the basis of it--would be far weaker from this latter key standpoint. If we moved into stronger actions, we should have in mind that negotiations would be likely to emerge from some quarter in any event, and that under existing circumstances, even with the additional element of pressure, we could not expect to get an outcome that would really secure an independent South Vietnam. Yet even on an outcome that produced a progressive deterioration in South Vietnam and an eventual Communist takeover, we would still have appeared to Asians to have done a lot more about it."

Turning then to specific alternatives, Bundy and his colleagues envisioned five proposals:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

- a. An early occasion for reprisal action against the DRV.
- b. Possibly beginning low-level reconnaissance of the DRV at once.
- c. Concurrently with a or b, an early orderly withdrawal of our dependents. We all think this would be a grave mistake in the absence of stronger action, and if taken in isolation would tremendously increase the pace of deterioration in Saigon. If we are to clear our decks in this way--and we are more and more inclined to think we should--it simply must be, for this reason alone, in the context of some stronger action.
- d. Intensified air operations in Laos may have some use, but they will not meet the problem of Saigon morale and, if continued at a high level, may raise significant possibilities of Communist intervention on a substantial scale in Laos with some plausible justification. We have gone about as far as we can go in Laos by the existing limiting actions, and, apart from cutting Route 7, we would not be accomplishing much militarily by intensifying US air actions there. This form of action thus has little further to gain in the Laos context, and has no real bearing at this point on the South Vietnamese context.
- e. Introduction of limited US ground forces into the northern area of South Vietnam still has great appeal to many of us, concurrently with the first air attacks into the DRV. It would have a real stiffening effect in Saigon, and a strong signal effect to Hanoi. On the disadvantage side, such forces would be possible attrition targets for the Viet Cong. For your information, the Australians have clearly indicated (most recently yesterday) that they might be disposed to participate in such an operation. The New Zealanders are more negative and a proposal for Philippine participation would be an interesting test."

Whether and how these alternatives were posed for the President is not recorded, but at least two of the actions--getting the U.S. dependents out of Vietnam and reacting promptly and firmly to the next reprisal opportunity--were also recommended to another top presidential advisor, namely to Secretary McNamara, by Assistant Secretary John McNaughton, in a McNaughton memorandum 21/ that he discussed with McNamara on January 27. The memorandum contains McNaughton's pencil notations of McNamara's comments on various points, which suggest that the Secretary of Defense was dissatisfied with the way U.S. Vietnam policy was "drifting" and seemed a good deal less dubious than was McNaughton about the potential benefits to be derived from initiating air strikes against the DRV.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In the meantime, a 7 January 1965 conference of SEACORD (the coordinating mechanism of the U.S. ambassadors and military commanders in Southeast Asia) had reviewed the accomplishments of the first few weeks of Phase I--the 30-day program of mild EARREL ROLL, YANKEE TEAM and other operations--and had concluded that the results were militarily negligible. SEACORD recommended an extension of the operations for another 30 days, and their intensification as "an effective tonic [for the GVIN], particularly if accompanied by serious joint preparations and timely initiation of retaliatory and Phase II operations against the DRV." 22/

The most forceful restatement of the reprisal policy, however, came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the end of January, in the form of a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense 23/ reviewing earlier JCS recommendations on reprisals and noting that the continued lack of a U.S. response to major enemy provocations risked inviting more such actions. They urged that the next significant provocation be met with a "positive, timely, and appropriate response...undertaken preferably within twenty-four hours, against selected targets in the DRV." 24/ They appended to their memorandum a resume of possible reprisal actions of varying intensities, for which plans were available and the strike forces at hand to carry out these actions. The most intensive preparations had already been made, particularly in connection with the forthcoming resumption of the DESOTO Patrols, to which a reprisal operation was explicitly linked as a contingency option, under the code name FLAMING DART. These preparations and the evolution of the readiness posture associated with this and other potential reprisal actions is reviewed briefly in the next section.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. DESOTO AS A REPRISAL OPPORTUNITY -- AND THE DECISION TO SUSPEND

Detailed and specific reprisal preparations had been under way for many months prior to February 1965, most prominently in connection with the periodic DESOTO Patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin. The patrols were suspended after the August 2 and 4, 1964 incidents, when the destroyer patrol group had been fired upon, giving rise to the first U.S. retaliatory strikes. They were resumed on 12 September, and at that time were believed to have been again attacked, or at least "menaced," by unfriendly vessels on the night of 18 September. That incident, however, was considered as too ambiguous by Washington officials to justify a reprisal action. The patrol was once more suspended on 20 September.

In order to be properly prepared for an attack on any future patrol, military authorities began to work up a pre-packaged set of reprisal targets that might be politically acceptable, with pre-assigned forces that would be in a high state of readiness to strike these targets, and with a detailed strike plan that would provide a range of retaliatory options. Accordingly, CINCPAC, on instructions from the JCS, developed appropriate plans and issued a series of Fragmentary Operations Orders under the colorful caption, "Punitive and Crippling Reprisal Actions on Targets in NVN." 25/ The orders provided for air strikes to be conducted against selected targets in North Vietnam in retaliation for DRV attacks against the DESOTO Patrol, if the patrol were resumed and attacked. Two levels of retaliation response were prescribed, with two target options each (all located south of the 19th parallel), with the various options scaled to the extent and severity of damage inflicted upon the patrol. A high alert posture was to be maintained during the days the patrol was in progress, such that the strikes could be launched within one hour after receipt of the execution order. The retaliatory forces were to be carefully prepositioned and rules of engagement were meticulously spelled out. 26/

While these preparations were initially associated exclusively with the DESOTO Patrol, it was recognized that reprisals might also be called for in retaliation for any type of serious provocation which could occur without warning, could be caused by the DRV or by the VC, and might be directed against US or GVN forces. But the high alert status ordered in connection with the DESOTO Patrols could be maintained for only short periods of time. A more sustained capability was also needed, and the JCS prepared an outline plan for further elaboration by CINCPAC, calling for a more limited reprisal action that could be launched with the least possible delay with forces in place and with a readiness posture normally maintained. 27/ The forces expected to be available for such strikes were one CVA air wing, two squadrons of B-57, two squadrons of F-105, three squadrons of F-100, and approximately one squadron of VNAF A-1H; and the targets considered most suitable were:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Target No. 33 - Dong Hoi Barracks
36 - Vit Thu Lu Army Barracks
39 - Chap Le Army Barracks
52 - Vinh Army Supply Depot E
71 - Ben Thuy Port Facilities

All of these preparations came to a head at the end of January, when a tentative decision had evidently been reached in Washington to authorize resumption of the DESOTO Patrols on or about 3 February. A JCS directive to that effect went out to CINCPAC on 28 January, 28/ requesting CINCPAC to issue the necessary Operational Plan, covering a two destroyer Patrol Group with on-line Crypto RATT and Star Shell illumination capabilities. Interestingly, the instructions were explicit to the effect that the "Patrol track shall not be provocative, with the Patrol Group remaining 30 nautical miles from both NVN mainland and Hainan Island and South of 20 degrees North latitude." The Patrol was to be continued for a period of three days, during which time SP-2 aircraft with searchlight and flare capability were to support the Patrol Group during hours of darkness by assisting in contact investigation and clarification, and a Combat Air Patrol was to be airborne in the vicinity of the Patrol during daylight and to be on immediate call during darkness. Instructions also called for carefully dissociating the Patrol from OPLAN 34A operations in and over the Gulf of Tonkin 48 hours before, during, and 48 hours following completion of the Patrol.

Rules of engagement, in the event of attack, were as follows:

a. The Patrol ships and aircraft are authorized to attack with the objective of insuring destruction of any vessel or aircraft which attacks, or gives positive indication of intent to attack, US forces operating in international waters or air-space over international waters.

b. In event of hostile attack, the Patrol ships and aircraft are directed to fire upon the hostile attacker with the objective of insuring destruction. Ships are authorized to pursue the enemy to the recognized three mile territorial limit. Aircraft are authorized hot pursuit inside territorial waters (three miles) against surface vessels and into hostile air space (includes DRV, Hainan Island and Mainland China) against attack aircraft when necessary to achieve destruction of identified attack forces. Ships and aircraft will confine their actions to the attacking ships and/or aircraft.

In the days following, attention centered on plans for the reprisal strike. A number of last-minute changes were made in the targets that had been recommended by CINCPAC and the JCS, in order to reduce the risk of aircraft losses and to reduce sortie requirements. The launching date for the DESOTO Patrol was postponed from the 3rd to the 7th of February, and the JCS asked CINCPAC 29/ to re-order its reprisal targets

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

into three attack options, consisting respectively of three, five, and seven specified targets, and to plan to conduct the air strikes against them, as directed, by option or by target, in any combination. The options and targets, together with estimated sorties, were as follows:

		<u>Strike</u>	<u>Flak</u>	<u>CAP</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
<u>Option One</u>					
Tgts 33	Dong Hoi Barracks	24	8	8	40
36	Vit Thu Lu Barracks	24	8	4	36
39	Chap Le Barracks	40	12	4	56
	Total....	80	28	16	132
<u>Option Two</u>					
Tgts 33, 36, 39	of Option One, plus:				
24	Chanh Hoa Barracks	28	12	12	52
32	Vu Con Barracks	10	8	4	22
	Total....	126	48	32	206
<u>Option Three</u>					
Tgts 33, 36, 39, 24, 32	of Option Two, plus:				
14	Thanh Hoa Bridge	32	12	4	48
74	Quang Khe Naval Base	22	4	2	28
	Total....	180	64	38	282

Of these seven targets, six were south of the 19th parallel, and on the November working group's reprisal target list; one, the Thanh Hoa Bridge, Target 14 in Option Three, was north of the 19th parallel.

The strikes against these targets were to employ the US forces then in mainland Southeast Asia in their alerted and augmented state (with an additional F105 squadron from the Philippines at Da Nang), plus up to 3 CVAs; but they would also provide for strikes from a non-alert status, i.e., with US forces normally in-country, plus CVA normally on station. Strikes from a non-alert status, if ordered, would be simultaneous, launched within the minimum feasible reaction time, and as near as practicable to first light following the reprisal incident. CINCPAC was also asked to make "preliminary provisions" for a strike at Target 32-- Vu Con Barracks in Option Two above -- to be conducted by VNAF, with assistance from US flak suppression, CAP, pathfinder, and SAR. These provisions were not to be revealed to the GVN at that time, since the inclusion of this VNAF strike might or might not be ordered, depending on the circumstances.^{30/}

CINCPAC responded the following day by issuing Operation Order FLAMING DART, directing its Air Force and Navy Component Commands to be prepared to conduct air strikes when directed, against the above targets by option, or against any combination of the above targets within or between options, in retaliation for attacks on the DESOTO Patrol.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

CINCPACFLT was assigned Targets 33 and 36 of Option One, 24 of Option Two, and 74 of Option Three. CINCPACAF was assigned Targets 39 of Option One, 32 of Option Two, and 14 of Option Three. Aircraft would be armed with optimum conventional ordnance for the target to be attacked, excluding napalm. 31/

Operation Order FLAMING DART placed the US in a highly flexible position. It provided a vehicle for a quick reprisal decision in the eventuality of an attack on the DESOTO Patrol or of any other provocation, such as a dramatic VC incident in South Vietnam. The particular targets involved had been briefed to the principal decision-makers, had the virtue of being known and understood by them, and even had their tentative approval. Moreover, nearly all the targets were in the far south of North Vietnam and all could be associated with infiltration, which were two of the conditions laid down in the guidelines for retaliating against the North for spectacular incidents in the South. The Operation Order therefore served well as a generalized pre-planned reprisal target package, offering a wide spectrum of choices.

To gain an impression of the alert posture of the strike forces poised for action, the table below sets forth the varying weight of attack that could be brought to bear at different reaction times:

(CHART, page 20)

The DESOTO Patrol, however, which had been the major focus for the reprisal planning, was never to carry out its assigned role. On 4 February, three days before the Patrol was to begin its operation, the Chairman of the JCS informed CINCPAC and all interested posts and commands that authority to execute DESOTO was cancelled, in view of Soviet Premier Kosygin's imminent four-day visit to Hanoi that was to begin on 6 February. "DESOTO patrol concurrent with Kosygin visit or immediately thereafter," wrote the CJCS, "could be interpreted as reaction to visit, thereby impairing and complicating US-Soviet relations." 33/

The decision to call off the Patrol in deference to Kosygin's visit, reflected a growing feeling in some parts of the Administration that the renewed involvement of the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia, after its hands-off policy of almost three years' standing, might, on balance, be a good thing for the U.S. While some American experts interpreted Moscow's November, 1964 pledge of military assistance to Hanoi and Kosygin's visit in February 1965 as a sure sign that the Soviet Union saw the collapse of the US venture in SVN as imminent and wanted merely to stake its claim in apposition to Peking before it was too late, others believed that the USSR might well find it in its interest to act as an agent of moderation and compromise, providing the U.S. with an avenue of graceful retreat from a seemingly irretrievable situation.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

STRIKE FORCES AVAILABLE FOR REPRISAL ACTIONS AGAINST TARGETS IN

LAOS AND NORTH VIETNAM (as of 29 Jan 65) 32/

STRIKE FORCES	REACTION TIME (HOURS)					
	1 ^{1/}	6 ^{2/}	12 ^{3/}	48 ^{4/}	72	AFTER 72
	(DeSoto Patrol)				Same as 48 hr. column plus following deployments:	
USAF						
B-57	28-Bien Hoa	4-5-Bien Hoa	28-Bien Hoa	S A		S A
F-100	36-Da Nang 18-Takhli	12-Da Nang 12-Takhli	36-Da Nang 18-Takhli	M E	18-Conus to Clark	M E
F-105	18-Da Nang 18-Korat	2-6-Da Nang 6-10-Korat	18-Da Nang 18-Korat		18-Conus to Clark	
B-52				30-Guam		
CVA						
A-4	48	24	24	48	S	72
A-1	24	12	12	24	A	36
A-3	9	6	6	9	M	15
F-4/8	40-46	20-23	20-23	40-46	E	60-69
USMC						
MAG						
A-4						47-Da Nang
VNAF						
A-1H		11	11	60		

NOTES: 32/ (Keyed to reprisal actions described in Appendix B to JCSM 70-65, 29 Jan 65, TOP SECRET)

1/ DeSoto Patrol reprisal forces. Only case in which forces are prepositioned, held in alert status and prepared to conduct reprisal attacks without delay.

2/ Forces immediately available under normal conditions.

3/ USAF fully deployed. Only one carrier available.

4/ Could conduct all strikes in CINCPAC FRAG ORDER #3. 60 VNAF sorties available each day at expense of pacification program. By 31 Jan 65, 75 VNAF sorties available.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

This view was certainly held by some State Department experts, particularly in the Office of Asian Communist Affairs (ACA) and in the Office of Intelligence and Research (INR). In an interesting memorandum of February 5, 1965 to William Bundy, Lindsay Grant of ACA saw the implications for American policy of the Kosygin visit to Hanoi as "enormous."

It is possible to hypothesize that the Soviet initiative may be intended to present the United States with an acceptable, albeit difficult, choice. They may presume that the situation in the South would deteriorate to the point where we could foresee ourselves confronted with the possibility of:

- 1) a series of defeats on the ground and/or total collapse of authority in Saigon, or
- 2) a rapid movement in the direction of neutralism, leading to our being invited out, or
- 3) some kind of negotiated settlement which would permit us to reduce our commitment to the bare bones, and thereby at least minimize a generally distasteful loss. The last prospect, which would represent the best of a bad choice, could possibly result from an increased Soviet presence in North Viet-Nam.

Thus, the Soviets might find it in their own interest to propose to Hanoi a solution of the war in Viet-Nam along the following lines:

- 1) North Viet-Nam would remain untouched, with the Soviet Union guaranteeing to provide major economic and other help;
- 2) South Viet-Nam would be neutralized, with some sort of paper guarantee offered by outside powers, including the Soviet Union;
- 3) The National Front for the Liberation of South Viet-Nam would participate in a neutralist coalition government.

(The Soviet Union would, presumably, give North Viet-Nam private assurances that it would not stand in the way of further Front and Viet Cong efforts to gain a complete political victory in the South.)

The author of the memorandum, of course, recognized that it would be only under the prospect of a collapse of the GVN or of being requested to leave that the U.S. would be willing to accede to the solutions suggested. But he stressed, as the major benefit of this course, that:

...the Soviet presence would represent a major deflection of the rising Chinese Communist tide in Southeast Asia in particular, and in its world-wide efforts at subversion in general.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

A somewhat similar view was echoed subsequently in a SEACORD conference, the sense of which was reported in a Saigon message to the Secretary of State. 34/ The relevant arguments were to the effect that:

- (1) The DRV is almost entirely dependent both economically and militarily upon the Chinese Communists who see great value in having the DRV continue this exclusive dependence;
- (2) The Soviet Union is the only alternative source of economic and military support to Hanoi which would enable the DRV to remain viable if it decided to cease its aggression;
- (3) It is therefore important that the Soviets receive accurate indications that we would not oppose a continuing Soviet role in the DRV, although this is not a matter on which the U.S. can take an initiative.

Subsequent events on the negotiating front, and the role we believed the USSR could play on that front, also lend support to the view that, at least in the early part of 1965, there was a fairly widespread belief among U.S. policy-makers that the Soviet Union could and probably would exert a benign influence upon Hanoi.

There is, indeed, some evidence that the USSR itself had some such thought in mind in connection with Kosygin's February visit. Peking, at least, has charged that Kosygin had tried at that time to persuade both Hanoi and Peking to negotiate some kind of settlement with the United States, reportedly involving a "face-saving" U.S. withdrawal. 35/

In any event, there seems little doubt that the decision to forego the DESOTO Patrol was inspired by the hope, if not expectation, that Kosygin would, from the US point of view, weigh in constructively in the Vietnam struggle.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

IV. FLAMING DART I AND II -- THE IMPERCEPTIBLE TRANSITION

A. The First Reprisal

The long months of contingency planning, hesitation, and agonized debate were suddenly cut short on February 7th, when the VC struck the American installations at Pleiku and Camp Holloway. This time the President showed the same decisiveness and swift reaction that he had displayed six months earlier in the Gulf of Tonkin. The decision to strike back was reached in a 75 minute meeting of the National Security Council on the evening of February 6 (Washington time) in the Cabinet Room of the White House, and in the presence of Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and House Speaker John McCormack. McGeorge Bundy, on his mission to Saigon at the time, had joined Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland in recommending prompt retaliation in telecoms with the President from the communications center in Saigon.

The strike, carried out during the early morning hours of the 7th (Washington time) was, at least militarily, something of a fizzle. The mildest of the three attack options was selected for the strike, but when the executive order was flashed, only one of the three CVA's (USS Ranger) was on station at Point Yankee. The other two (Hancock and Coral Sea) had been stood down to a 96-hour alert after the cancellation of the DESOTO Patrol and were enroute to assignments elsewhere. They were urgently recalled by CINCPAC to participate in the strike, which had to be delayed until the CVA's returned to points from which their aircraft could reach the assigned targets. The weather, however, was very adverse, causing a large number of sorties to abort, with the result that only one of the three assigned targets was struck in force. 36/ In order to stiffen the reprisal and to make it clearly a joint US-GVN response, the target was restruck the following day (February 8) by the US carrier aircraft that had aborted the previous day, and a VNAF strike by 24 A-1H's supported by USAF pathfinder, flak suppression and CAP aircraft, was carried out against target 32 (Vu Con Barracks) concurrently. 37/

B. Timing of Pleiku and the Kosygin Visit

As was indicated earlier, the U.S. had put off the DESOTO Patrol that had been scheduled for February 7 so as to avoid any appearance of provocativeness vis-a-vis Kosygin, who was to arrive in Hanoi on February 6. And yet it was precisely then, at the very beginning of the Kosygin visit, that the VC launched their spectacular attack on the US installations. This had led many to conjecture that the raid was deliberately organized and timed by the hardliners in Hanoi so as to nip in the bud any possible Soviet peace initiative or in other ways to put Kosygin on the spot.

Whether Hanoi specifically ordered the Pleiku attack or whether the VC merely received Hanoi's blessing for the attack remains speculative. There can be little doubt, however, that Hanoi was fully informed and had ample reason to favor the action. Robert Shaplen argues that, from Hanoi's point of view,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

it had more to gain than lose by having the attack take place while Kosygin was present, even though it might embarrass him, as it very likely did. If the Americans failed to respond, the North Vietnamese could argue that the United States was indeed a paper tiger, and that all that was needed for the war to be brought to a successful conclusion in the south was some additional military assistance. If the United States did respond, the North Vietnamese could claim that more aid was necessary to prosecute the war under more difficult circumstances, and they could then reasonably ask for planes and defensive missiles with which to protect their own cities, too. Since Kosygin was wooing North Vietnam for Russia's own purposes as much as Hanoi was wooing him to help it regain some balance between Moscow and Peking, the Russian Premier was hardly in a position to leave Hanoi in a huff, which besides would have made him look foolish. 38/

Although the onset of the bombing no doubt took the Russians by surprise, they probably viewed it as a futile last-ditch effort by Washington to strengthen its bargaining position rather than as a prelude to new escalation. In any event, Kosygin's reaction in Hanoi was restrained. He pointed out that the situation was "fraught with serious complications" and seemed to be favoring a negotiated termination. 39/ In any event, in keeping with the view held in several influential Administration quarters that the USSR might be a valuable moderating influence upon Hanoi, Washington took pains to assure Moscow that Kosygin's presence in Hanoi during the US reprisal strikes of February 7-8 was an unfortunate coincidence and no affront to the Soviet Union was intended.

C. The Reprisal Rationale and Its Public Handling

On the morning after the reprisal order had been issued (February 7), a second NSC meeting was convened at the White House to agree on an appropriate text for the White House statement and to discuss the content of a McNamara press briefing at the Pentagon, called for that afternoon. The public handling of the raids was of crucial importance in conveying to Hanoi some inkling of what the implications of the reprisal action were for future U.S. responses and for the future U.S. role in the Vietnamese war, without at the same time arousing undue anxieties at home and in the rest of the world.

It is worth noting that there were important differences between the February 7-8 raids and the earlier strikes in the Gulf of Tonkin incident. The August Tonkin strikes had clearly been presented as a one-time retaliatory action in response to a North Vietnamese attack on US naval power in international waters. In more or less tit-for-tat fashion, the strikes had been carried out by US Navy aircraft and had been directed primarily against the offending NVN patrol boats in their bases. As an extra punitive measure, POL storage tanks associated with one of the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

patrol boat bases were also hit, but no attempt was made to destroy base facilities, and the entire operation was a unilateral U.S. action.

Publicly, the Tonkin strikes had been depicted as a "positive reply" -- one which was "limited but fitting" -- to an unprovoked attack on US vessels operating within their rights on the high seas. The "one-shot" nature of the strikes was stressed, and it was explicitly stated that, provided there were no further enemy attacks, the US considered the incident closed. Together with declarations that the US strikes were not intended to expand or escalate the guerrilla war in Southeast Asia, this tended to make the strikes appear as an isolated action, bearing only incidental relationship to the war itself. The war continued to be officially pictured as one being fought by the South Vietnamese, with the US in a strictly limited supporting role. It is true that stiff warnings were sent to Hanoi through discrete diplomatic channels (ICC Commissioner Seaborne's August visit), stressing that US patience was wearing thin and that the DRV could expect to suffer the consequences if it persisted in its aggressive course, but U.S. public statements made it clear that the strikes were not intended to change the basic ground rules of the conflict at that time. The strikes were intended primarily to demonstrate that North Vietnam could not flagrantly attack U.S. forces with impunity; but nothing was said publicly to imply that the North could not continue its activities in the South without fear that its own territory would be placed in jeopardy.

By contrast with the Tonkin strikes, the February 1965 raids, while also initiated as reprisals, were intended to be explicitly linked with the "larger pattern of aggression" by North Vietnam, and were designed to signal a change in the ground rules of the conflict in the South. By retaliating against North Vietnam for a VC incident in the South, the US consciously made its first open break with self-imposed ground rules which had permitted the North to direct and support the war in the South, but which had precluded direct US countermeasures against the North's territory. The strikes thus were to serve clear notice upon all concerned that the US would not abide by such rules in the future.

But the change in ground rules also posed serious public information and stage managing problems for the President. Until the February raids, and especially throughout the election campaign of 1964, the case had regularly been made that the insurrection in the South was essentially a home-grown affair and largely self-supporting; now the argument had to be turned around and public opinion persuaded that there really wouldn't be much difficulty cleaning up the South if infiltrators from the North would just go home and "leave their neighbors alone."

In the White House press release immediately following the reprisal, therefore, major emphasis was placed on Hanoi's role in the South:

...these attacks were only made possible by the continuing infiltration of personnel and equipment from North Vietnam. This

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

infiltration markedly increased during 1964 and continues to increase." ... "The key to the situation remains the cessation of infiltration from North Vietnam and the clear indication that it is prepared to cease aggression against its neighbors. 40/

Another major new departure of the 7-8 February strikes was that they were intended to be at least a first step in more directly and actively associating the US with the South Vietnamese in "their" war. Thus while the retaliation was precipitated by the Pleiku incident, it was considered essential to justify it in broader terms -- not merely as a response to a single outrage committed against Americans, but as a response to a series of outrages, committed against South Vietnamese as well as Americans.

Thus, the White House press release and, even more explicitly, the McNamara press briefing of February 7 41/ spoke of three VC attacks, all "ordered and directed by the Hanoi regime," but only one of these was the Pleiku-Camp Holloway raid against U.S. installation. The two others cited in justification of the reprisal were attacks on Vietnamese villages in which, it was carefully pointed out, no American casualties were sustained.

This effort to link the reprisal to VC offenses against both parties was reinforced by having the reprisal strikes conducted by both South Vietnamese and US forces. McNamara's statement heavily stressed the fact that "elements of the U.S. and South Vietnamese Air Forces were directed to launch joint retaliatory attacks..."

By demonstrating that the US was prepared to join with the South Vietnamese in military reprisals against North Vietnam for actions committed against either or both parties in the South, the strikes tended to weaken the policy line, assiduously adhered to up to that time, that the war was essentially a Vietnamese war with US involvement confined to advice and support. Once the US began participating in such military reprisals on a regular basis, it would unavoidably begin to appear as more of a co-belligerent, along with South Vietnam, against the VC and their sponsors in North Vietnam.

The practical significance of this point is obvious. As long as the U.S. maintained the policy line that it was not really directly engaged in the war, it had to deny its forces many proposed military actions in Southeast Asia, and had to impose on itself severe political constraints in its military operations. The abandonment of this policy line as a result of reprisal actions like FLAMING DART would open the way to a much wider range of politically acceptable US military options in Vietnam.

The 7-8 February strikes, however, were only a limited and tentative first step, and far from an irrevocable commitment to the broader course of action they foreshadowed. The governing concept

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

was still "tit-for-tat". The White House statement stressed the phrase "appropriate reprisal action" and, likening it to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, characterized the response as similarly "appropriate and fitting."

The idea of equivalent punishment was conveyed by confining the strikes to a quite limited number of targets plausibly associated with infiltration. Thus the possibility was left open that these reprisals were strictly one-shot operations that would be carried out only in the event of spectacular enemy actions. But the public language was both ominous and ambiguous: "As the U.S. Government has frequently stated, we seek no wider war. Whether or not this course can be maintained lies with the North Vietnamese aggressors." In fact, however, there was little expectation, that the North Vietnamese would "cease their aggression," and every expectation that the U.S. would go beyond a policy of event-associated reprisals. For immediately following the first press release, the White House issued another significant presidential statement, ordering what had long been recommended:

"...I have directed the orderly withdrawal of American dependents from South Vietnam...We have no choice now but to clear the decks and make absolutely clear our continued determination to back South Vietnam..." 42/

And as further indication that much more than a mere occasional reprisal was in the offing, McNamara met with the JCS on the following day to request that they prepare and submit to him their recommendations for an eight-week air strike campaign against infiltration-associated targets in the lower portion of North Vietnam as a sustained reply to any further provocations. 43/

D. An Act of Defiance

The flashing red warning signals -- if that is what they were -- were not heeded by Hanoi. On the contrary, in what was regarded by some observers as a calculated act of defiance, the VC staged another dramatic attack on 10 February, this one against a US enlisted men's billet in Qui Nhon, inflicting the heaviest single loss of American personnel yet. Within 24 hours, US and South Vietnamese aircraft executed the largest retaliatory air strike of the war up to that time. Named FLAMING DART II, 28 VNAF A-1H's and 20 USAF F-100's hit Chap Le. Simultaneously, Navy aircraft struck Chanh Hoa not far from Dong Hoi, just north of the DMZ.

This time, significantly, the strikes were not characterized as a reprisal linked to the immediate incident. Instead, the White House release of February 11, 44/ listed a long series of VC incidents and attacks that had occurred since February 8, most of which were not "spectacular" but quite normal features of the Vietnam war. The statements moreover characterized the US air strikes as a more generalized

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

response to these "further direct provocations by the Hanoi regime," and to these "continued acts of aggression." The words "retaliation" and "reprisal" were carefully avoided and the joint US/GVN statement released in Saigon the same day actually characterized the air attack action for the first time as "air operations."

The change in terminology from "retaliation" or "reprisal" to "response," from a specific set of incidents to "continued aggression," and from a single attack to "air operations" was clearly deliberate. A strict reprisal policy, although permitting the US to strike the North, would have left the initiative in the enemy's hands and would have restricted the US to the kinds of responses that could be represented as equivalent or "fitting." But, more important, the new terminology reflected a conscious U.S. decision to broaden the reprisal concept as gradually and as imperceptibly as possible to accommodate a much wider policy of sustained, steadily intensifying air attacks against North Vietnam, at a rate and on a scale to be determined by the U.S. As will be discussed further in the next section, that decision was being forcefully pressed upon the President by his principal advisers immediately after FLAMING DART I (February 7). Whether the President had tacitly or explicitly accepted this course before FLAMING DART II (February 11), is not recorded. But it would have been important to him politically in any event to play it with a minimum of drama and to preserve maximum flexibility. It seemed sensible to make it all appear as a logical sequence of almost unavoidable steps, to avoid portraying any single move as a watershed or any single decision as irreversible. The February 11 strikes did constitute a much sharper break with past policy than any previous US action in Vietnam; they set the stage for the continuing bombing program that was now to be launched in earnest; but they were presented and discussed publicly in very muted tones.

Some of the President's private comments on the attacks are reported by one of his more perceptive biographers, Philip Geyelin, in the following terms:

His discussion of the first two retaliatory attacks, following Pleiku and Qui Nhon, was almost offhand. To one visitor, he lampooned the 'crisis' tones of the television broadcasters, the long faces, and the grim talk of big, black limousines assembled for weighty policy-making.

They woke us up in the middle of the night, and we woke them up in the middle of the night. Then they did it again, and we did it again, was the way he described it. If he suspected he was on the front edge of a major plunge into a fair-sized ground war in Asia, he hid his concern masterfully, dismissing all the excitement as the sort of thing that happens periodically.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Geyelin gives the President very high marks for his performance:

...his handling of Vietnam in the early months of 1965 was more than just skillful, it was a triumph of international and domestic politics. For if one accepts the need to right the 'equilibrium,' then it cannot be denied that Lyndon Johnson moved to do so with a bare minimum of dissent at home and less foreign opposition than might have been expected. And he did it, at least for a good many months, without giving the Communist Chinese or the Russians provocation in such intolerable degree that they felt obliged to move in any drastic way to the defense of Hanoi. 45/

E. Reactions at Home and Abroad

Official and public reactions to the retaliatory strikes were fairly predictable. In the U.S., as Newsweek put it, the decision "touched off a wave of national concern and international jitters unequalled since the US-Soviet confrontation over the Cuban missile build-up." 46/ Much of the US press expressed serious doubts about where the US was heading in Vietnam. A great majority of the nation's newspapers regarded the strikes as necessary and justified and the notion that Pleiku was a deliberate VC provocation was widely accepted. But many admitted to confusion as to just what U.S. policy in Vietnam was; (e.g., Kansas City Star: "Do we have a specific, unwavering policy or are we improvising from crisis to crisis?" St. Louis Post-Dispatch: "A strike for strike strategy...without any ultimate objective except to hang on in Vietnam, is not much of a policy." New York Times (James Reston): "We do not know what the President has in mind...For the moment we seem to be standing mute in Washington, paralyzed before a great issue and merely digging our thought deeper into the accustomed military rut.")

In Western Europe reactions were less uniform. To the dismay of leftist members of his own Labor Party, the U.K.'s Harold Wilson phoned a message of solid support to President Johnson. Moreover, the London Economist saw the bombing as part of a drama acted out for the benefit of Mr. Kosygin as a warning to all communist countries "that there are limits beyond which the Viet Cong cannot push things in the South without bringing down American reprisals on the North. There is no call to specify exactly what these limits are; but to make it clear that they exist, the shot across Mr. Kosygin's bow was essential." 47/ By contrast, de Gaulle issued a cool statement that the Southeast Asia crisis "cannot be settled by force of arms" and called again for a new Geneva conference to end the war -- a recommendation that was echoed by India's Prime Minister Shastri and U.N. Secretary General U Thant.

The pro-Western nations in Southeast Asia that live in the shadow of Communist China -- Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, Australia --

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

were visibly cheered. 48/ In South Vietnam, General Nguyen Khanh proclaimed that the VNAF reprisal strike after Pleiku marked "the happiest day of my life."

The most interesting reactions, of course, were those of the Bloc countries. As predicted in CIA's October 1964 estimate, 49/ the reactions of the three principal Communist powers to the limited US reprisal strikes were relatively restrained, with both Moscow and Peking promptly and publicly pledging unspecified support and assistance to Hanoi. Beneath the verbiage of condemnation of the U.S. "provocation," however, there was a measure of caution in both pledges. Neither raised the specter of a broad conflict or portrayed the U.S. actions as a threat to "world" peace. Peking's propaganda, though full of bellicosity and bluster, and publicizing huge anti-U.S. rallies organized in China's major cities, carefully avoided threatening any direct Chinese intervention. Thus it warned that, if the U.S. spread the flames of war to the DRV, "the Vietnamese people will, most assuredly, destroy the U.S. aggressors lock, stock, and barrel on their own soil." 50/ The propaganda line also suggested that only actual U.S. invasion of North Vietnam would precipitate direct Chinese intervention in the war.

Moscow's response was even more restrained. "In the face of U.S. actions" the Soviet statement said, the USSR "will be forced, together with its allies and friends, to take further measures to safeguard the security and strengthen the defense capability of the DRV." And it added that "no one should doubt that the Soviet people will fulfill its international duty to the fraternal socialist country." Like Peking, however, it derided U.S. statements that the air strikes were retaliatory, and Soviet media widely publicized international expressions of indignation and popular protests in the USSR. While indicating that "DRV defenses" would be strengthened, some Moscow broadcasts took note of growing interest in the United States and elsewhere for a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. 51/

Hanoi's voluble, heated propaganda reaction to the air strikes pictured the incident as a sequel to previous air and naval "provocations" against the DRV rather than as a move which essentially altered either America's or North Vietnam's positions in the conflict. DRV propaganda hailed the "heroic exploit" of the antiaircraft units and claimed that, in the first raid, 12 planes were downed.

Officially, Hanoi responded in a more carefully worded fashion. A Defense Ministry statement on the 7th warned that the United States must "bear the responsibility" for the "consequences" of its "aggression" and demanded an end to "provocative and war-seeking acts against the DRV and the aggressive war in South Vietnam." Implying that the air raids would not deter future rebel aggression in the South, the DRV Government declared that "the Vietnamese people will never shrink before any threat of the United States" and will "further increase their forces and step up their struggle." The Viet Cong's Liberation Radio on the 8th protested the air raids and said they had "heightened the determination of our people throughout the country to fight and win." 52/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

V. "SUSTAINED REPRISAL" AND ITS VARIANTS -- ADVOCACY SHIFTS INTO HIGH GEAR

A. The McGeorge Bundy Recommendation

Pleiku, and the first FLAMING DART reprisal, caught the McGeorge Bundy group (which also included Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton, White House Aide Chester Cooper, and Chairman of the Vietnam Coordinating Group Leonard Unger) in the midst of intensive discussions with the US Mission in Saigon. These discussions covered the whole range of US-Vietnam policy options, particularly the complex issue of future pressures on the North. Immediately following the reprisal decision of February 7, the group returned to Washington via Air Force One. Enroute and airborne, they drafted a memorandum to the President which was intended to reflect in some degree the consensus reached among the Bundy group and with the U.S. Mission in Saigon. 53/ But in an unmistakable way, the memorandum also represents a highly personal Bundy assessment and point of view. For this reason, and because of its unique articulation of a rationale for the ROLLING THUNDER policy, it is reproduced here in considerable detail.

The Summary Conclusions, presented at the very outset of the memorandum, set the tone of the more detailed elaboration that is to follow:

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

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

The policy of graduated and continuing reprisal outlined in Annex A is the most promising course available, in my judgment. That judgment is shared by all who accompanied me from Washington, and I think by all members of the country team.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The events of the last twenty-four hours have produced a practicable point of departure for this policy of reprisal, and for the removal of U.S. dependents. They may also have catalyzed the formation of a new Vietnamese government. If so, the situation may be at a turning point.

There is much that can and should be done to support and to supplement our present effort, while adding sustained reprisals. But I want to stress one important general conclusion which again is shared by all members of my party: the U.S. mission is composed of outstanding men, and U.S. policy within Vietnam is mainly right and well directed. None of the special solutions or criticisms put forward with zeal by individual reformers in government or in the press is of major importance, and many of them are flatly wrong. No man is perfect, and not every tactical step of recent months has been perfectly chosen, but when you described the Americans in Vietnam as your first team, you were right.

After a brief description of the general situation in Vietnam as the Bundy group found it, the memorandum explains the crucial question of whether and to what degree a stable government is a necessity for the successful prosecution of U.S. policy in Vietnam. It is well to bear in mind that the achievement of considerable government stability had been made, in all previous "pressure guidance," a sine qua non of any transition to Phase II action against the North. And yet GVN stability continued to be a most elusive goal. Bundy now seemed to be arguing that the U.S. may have been insisting on a more perfect government than was really necessary, at least in the short run:

For immediate purposes -- and especially for the initiation of reprisal policy, we believe that the government need be no stronger than it is today with General Khanh as the focus of raw power while a weak caretaker government goes through the motions. Such a government can execute military decisions and it can give formal political support to joint US/GVN policy. That is about all it can do.

In the longer run, it is necessary that a government be established which will in one way or another be able to maintain its political authority against all challenges over a longer time than the governments of the last year and a half.

The composition and direction of such a government is a most difficult problem, and we do not wholly agree with the mission in our estimate of its nature.

The mood of the mission with respect to the prospect of obtaining such a government is one of pessimism and frustration. This is only natural in terms of the events of the past many weeks...

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Specifically, we believe that General Khanh, with all his faults, is by long odds the outstanding military man currently in sight -- and the most impressive personality generally. We do not share the conclusion of Ambassador Taylor that he must somehow be removed from the military and political scene.

There are strong reasons for the Ambassador's total lack of confidence in Khanh. At least twice Khanh has acted in ways that directly spoiled Ambassador Taylor's high hopes for December. When he abolished the High National Council he undercut the prospect of the stable government needed for Phase II action against the North. In January he overthrew Huong just when the latter, in the Embassy's view, was about to succeed in putting the bonzes in their place...

...our principal reasons for opposing any sharp break with Khanh is that we see no one else in sight with anything like his ability to combine military authority with some sense of politics.

Bundy also differed from the Embassy on the necessity of "facing down" the Buddhist leaders, believing instead that they should be "incorporated" into GVN affairs rather than being "confronted." He stressed the significance of these differences, but then generously endorsed the Mission's overall relationship to and handling of the GVN.

Having registered these two immediate and important differences of emphasis, we should add that in our judgment the mission has acted at about the right level of general involvement in the problem of Vietnamese government-making. American advice is sought by all elements, and all try to bend it to their own ends. The mission attempts to keep before all elements the importance of stable government, and it quietly presses the value of those who are known to be good, solid, able ministerial timber...

...It is important that the mission maintain a constant and active concern with the politics of government-making. This it is doing.

Bundy then went on to pay obeisance to the need for a stronger pacification program and for greater recognition that the Vietnamese need "a sense of positive hope":

If we suppose that new hopes are raised -- at least temporarily -- by a reprisal program, and we support further that a government somewhat better than the bare minimum is established, the most urgent order of business will then be the improvement and broadening of the pacification program, especially in its non-military elements...

...Vietnamese talk is full of the need for 'revolution.' Vietnamese practice is empty of action to match the talk --

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

so much so that the word 'revolution' sometimes seems to have no real meaning. Yet in fact there is plainly a deep and strong yearning among the young and the unprivileged for a new and better social order. This is what the Buddhist leaders are groping toward; this is what the students and young Turk generals are seeking. This yearning does not find an adequate response in American policy as Vietnamese see it. This is one cause of latent anti-American feeling. We only perceived this problem toward the end of our visit. We think it needs urgent further attention. We make no present recommendations. We do believe that over the long pull our military and political firmness must be matched by our political and economic support for the hopes that are embodied to Vietnamese in the word 'revolution.'

Bundy harbored no illusions concerning the enemy's ability and determination:

The prospect in Vietnam is grim. The energy and persistence of the Viet Cong are astonishing. They can appear anywhere -- and at almost any time. They have accepted extraordinary losses and they come back for more. They show skill in their sneak attacks and ferocity when cornered. Yet the weary country does not want them to win.

There are a host of things the Vietnamese need to do better and areas in which we need to help them. The place where we can help most is in the clarity and firmness of our own commitment to what is in fact as well as in rhetoric a common cause.

Finally, Bundy explained the central rationale of his recommendations:

There is one grave weakness in our posture in Vietnam which is within our own power to fix -- and that is a widespread belief that we do not have the will and force and patience and determination to take the necessary action and stay the course.

This is the overriding reason for our present recommendation of a policy of sustained reprisal. Once such a policy is put in force, we shall be able to speak in Vietnam on many topics and in many ways, with growing force and effectiveness.

One final word. At its very best the struggle in Vietnam will be long. It seems to us important that this fundamental fact be made clear and our understanding of it be made clear

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

to our own people and to the people of Vietnam. Too often in the past we have conveyed the impression that we expect an early solution when those who live with this war know that no early solution is possible. It is our own belief that the people of the United States have the necessary will to accept and to execute a policy that rests upon the reality that there is no short cut to success in South Vietnam."

Appended to the Bundy memorandum as Annex A is a detailed, carefully formulated explanation of his "sustained reprisal" policy, including specific action recommendations. Because of its explicitness and clarity, it is reproduced in full:

"A POLICY OF SUSTAINED REPRISAL

"I. Introductory

"We believe that the best available way of increasing our chance of success in Vietnam is the development and execution of a policy of sustained reprisal against North Vietnam -- a policy in which air and naval action against the North is justified by and related to the whole Viet Cong campaign of violence and terror in the South.

"While we believe that the risks of such a policy are acceptable, we emphasize that its costs are real. It implies significant U.S. air losses even if no full air war is joined, and it seems likely that it would eventually require an extensive and costly effort against the whole air defense system of North Vietnam. U.S. casualties would be higher -- and more visible to American feelings -- than those sustained in the struggle in South Vietnam.

"Yet measured against the costs of defeat in Vietnam, this program seems cheap. And even if it fails to turn the tide -- as it may -- the value of the effort seems to us to exceed its cost.

"II. Outline of the Policy

"1. In partnership with the Government of Vietnam, we should develop and exercise the option to retaliate against any VC act of violence to persons or property.

"2. In practice, we may wish at the outset to relate our reprisals to those acts of relatively high visibility such as the Pleiku incident. Later, we might retaliate against the assassination of a province chief, but not necessarily the murder of a hamlet official; we might retaliate against a grenade thrown into a crowded cafe in Saigon, but not necessarily to a shot fired in a small shop in the countryside.

"3. Once a program of reprisals is clearly underway, it should not be necessary to connect each specific act against North Vietnam to a

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

particular outrage in the South. It should be possible, for example, to publish weekly lists of outrages in the South and to have it clearly understood that these outrages are the cause of such action against the North as may be occurring in the current period. Such a more generalized pattern of reprisal would remove much of the difficulty involved in finding precisely matching targets in response to specific atrocities. Even in such a more general pattern, however, it would be important to insure that the general level of reprisal action remained in close correspondence with the level of outrages in the South. We must keep it clear at every stage both to Hanoi and to the world, that our reprisals will be reduced or stopped when outrages in the South are reduced or stopped -- and that we are not attempting to destroy or conquer North Vietnam.

"4. In the early stages of such a course, we should take the appropriate occasion to make clear our firm intent to undertake reprisals on any further acts, major or minor, that appear to us and the GVN as indicating Hanoi's support. We would announce that our two governments have been patient and forbearing in the hope that Hanoi would come to its senses without the necessity of our having to take further action; but the outrages continue and now we must react against those who are responsible; we will not provoke; we will not use our force indiscriminately; but we can no longer sit by in the face of repeated acts of terror and violence for which the DRV is responsible.

"5. Having once made this announcement, we should execute our reprisal policy with as low a level of public noise as possible. It is to our interest that our acts should be seen -- but we do not wish to boast about them in ways that make it hard for Hanoi to shift its ground. We should instead direct maximum attention to the continuing acts of violence which are the cause of our continuing reprisals.

"6. This reprisal policy should begin at a low level. Its level of force and pressure should be increased only gradually -- and as indicated above it should be decreased if VC terror visibly decreases. The object would not be to "win" an air war against Hanoi, but rather to influence the course of the struggle in the South.

"7. At the same time it should be recognized that in order to maintain the power of reprisal without risk of excessive loss, an "air war" may in fact be necessary. We should therefore be ready to develop a separate justification for energetic flak suppression and if necessary for the destruction of Communist air power. The essence of such an explanation should be that these actions are intended solely to insure the effectiveness of a policy of reprisal, and in no sense represent any intent to wage offensive war against the North. These distinctions should not be difficult to develop.

"8. It remains quite possible, however, that this reprisal policy would get us quickly into the level of military activity contemplated in the so-called Phase II of our December planning. It may even get us

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

beyond this level with Hanoi and Peiping, if there is a Communist counter-action. We and the GVN should also be prepared for a spurt of VC terrorism, especially in urban areas, that would dwarf anything yet experienced. These are the risks of any action. They should be carefully reviewed -- but we believe them to be acceptable.

"9. We are convinced that the political values of reprisal require a continuous operation. Episodic responses geared on a one-for-one basis to "spectacular" outrages would lack the persuasive force of sustained pressure. More important still, they would leave it open to the Communists to avoid reprisals entirely by giving up only a small element of their own program. The Gulf of Tonkin affair produced a sharp upturn in morale in South Vietnam. When it remained an isolated episode, however, there was a severe relapse. It is the great merit of the proposed scheme that to stop it the Communists would have to stop enough of their activity in the South to permit the probable success of a determined pacification effort.

"III. Expected Effect of Sustained Reprisal Policy

"1. We emphasize that our primary target in advocating a reprisal policy is the improvement of the situation in South Vietnam. Action against the North is usually urged as a means of affecting the will of Hanoi to direct and support the VC. We consider this an important but longer-range purpose. The immediate and critical targets are in the South -- in the minds of the South Vietnamese and in the minds of the Viet Cong cadres.

"2. Predictions of the effect of any given course of action upon the states of mind of people are difficult. It seems very clear that if the United States and the Government of Vietnam join in a policy of reprisal, there will be a sharp immediate increase in optimism in the South, among nearly all articulate groups. The Mission believes and our own conversations confirm -- that in all sectors of Vietnamese opinion there is a strong belief that the United States could do much more if it would, and that they are suspicious of our failure to use more of our obviously enormous power. At least in the short run, the reaction to reprisal policy would be very favorable.

"3. This favorable reaction should offer opportunity for increased American influence in pressing for a more effective government -- at least in the short run. Joint reprisals would imply military planning in which the American role would necessarily be controlling, and this new relation should add to our bargaining power in other military efforts -- and conceivably on a wider plane as well if a more stable government is formed. We have the whip hand in reprisals as we do not in other fields.

"4. The Vietnamese increase in hope could well increase the readiness of Vietnamese factions themselves to join together in forming a more effective government.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"5. We think it plausible that effective and sustained reprisals, even in a low key, would have a substantial depressing effect upon the morale of Viet Cong cadres in South Vietnam. This is the strong opinion of CIA Saigon. It is based upon reliable reports of the initial Viet Cong reaction to the Gulf of Tonkin episode, and also upon the solid general assessment that the determination of Hanoi and the apparent timidity of the mighty United States are both major items in Viet Cong confidence.

"6. The long-run effect of reprisals in the South is far less clear. It may be that like other stimulants, the value of this one would decline over time. Indeed the risk of this result is large enough so that we ourselves believe that a very major effort all along the line should be made in South Vietnam to take full advantage of the immediate stimulus of reprisal policy in its early stages. Our object should be to use this new policy to effect a visible upward turn in pacification, in governmental effectiveness, in operations against the Viet Cong, and in the whole US/GVN relationship. It is changes in these areas that can have enduring long-term effects.

"7. While emphasizing the importance of reprisals in the South, we do not exclude the impact on Hanoi. We believe, indeed, that it is of great importance that the level of reprisal be adjusted rapidly and visibly to both upward and downward shifts in the level of Viet Cong offenses. We want to keep before Hanoi the carrot of our desisting as well as the stick of continued pressure. We also need to conduct the application of the force so that there is always a prospect of worse to come.

"8. We cannot assert that a policy of sustained reprisal will succeed in changing the course of the contest in Vietnam. It may fail, and we cannot estimate the odds of success with any accuracy -- they may be somewhere between 25% and 75%. What we can say is that even if it fails, the policy will be worth it. At a minimum it will damp down the charge that we did not do all that we could have done, and this charge will be important in many countries, including our own. Beyond that, a reprisal policy -- to the extent that it demonstrates U.S. willingness to employ this new norm in counter-insurgency -- will set a higher price for the future upon all adventures of guerrilla warfare, and it should therefore somewhat increase our ability to deter such adventures. We must recognize, however, that that ability will be gravely weakened if there is failure for any reason in Vietnam.

"IV. Present Action Recommendations

"1. This general recommendation was developed in intensive discussions in the days just before the attacks on Pleiku. These attacks and our reaction to them have created an ideal opportunity for the prompt development and execution of sustained reprisals. Conversely, if no such

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

policy is now developed, we face the grave danger that Pleiku, like the Gulf of Tonkin, may be a short-run stimulant and a long-term depressant. We therefore recommend that the necessary preparations be made for continuing reprisals. The major necessary steps to be taken appear to us to be the following:

- "(1) We should complete the evacuation of dependents.
- "(2) We should quietly start the necessary westward deployments of back-up contingency forces.
- "(3) We should develop and refine a running catalogue of Viet Cong offenses which can be published regularly and related clearly to our own reprisals. Such a catalogue should perhaps build on the foundation of an initial White Paper.
- "(4) We should initiate joint planning with the GVN on both the civil and military level. Specifically, we should give a clear and strong signal to those now forming a government that we will be ready for this policy when they are.
- "(5) We should develop the necessary public and diplomatic statements to accompany the initiation and continuation of this program.
- "(6) We should insure that a reprisal program is matched by renewed public commitment to our family of programs in the South, so that the central importance of the southern struggle may never be neglected.
- "(7) We should plan quiet diplomatic communications of the precise meaning of what we are and are not doing, to Hanoi, to Peking and to Moscow.
- "(8) We should be prepared to defend and to justify this new policy by concentrating attention in every forum upon its cause -- the aggression in the South.
- "(9) We should accept discussion on these terms in any forum, but we should not now accept the idea of negotiations of any sort except on the basis of a stand down of Viet Cong violence. A program of sustained reprisal, with its direct link to Hanoi's continuing aggressive actions in the South will not involve us in nearly the level of international recrimination which would be precipitated by a go-North program which was not so connected. For this reason the international pressures for negotiation should be quite manageable."

B. The Taylor Conception of "Graduated Reprisals"

At about the same time that the McGeorge Bundy memorandum was being submitted to the President, Ambassador Taylor, in a cable from

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Saigon, 54/ conveyed his own views concerning a future reprisal program to Washington. Not surprisingly, (since they had exchanged ideas extensively in Saigon) Taylor's concept closely paralleled Bundy's in many of its features. But in at least one significant respect it diverged sharply. Whereas Bundy's main objective was to influence the course of the struggle in the South (providing a boost to GVN morale and cohesion, affording an opportunity for increased American influence upon and bargaining power with the GVN, and exerting a depressing effect upon VC cadres), Taylor's principal aim was "to bring increasing pressure on the DRV to cease its intervention."

The areas of agreement between Taylor and Bundy were considerable. Like Bundy, he recommended "a measured, controlled sequence of actions against the DRV taken in reprisal for DRV-inspired actions in South Vietnam... ..carried out jointly with the GVN and ... directed solely against DRV military targets and infiltration routes..." The reprisals could be "initiated on the basis of a general catalogue or package of VC outrages, no one particularly grave itself..." and could be varied "with the general level of VC outrages in SVN or, if we so desired, progressively raised.... Thus it would be tantamount to the so-called Phase II escalation, but justified on the basis of retaliation." Like Bundy, he believed "that we should limit US/GVN publicity to the bare minimum..." and he also cautioned that "we should attempt to avoid in the present situation a general letdown in morale and spirit which followed our action in the Tonkin Gulf."

But Taylor's concept was much more directly aimed at bringing pressures to bear against the DRV, to give them "serious doubts as to their chances for ultimate success" and to cause them to cease their aggression and to accede to a rigorously enforced 1954/1962 Geneva-type settlement. 55/ It was this focus on the North, rather than a rededication of the GVN to the struggle in the South, that Taylor considered to be the real benefit of a reprisal policy. Integrating the Vietnamese in a program against the DRV, he believed, would have an exhilarating effect which, if exploited early "could lead to a greater sense of purpose and direction both in the government and the military and awaken new hope for eventual victory on the part of the Vietnamese people."

In a subsequent cable, 56/ Taylor spelled out his "graduated reprisal" concept in a more orderly fashion:

In review of the rationale for concept of graduated reprisals we are of the opinion that, in order of importance, it should have the following objectives:

- (a) The will of Hanoi leaders;
- (b) GVN morale; and
- (c) Physical damage to installations having some bearing on the DRV ability to support VC.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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

Effect of the physical destruction of material objects and infliction of casualties will not, in our judgment, have a decisive bearing upon the ability of DRV to support VC. However, degree of damage and number of casualties inflicted gauge the impact of our operations on Hanoi leadership and hence are important as a measure of their discomfort.

...We should keep our response actions controllable and optional to maximum degree possible so that we can act or withhold action when and as we choose. This need for flexibility argues strongly for vagueness in defining criteria for situations justifying retaliation and for retention of freedom of action to make ad hoc decisions in light of our interests at the moment. But in any case, complete flexibility will not be possible...

Assuming that we have achieved control and flexibility, we will then need to think of the tempo which we wish to communicate to the retaliatory program, with primary consideration given to effect of the program on Hanoi leadership. It seems clear to us that there should be a gradual, orchestrated acceleration of tempo measured in terms of frequency, size, number and/or geographical location of the reprisal strikes and of related activities such as BARREL ROLL and 34-A. An upward trend in any or all of these forms of intensity will convey signals which, in combination, should present to the DRV leaders a vision of inevitable, ultimate destruction if they do not change their ways. The exact rate of acceleration is a matter of judgment but we consider, roughly speaking, that each successive week should include some new act on our part to increase pressure on Hanoi...

We do not believe that our reprisal program will lead the GVN to believe that we have taken over their war and that they can reduce their anti-VC activities. We hope that the opposite will be the effect and the retaliatory actions in the North will give impulsion to the defensive efforts in the South. However, the Dept's fear can certainly not be ruled out and we shall watch closely the GVN reaction to the program as it unfolds."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

One of Ambassador Taylor's major concerns was that, if a graduated reprisals program were adopted, it would be necessary to begin discussions with the GVN to seek agreement on mutually acceptable terms for the ultimate settlement of the conflict. Taylor thought of this as a process of education by which he would guide the GVN towards formulating a "framework of demands to be made on the DRV as well as the general negotiating procedures." He outlined his proposed "terms for cessation of our reprisal attacks" as follows: 57/

A. Demands

1. DRV return to strict observance of 1954 accords with respect SVN and the 1962 agreement with respect to Laos -- that is, stop infiltration, and bring about a cessation of VC armed insurgency. (With respect to Laos strictly observe the 1962 accords with respect to Laos, including the withdrawal of all Viet Minh forces and personnel from Laos and recognize that the freedom of movement granted therein in Laos under those accords is not subject to veto or interference by any of the parties in Laos.)

B. In return and subject in each instance to a judgment that DRV is complying faithfully and effectively:

1. U.S. will return to 1954 accords with respect to military personnel in SVN and GVN would be willing to enter into trade talks looking toward normalization of economic relations between DRV and GVN.

2. Subject to faithful compliances by DRV with 1954 accords, U.S. and GVN would give assurances that they would not use force or support the use of force by any other party to upset the accords with respect to the DRV.

3. Within the framework of the 1954 accords, the GVN would permit VC desiring to do so to return to the DRV without their arms and would grant amnesty to those peacefully laying down their arms and desiring to remain in SVN.

C. If and when Hanoi indicates its acceptance of foregoing conditions, careful consideration must be given to immediate subsequent procedures which will avoid danger of: (a) becoming involved in a cease fire vis-a-vis the DRV and/or the VC accompanied by strung-out negotiations; (b) making conditions so stringent as to be unworkable from practical point of view. Probably best procedure would be to have the GVN and DRV meet in the DMZ at the military level under ICC auspices with U.S. observers to reach agreement mechanics of carrying out understanding while action against the VC and DRV continues, at

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

least in principle. RIG would have to be associated with these negotiations at some point.

It is evident from these and similar tough settlement terms and cessation "demands" that were being discussed between Saigon and Washington at that time that there was a real expectation that the kinds of reprisal pressures contemplated would inflict such pain or threat of pain upon the DRV that it would be compelled to order a stand-down of Viet Cong violence and accept conditions that, from their point of view, were tantamount to surrender. Such a view is even more clearly implicit in the comments and proposals on reprisal programs emanating from the U.S. military leadership.

C. CINCPAC's "Graduated Pressures" Philosophy

Admiral Sharp, commenting on Ambassador Taylor's reprisal and negotiating concepts, called attention to the need to make the reprisal program a very forceful one, if the DRV was to be persuaded to accede to a cessation on US terms:

While it may be politically desirable to speak publicly in terms of a "graduated reprisal" program, I would hope that we are thinking, and will act, in terms of a "graduated pressures" philosophy which has more of a connotation of steady, relentless movement toward our objective of convincing Hanoi and Peiping of the prohibitive cost of them of their program of subversion, insurgency and aggression in SEAsia.

If a firm decision is made to embark upon a graduated pressures program, the recommendation contained in Taylor's Feb 11 message/ to undertake discussions with the RVN reference joint US/GVN military actions is most necessary. Failure to develop firm arrangements concerning roles and responsibilities could result in over reliance on the U.S. contribution to the war effort, and perhaps GVN resorting to rash military actions from which we would have to bail them out.

There is no question of the desirability of concurrently educating the GVN, as also proposed in Ref'b, toward formulation of war objectives, demands and negotiating procedures to be employed against the DRV. I believe that such an educational process, combined with a graduated military pressures program will further contribute to GVN stability.

We must be certain that we are dealing from a posture of strength before we sit down at the bargaining table. Successful direct increasing military pressures against NVN must be complemented by a reversal of the trend toward VC success within RVN. We must also exhibit complete confidence in our

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

ability to win in Vietnam and so indicate by our willingness to rely on our military superiority if need be.

We must not be driven to premature discussions with the DRV in our eagerness to find a solution to the Southeast Asian problem. We should continue our military pressures, making (our) general objectives publicly known, while awaiting some sign that the DRV is ready to negotiate towards achievement of those objectives...

...Finally, any political program which is designed to formulate terms and procedures for reaching agreement on cessation of a graduated military pressures program, will be successful in proportion to the effectiveness of the military pressures program itself. 58/

D. JCS Eight-Week Program

As these discussions continued, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, responding to a McNamara request of 8 February, sent to the Secretary of Defense their recommendations 59/ for an initial program of military actions against the DRV, extending over a period of eight weeks. In accordance with McNamara's instructions, the program was to be confined generally to targets along Route 7 and south of the 19th parallel, was to employ both RVN and US forces, and was to be primarily a plan for air strikes. Since it was so constrained, the JCS program does not fully reflect the preferences of the Joint Chiefs. But it does reveal something of their thinking. The context in which the program would be undertaken is described as follows:

It is visualized that the initial overt air strikes of this program will have been undertaken as a retaliation in response to a provocative act by Viet Cong or DRV forces against US or RVN personnel or installations. Successive overt operations to provide sustained pressures and progressive destruction will be continued on the plausible justification of further provocations, which on the basis of recent past experience seem quite likely to exist. As this program continues the realistic need for precise event-association in this reprisal context will progressively diminish. A wide range of activities are within the scope of what may be stated to be provocations justifying reprisal.

The program called for two to four US-VNAF strikes per week, initially against targets along Route 7 south of the 19th parallel and near the Laos border. Specifically, the program was conceived as follows:

The air attacks are scheduled for the first eight weeks at the rate of four fixed targets a week...These initial targets are located South of the 19th parallel with the exception of

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Target 89, an Armed Route Reconnaissance of Route 7, in the DRV close to the Laos border. BARREL ROLL missions in Laos will be coordinated with air strikes in the DRV near the Laos border to ensure maximum effectiveness.

a. The targets are attacked in the order of ascending risk to attacking forces and are attacked at a frequency that assures that continuous and regular pressure is maintained against the DRV. Authority should be delegated to CINCPAC to select alternate weather targets from the list of previously approved targets for the eight weeks program. Subsequent weekly operations would be adjusted as appropriate when alternate targets are attacked.

b. Airfields north of the 19th parallel are not scheduled for attack in the first eight weeks. However, if, during the scheduled attacks in this program, DRV or CHICOM aircraft attempt intercept of US/RVN forces, the communist air threat involved should be eliminated. The program of graduated pressures would then have reached a higher scale of escalation and would require reorientation.

The program also provided for naval gunfire bombardment and for continuation of already ongoing activity, including 34A operations, resumption of DESOTO Patrols, and authorization for ground cross border operations.

To carry out this program, the JCS wished to deploy about 325 more aircraft to the Western Pacific to deter or cope with any escalation that might result. This would include dispatch of 30 B-52's to Guam, deployment of 9 more USAF tactical fighter squadrons and a fourth aircraft carrier. Some Marine and Army units would go to Thailand, and other units would be alerted.

As for the risks of escalation, the JCS considered these as manageable:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the DRV, Communist China, and the Soviet Union will make every effort through propaganda and diplomatic moves to halt the US attacks. The DRV also will take all actions to defend itself, and open, overt aggression in South Vietnam and Laos by the DRV might occur. In addition, the mere initiation of the new US policy almost certainly would not lead Hanoi to restrain the Viet Cong; Hanoi would probably elect to maintain the very intense levels of activity of the past few days. However, if the United States persevered in the face of threats and international pressures, and as the degree of damage inflicted on North Vietnam increased, the chances of a reduction in Viet Cong activity would rise.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

They further believe that the Chinese communists would be reluctant to become directly involved in the fighting in Southeast Asia; however, as the number and severity of US attacks against the DRV increase, they probably would feel an increased compulsion to take some dramatic action to counter the impact of US pressures. There is a fair chance that Peiping would introduce limited numbers of Chinese ground forces as "volunteers" into North Vietnam, and/or northern Laos, intending to raise the specter of further escalation, to underline its commitment to assist the North Vietnamese, and to challenge the Soviets to extend corresponding support. They also believe that the probable Soviet response to these US courses of action would consist both of a vigorous diplomatic and propaganda effort to bring the United States to the conference table and the provision of military support to North Vietnam. While the extent and nature of the latter are difficult to predict, it almost certainly would include anti-aircraft artillery and radars. In order to provide a more effective defense against the US air attacks, North Vietnam would probably press for surface-to-air missiles. The chances are about even that the Soviets would agree to provide some SA-2 defenses, but they would do so in ways calculated to minimize the initial risks to them. By providing the necessary Soviet personnel in the guise of 'technicians,' the USSR could preserve the option of ignoring any Soviet casualties. In the event the DRV and Communist Chinese openly undertake aggressive actions, the United States and its allies can deal with them adequately....

It is the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the program herein proposed will demonstrate to the DRV that continuation of its direction and support of insurgencies will lead progressively to more serious punishment. If the insurgency continues with active DRV support, strikes against the DRV will be extended with intensified efforts against targets north of the 19th parallel.

While the Joint Chiefs recommended approval of the recommendations, not all considered them adequate. General McConnell, Air Force Chief of Staff, believed that the much heavier air strike recommendations made by the JCS in late 1964 were more appropriate than the mild actions now proposed. 60/ General Wheeler backed deployment of more USAF and other air units but pressed for an integrated air program against the North's transportation system, especially railroads. He also believed, along with General Harold K. Johnson, Army Chief of Staff, that three U.S. ground divisions might have to be sent to Southeast Asia. The JCS chairman directed the Joint Staff to examine the possibility of placing one or two of these divisions in northeast Thailand and a third, augmented by allied personnel, south of the demilitarized zone in South Vietnam.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Some of these JCS recommendations were quickly accepted, particularly those having to do with Air Force deployments. Thus the Administration approved the dispatch, from 11 to 13 February, of 30 B-52's to Guam and 30 KC-135's to Okinawa. Designated Arc Light, these bombers and tankers of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) initially were earmarked (though never used) for high-altitude, all-weather bombing of important targets in the North. 61/

The particular JCS air strike program, on the other hand, was never adopted. The detailed JCS target proposals did figure prominently in the intensive highest-level reprisal and pressures planning that continued during the succeeding weeks and months, but that planning was conducted essentially on an ad hoc basis, strike by strike, and did not at this stage embrace a multi-week program.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

VI. INITIATION OF "ROLLING THUNDER" -- 18 DAYS OF MANEUVER AND DELAY

A. The Presidential Decision and Taylor's Response

The formal Presidential decision to inaugurate what eventually emerged as the ROLLING THUNDER program was made on Sunday, February 13. It was reported to Ambassador Taylor in a NODIS cable 62/ drafted in the White House and transmitted to Saigon late that afternoon. The full text of the message follows:

The President today approved the following program for immediate future actions in follow-up decision he reported to you in Deptel 1653. [The first FLAMING DART reprisal decision.]

1. We will intensify by all available means the program of pacification within SVN.

2. We will execute a program of measured and limited air action jointly with GVN against selected military targets in DRV remaining south of 19th parallel until further notice.

FYI. Our current expectation is that these attacks might come about once or twice a week and involve two or three targets on each day of operation. END FYI.

3. We will announce this policy of measured action in general terms and at the same time, we will go to UN Security Council to make clear case that aggressor is Hanoi. We will also make it plain that we are ready and eager for 'talks' to bring aggression to an end.

4. We believe this 3-part program must be concerted with GVN, and we currently expect to announce it by Presidential statement directly after next authorized air action. We believe this action should take place as early as possible next week.

5. You are accordingly instructed to seek immediate GVN agreement on this program. You are authorized to emphasize our conviction that announcement of readiness to talk is stronger diplomatic position than awaiting inevitable summons to Security Council by third parties. We would hope to have appropriate GVN concurrence by Monday [Feb 14th] if possible here.

In presenting above to GVN, you should draw fully, as you see fit, on following arguments:

a. We are determined to continue with military actions regardless of Security Council deliberations and any 'talks' or negotiations that may ensue, unless and until Hanoi has brought

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

its aggression to an end. Our demand would be that they cease infiltration and all forms of support and also the activity they are directing in the south.

b. We consider the UN Security Council initiative, following another strike, essential if we are to avoid being faced with really damaging initiatives by the USSR or perhaps by such powers as India, France, or even the UN.

c. At an early point in the UN Security Council initiative, we would expect to see calls for the DRV to appear in the UN. If they failed to appear, as in August, this will make doubly clear that it is they who are refusing to desist, and our position in pursuing military actions against the DRV would be strengthened. For same reason we would now hope GVN itself would appear at UN and work closely with US.

d. With or without Hanoi, we have every expectation that any 'talks' that may result from our Security Council initiative would in fact go on for many weeks or perhaps months and would above all focus constantly on the cessation of Hanoi's aggression as the precondition to any cessation of military action against the DRV. We further anticipate that any detailed discussions about any possible eventual form of agreement returning to the essentials of the 1954 Accords would be postponed and would be subordinated to the central issue.

For your private guidance, the following draft language is under consideration for Presidential announcement:

BEGIN QUOTE:

The aggression has continued. It has continued against the Vietnamese, and it has continued against Americans. In support of the independence of Vietnam, in the service of our nation, and in fulfillment of the solemn public obligation of our nation, and in our individual and collective self-defense, the Government of the United States, with the Government of Vietnam, has now decided that further action must be taken.

The actions we have agreed upon are three:

First and most important, we will continue and will intensify still further our campaign against terror and violence in South Vietnam itself. The establishment of civil peace and the disarming of the Communist forces are the first order of business for both our Governments. Our military and police actions will be increasingly energetic and effective. We will also strengthen and enlarge our efforts to move forward with the peaceful development of a society set free from fear. We will never make

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

the mistake of assuming that there is any substitute for victory against aggression where it shows its open face -- inside the borders of South Vietnam itself.

Second -- and at the same time -- we will carry out measured but effective actions against military targets in North Vietnam. These actions will be reported to the United Nations Security Council under the Provisions of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter -- and each such report will include a full account of the continuing acts of aggression which make our actions necessary. These actions will stop when the aggression stops.

Third, we will press with urgency for talks designed to bring an end to the aggression and its threat to peace. I have today instructed Ambassador Stevenson to seek such action urgently, in the Security Council of the United Nations, and if that body should be hamstrung by any veto, we shall then press for talks in another appropriate forum. We believe that in any such talks the first object must be an end of aggression, and we believe that the government in Hanoi must be brought to the conference room. Our common purpose -- and our only purpose -- is to restore the peace and domestic tranquility which others have so savagely attacked. END QUOTE

Several aspects of the message are of interest. First, it features intensified pacification as the first order of business and as a major point in the contemplated Presidential announcement. This stress on action in the South reflected a serious concern at high levels in the White House and the State Department at that time, that a growing pre-occupation with action against the North would be likely to cause the US Mission and the GVN leadership to neglect the all-important struggle within the borders of South Vietnam. Second, the description of the air strike program in the message is extremely cursory, suggesting that the President at this time still wished to preserve as much flexibility as possible concerning the future scope and character of the program. And third, the message reveals the President's intention, as of that date, to take the DRV aggression issue and the US bombing response promptly before the UN Security Council -- an intention that was dropped several days later in favor of a quite different approach, namely the UK/USSR Co-Chairmen initiative recounted below. In actuality, instead of mounting a major UN approach, the President contented himself initially with a brief public statement 63/ of US objectives in Vietnam, which formed the keynote of the official line, and was to be frequently quoted by Administration officials in subsequent weeks:

As I have said so many, many times, and other Presidents ahead of me have said, our purpose, our objective there is clear. That purpose and that objective is to join in the defense and protection of freedom of a brave people who are under attack that is controlled and that is directed from outside their country.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

We have no ambition there for ourselves. We seek no dominion. We seek no conquest. We seek no wider war. But we must all understand that we will persist in the defense of freedom and our continuing actions will be those which are justified and those that are made necessary by the continuing aggression of others.

These actions will be measured and fitting and adequate. Our stamina and the stamina of the American people is equal to the task.

Ambassador Taylor received the news of the President's new program with enthusiasm. In his response, however, he explained the difficulties he faced in obtaining authentic GVN concurrence "in the condition of virtual non-government" which existed in Saigon at that moment. The Vietnamese Armed Forces Council had arrogated unto itself the authority of appointing the Chief of State and the Premier, and had left him to his own devices in trying to form a cabinet. Any GVN concurrence that Taylor could obtain would have to be a consensus of a lame-duck acting prime minister, a widely mistrusted military commander-in-chief, a prime-minister-designate with uncertain prospects, and assorted other power figures in a foundering caretaker government. This Alice-in-Wonderland atmosphere notwithstanding, Taylor was undaunted:

It will be interesting to observe the effect of our proposal on the internal political situation here. I will use the occasion to emphasize that a dramatic change is occurring in U.S. policy, one highly favorable to GVN interests but demanding a parallel dramatic change of attitude on the part of the GVN. Now is the time to install the best possible government as we are clearly approaching a climax in the next few months. The U.S. Mission and the GVN will have serious problems to work out together, many of them complicated matters in the field of foreign affairs where the GVN must strengthen its professional representation. We need the first team and we need it fast.

There is just a chance that the vision of possible victory may decide Khanh to take over the government at this juncture. Alternately, it may create some measure of national unity which will facilitate the task of Quat or of any other Prime Minister who succeeds in forming a new government. 64/

Quat's chances for creating national unity -- even with the assist of an imminent "dramatic change in US policy" -- were slim indeed. Quat's government was the ninth attempt to form a viable structure since the overthrow of Diem. It was obvious from the outset that it would be under the domination of the Armed Forces Council which had publicly declared that it would "act as a mediator until the government is popularly elected.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The mediator himself, however, was to be rent asunder within days of Quat's assumption of office in one of those explosions that had become so typical in Vietnam since Diem's demise. That political explosion was particularly unfortunate in its timing in relation to the "dramatic" new ROLLING THUNDER program just then set to get under way.

B. ROLLING THUNDER I is Laid On--and Cancelled

A refinement of the February 13 decision on ROLLING THUNDER, including determination of the timing and character of the first air strike, was evidently made by the President on February 18. A NODIS cable 65/ of that date informed nine American posts in the Far East of the decisions in the following words:

Policy on Viet-Nam adopted today calls for following:

1. Joint program with GVN of continuing air and naval action against North Viet-Nam whenever and wherever necessary. Such action to be against selected military targets and to be limited and fitting and adequate as response to continuous aggression in South Viet-Nam directed in Hanoi. Air strikes will be jointly planned and agreed with GVN and carried out on joint basis.
2. Intensification by all available means of pacification program within South Viet-Nam, including every possible step to find and attack VC concentrations and headquarters within SVN by all conventional means available to GVN and US.
3. Early detailed presentation to nations of world and to public of documented case against DRV as aggressor. Forum and form this presentation not yet decided, but we do not repeat not expect to touch upon readiness for talks or negotiations at this time. We are considering reaffirmation our objectives in some form in near future.
4. Careful public statements of USG, combined with fact of continuing air action, are expected to make it clear that military action will continue while aggression continues. But focus of public attention will be kept as far as possible on DRV aggression, not on joint GVN/US military operations. There will be no comment of any sort on future actions except that all such actions will be adequate and measured and fitting to aggression. (You will have noted President's statement of yesterday, which we will probably allow to stand.)

Addressees should inform head of government or State (as appropriate) of above in strictest confidence and report reactions. In the case of Canberra and Wellington you may indicate we would be prepared respond to questions through embassies here tomorrow.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

You may indicate that we will seek to keep governments informed, subject to security considerations, of each operation as it occurs; as we did with respect to operations of February 7 and 11. 66/

Although the cable does not indicate it, the first air action under the new program was set for February 20th. Dubbed ROLLING THUNDER I, it called for US strikes against Quang Khe Naval Base and concurrent VNAF strikes against Vu Con Barracks, with appropriate weather alternates provided. The above cable was sent from Washington at 8:00 p.m. on February 18th. Five hours later, at 1:00 p.m., February 19 (Saigon time), Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, a conspiratorial revolutionary figure who had been active in the coup against Diem, began his infamous semi-coup to oust General Khanh -- but not to overthrow the Armed Forces Council. Aided by General Phat, his forces succeeded in occupying the ARVN military headquarters and other key government buildings in Saigon, including the radio station. Until the coup was defeated and Khanh's resignation submitted some 40 hours later, pandemonium reigned in Saigon. Ambassador Taylor promptly recommended cancellation of the February 20 air strike and his recommendation was equally promptly accepted. In a FLASH message to all recipients of the cable quoted above, Washington rescinded the instructions to notify respective heads of state until further notice "in view of the disturbed situation in Saigon." 67/

The "disturbed situation" was not to settle down completely for almost a week. Even though the semi-coup failed quickly and the Armed Forces Council reasserted its full authority, the AFC continued the anti-Khanh momentum of the coup-plotters by adopting a "vote of no confidence" in Khanh. The latter made frantic but unsuccessful efforts to rally his supporters. Literally running out of gas in Nha Trang shortly before dawn on February 21, he submitted his resignation, claiming that a "foreign hand" was behind the coup. No one, however, could be quite certain that Khanh might not "re-coup" once again, unless he were physically removed from the scene. This took three more days to accomplish. On the afternoon of February 25, after some mock farewell performances designed to enable Khanh to save face, he left Vietnam to become an Ambassador-at-Large. At the airport to see him off and to make sure that he was safely dispatched from the country, was Ambassador Taylor, glassily polite. It was only then that Taylor was able to issue, and Washington would accept, clearance for the long postponed and frequently rescheduled first ROLLING THUNDER strike.

C. The UK/USSR Co-Chairmen Gambit

Political turbulence in Saigon was not the only reason for delaying the air action. Even before the semi-coup broke out, forcing cancellation of the February 20 strike, a diplomatic initiative was taken by the Soviet Foreign Office in Moscow, that was eagerly picked up by London and Washington, and that quickly drew attention to the adverse consequences that might flow from an air strike executed at that very moment, concurrently with the diplomatic initiative in question.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

On February 17, the UK Ambassador to Washington, Lord Harlech, informed Secretary Rusk that the Soviet Foreign Office had approached the British with the suggestion that the UK-USSR Co-Chairmanship of the 1954 Geneva Conference might be reactivated in connection with the current Vietnam crisis. Secretary Rusk described the possibilities of such a gambit in a message 68/ to Ambassador Taylor as follows:

British apparently expect that next Soviet step might be to propose a joint statement by two Co-Chairmen on bombings in North Viet-Nam as reported to Co-Chairmen by regime in Hanoi. Interest of Soviet Government in co-chairmanship, though not yet confirmed, might also reflect some relief for Moscow regarding dilemma in which they may find themselves in dealing with Hanoi, Peiping and Southeast Asia issues. It may prove desirable for us to provide to UK and USSR full statement of facts as we see them, US purposes in Southeast Asia and our concept of necessary solution...We would stop short of ourselves proposing formal systematic negotiations but assumption of 1954 co-chairmanship by two governments would imply that they might themselves explore with interested governments possibilities of solution, which we could encourage or otherwise as we see fit. If message is made to two Co-Chairmen, which would be made public, it may mean that better procedure would be to present full documentation on North Viet-Nameese aggression to U.N. Secretary General in writing for circulation to members rather than make oral presentation in meeting of Security Council which might require Soviets to act as defense counsel for Hanoi.

"Obviously, this has bearing on timing of next strike. Hope to be in touch with you within next several hours on our further reflection on this problem. Do not believe a Thursday February 18 strike therefore feasible because of this time factor and because these possibilities have not been explored here at highest level.

With encouragement from Rusk, the British Foreign Office showed itself eager to pick up the Soviet hint. London proposed to make a formal approach to the Soviet Government, through UK Ambassador Trevelyan in Moscow. Specifically, they wished to instruct the Ambassador to propose to the Soviet Government that the Co-Chairmen of the 1954 Geneva Conference request the Governments which were members of that Conference and those represented on the International Control Commission "to furnish the Co-Chairmen without delay with a statement of their views on the situation in Viet-Nam and, in particular, on the circumstances in which they consider that a peaceful settlement could be reached.

In a further discussion with Lord Harlech on February 19, 69/ Secretary Rusk agreed to the proposed British action and Ambassador Trevelyan was duly instructed to approach the Soviet Foreign Office in Moscow on February 20.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

What were US expectations with respect to this initiative, and how did it relate to the new policy of pressures against the DRV? An excellent indication of State Department thinking on these matters at that moment is contained in an unfinished draft memorandum dated February 18, prepared by William P. Bundy and entitled "Where Are We Heading?" Because it is addressed to the relevant issues of that moment and surveys the political-diplomatic scene, it is reproduced here in full:

This memorandum examines possible developments and problems if the US pursues the following policy with respect to South Viet-Nam:

- a. Intensified pacification within South Vietnam. To meet the security problem, this might include a significant increase in present US force strength.
- b. A program of measured, limited, and spaced air attacks, jointly with the GVN, against the infiltration complex in the DRV. Such attacks would take place at the rate of about one a week, unless spectacular Viet Cong action dictated an immediate response out of sequence. The normal pattern of such attacks would comprise one GVN and one US strike on each occasion, confined to targets south of the 19th parallel, with variations in severity depending on the tempo of VC action, but with a slow upward trend in severity as the weeks went by.
- c. That the US itself would take no initiative for talks, but would agree to cooperate in consultations -- not a conference -- undertaken by the UK and USSR as Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conferences. As an opening move, the British would request an expression of our views, and we would use this occasion to spell out our position fully, including our purposes and what we regard as essential to the restoration of peace. We would further present our case against the DRV in the form of a long written document to be sent to the President of the United Nations Security Council and to be circulated to members of the UN.

* * * *

1. Communist responses.

a. Hanoi would almost certainly not feel itself under pressure at any early point to enter into fruitful negotiations or to call off its activity in any way. They would denounce the continued air attacks and seek to whip up maximum world opposition to them. Within South Viet-Nam, they might avoid spectacular actions, but would certainly continue a substantial pattern of activity along past lines, probably with emphasis on the kind of

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

incidents we have seen this week, in which Communist agents stirred up a village protest against government air attacks, and against the US. Basically, they would see the situation in South Viet-Nam as likely to deteriorate further (crumble, as they have put it), and would be expecting that at some point someone in the GVN will start secret talks with them behind our backs.

b. Communist China might supply additional air defense equipment to the DRV, but we do not believe they would engage in air operations from Communist China, at least up to the point where the MIGs in the DRV were engaged and we had found it necessary to attack Fukien or possibly -- if the MIGs had been moved there -- Vinh.

c. The Soviets would supply air defense equipment to the DRV and would continue to protest our air attacks in strong terms. However, we do not believe they would make any new commitment at this stage, and they would probably not do so even if the Chicoms became even more deeply involved -- provided that we were not ourselves attacking Communist China. At that point, the heat might get awfully great on them, and they would be in a very difficult position to continue actively working as Co-Chairman. However, their approach to the British on the Co-Chairmanship certainly suggests that they would find some relief in starting to act in that role, and might use it as a hedge against further involvement, perhaps pointing out to Hanoi that the Co-Chairman exercise serves to prevent us from taking extreme action and that Hanoi will get the same result in the end if a political track is operating and if, in fact, South Viet-Nam keeps crumbling. They might also argue to Hanoi that the existence of the political track tends to reduce the chances of the Chicoms having to become deeply involved -- which we believe Hanoi does not want unless it is compelled to accept it.

2. Within South Viet-Nam the new government is a somewhat better one, Note: this was written one day before the semi-coup but the cohesive effects of the strikes to date have at most helped things a bit. The latest MACV report indicates a deteriorating situation except in the extreme south, and it is unlikely that this can be arrested in any short period of time even if the government does hold together well and the military go about their business. We shall be very lucky to see a leveling off, much less any significant improvement, in the next two months. In short, we may have to hang on quite a long time before we can hope to see an improving situation in South Viet-Nam -- and this in turn is really the key to any negotiating position we could have at any time.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

3. On the political track we believe the British will undertake their role with vigor, and that the Soviets will be more reserved. The Soviets can hardly hope to influence Hanoi much at this point, and they certainly have no leverage with Communist China. In the opening rounds, the Soviets will probably fire off some fairly sharp statements that the real key to the situation is for us to get out and to stop our attacks, and the opposing positions are so far apart that it is hard to see any useful movement for some time to come. We might well find the Soviets -- or even the Canadians -- sounding us out on whether we would stop our attacks in return for some moderation in VC activity. This is clearly unacceptable, and the very least we should hold out on is a verified cessation of infiltration (and radio silence) before we stop our attacks. Our stress on the cessation of infiltration may conceivably lead to the Indians coming forward to offer policing forces -- a suggestion they have made before -- and this would be a constructive move we could pick up. But, as noted above, Hanoi is most unlikely to trade on this basis for a long time to come.

4. In sum -- the most likely prospect is for a prolonged period without major risks of escalation but equally without any give by Hanoi."

In retrospect, Bundy's expectations appear appropriately sober and realistic in comparison with more euphoric views held by some of his contemporaries. Particularly with respect to the Co-Chairmen gambit, his predictions were strikingly close to the mark. The British did in fact "undertake their role with vigor" and, as it turned out, the Soviets were indeed "more reserved." So much so, that the Co-Chairmen initiative eventually came to naught.

At this point in time, however, (in the days following February 20th) the Co-Chairman proposal was in orbit and real hopes were held out for it. Trevelyan had approached Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Lapin with the proposal and the Soviet officials had agreed to take it under advisement, warning Trevelyan that absolute secrecy was essential. U.S. Ambassador to Moscow Foy Kohler, upon learning of the UK/Soviet undertaking, expressed his concern that the air strikes on the DRV planned for February 20 would put the Soviets on the spot, and would cause them to reject the British proposal. 70/

Washington reassured Kohler by advising him that the scheduled strikes were being postponed and also informed him that, when rescheduled, the strikes would be tied to a major DRV aggressive act which had just come to light. 71/ It appears that, on February 16, an armed ocean-going North Vietnamese vessel, carrying large quantities of arms and ammunition, was intercepted and captured as it was infiltrating into Vung Ro Bay in South Vietnam, to deliver its cargo to the VC. It was thought that, by

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

pegging the strikes primarily to that boat incident, and by directing the strikes in part against a DRV naval base, the risk of an adverse Soviet reaction would be minimized.

During the next several days, Washington was in almost continuous communication (1) with Taylor in Saigon -- to ascertain whether the political situation had stabilized sufficiently to permit rescheduling the postponed air strikes; (2) with Kohler in Moscow -- to feel the pulse of the Soviet government and its likely reaction to the upcoming air operation; and (3) with Ambassador Bruce in London -- to monitor the progress of the Trevelyan approach to the Soviet Foreign Office concerning the Co-Chairman process. Throughout this time, Secretary Rusk was visibly torn on the question of whether or not to proceed with the air strikes. He wanted very much to push ahead immediately, in order to exploit promptly the DRV arms ship incident which seemed to beg for some response. But he hesitated to launch a strike on behalf of and in concert with a government that was teetering and whose Commander-in-Chief was in the process of being deposed; he also wished to avoid angering the Soviets, thus possibly sabotaging their Co-Chairmen effort. On the other hand, he wanted to make it clear that the U.S. would not indefinitely accept a "unilateral ceasefire" while the Co-Chairman effort dragged on.

It is important to note that the Co-Chairmen gambit was not viewed by anyone involved on the US side as a negotiating initiative. On the contrary, every effort was made to avoid giving such an impression. Instead, the gambit was intended to provide a vehicle for the public expression of a tough U.S. position. This was clearly implied in Washington messages to Saigon and London on this issue, as, for example, in a cable from Unger to Taylor: 72/

You should not reveal possibility this UK/USSR gambit to GVN for time being. We naturally wish have it appear entirely as their initiative, so that our reply would not be any kind of initiative on our part and would, in its content, make clear how stiff our views are.

Finally, by February 24th, since no reply had as yet been received from Moscow and the situation in Saigon had begun to settle down, Secretary Rusk felt he could hold off no longer. In a message to Bruce in London, he wrote:

We have decided that we must go ahead with next operation Feb. 26 unless there should be further political difficulties in Saigon. Taylor will be seeking political clearance afternoon Feb. 25 Saigon time once Khanh is off the scene.

We told Harlech this decision today stating that while we recognized British concern and possibility some Soviet reaction we cannot even by implication get into position of withholding

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

continuation of program. We may hear further from London following his report but would now expect to maintain decision and indeed Taylor would probably have gone ahead on political side. If matter comes up you may of course note that we have held off five days but that British have not had any indication of Soviet response so that further delay now appeared unwise. We continue of course attach major importance to UK/Soviet gambit... 73/

Confidence that the Co-Chairman initiative would pay off was beginning to wane, and the air strikes were indeed being rescheduled for February 26. A continuous readiness to launch had in fact been maintained every since February 20, by simply postponing the strikes for 24 hours at a time and laying on new strikes whenever a change in targets or in operating rules had been decided upon. The February 26 operation was the fourth reprogramming of the strikes and thus went by the code designation ROLLING THUNDER IV, even though RT's I through III had been scratched. 74/

Fully expecting that the February 26 air operation would go off as planned, State sent out a cable 75/ to thirteen posts, quoting the probable text of a joint GVN/US announcement that was to be made at about 2:00 a.m. Washington time on February 26, and instructing all addressees to contact their respective host governments as soon as FLASH notification was received that the mission had in fact been executed. The execution messages however, never came. Weather over the entire target area in North Vietnam had closed in, forcing another postponement and, ultimately, cancellation of the strikes. The weather remained adverse for four more days. It was not until March 2 that the first of the new program strikes, dubbed ROLLING THUNDER V was actually carried out.

D. Efforts at Public Justification and Persuasion

The need to communicate the new policy promptly and persuasively to the public had been recognized throughout the 1964 planning process as an essential ingredient of any graduated pressures campaign. Now the time had come to put the information and education plans into effect.

Over the weekend of February 12, serious work was begun in the State Department on the preparation of a "White Paper" on the infiltration of men and supplies from the North. Such a public report was considered essential to justifying any program of U.S. military operations against North Vietnam. The compilers of the exhibits for the public record were handicapped however, by the fact that the most persuasive evidence on DRV infiltration and support was derived from Special Intelligence sources which could not be revealed without embarrassment and detriment to other U.S. security interests. The White Paper that was submitted to the U.S. public and to the United Nations on February 27, therefore, did not make as strong a case as it might have of the extent and nature of DRV involvement in the war in the South. It did serve, however, to put the U.S. case in the public record and to affirm the limited nature of U.S. objectives toward North Vietnam. 76/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Concurrently, the Administration undertook to communicate to both foreign and domestic audiences its determination to prevent Communist destruction of the Government of South Vietnam and to underline the limited character of its objectives in Southeast Asia. A series of "leaked" press analyses suggested that the most recent and the anticipated air strikes constituted a clear threat of extensive future destruction of North Vietnam's military assets and economic investments. They inferred that such consequences could be avoided if Hanoi would agree to cease its direct support of the insurgency in the South.

At the same time, privately the State Department asked the Canadian ICC representative Blair Seaborn again to act as a discreet intermediary with Hanoi, conveying to the DRV leadership the same statement on Vietnam that had been handed by U.S. Ambassador Cabot to Chicom Ambassador Wang Kuo-chuan in Warsaw on February 24, reaffirming that the United States had no designs on the territory of North Vietnam, nor any desire to destroy the DRV. On his March visit to Hanoi, Seaborn sought an appointment with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, but was obliged to settle for a meeting with the chief of the North Vietnamese Army's Liaison Section, to whom he read the statement. This officer commented that it contained nothing new and that the North Vietnamese had already received a briefing on the Warsaw meeting from the Chicoms. The Canadian Government publicly noted in April that Seaborn had two important conversations with DRV officials in recent months, but did not go into details.

In the closing days of February and continuing through the first week of March, Secretary Rusk conducted a marathon public information campaign to explain and justify the new U.S. policy and to signal a seemingly reasonable but in fact quite tough U.S. position on negotiations. In part, the Rusk campaign was precipitated by a press conference comment by U Thant at the United Nations on February 24, implying that the U.S. had perhaps not been as zealous in its quest for peace as it might have been. Thant went so far as to assert that "the great American people, if they only knew the true facts and the background to the developments in South Vietnam, will agree with me that further bloodshed is unnecessary." The suggestion that the U.S. Government wasn't leveling with the U.S. public produced a sharp retort from Secretary Rusk:

We have talked over the past 2 years informally and on a number of occasions with the Secretary-General...as well as with many governments in various parts of the world...But the proposals that I know about thus far have been procedural in nature. The missing piece continues to be the absence of any indication that Hanoi is prepared to stop doing what it is doing against its neighbors. ...This question of calling a conference, under what circumstances -- these are procedural matters. What we are interested in, what is needed to restore peace to Southeast Asia, is substance, content, and indication that peace is possible in terms of the appetites and the attitudes of the other side. 77/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

This and similar themes were endlessly reiterated in the ensuing days:

The key to peace in Southeast Asia is the readiness of all in that area to live at peace and to leave their neighbors alone....A negotiation aimed at the confirmation of aggression is not possible. And a negotiation which simply ends in bitterness and hostility merely adds to the danger. 78/

South Viet-Nam is being subjected to an aggression from the North, an aggression which is organized and directed and supplied with key personnel and equipment by Hanoi. The hard core of the Viet Cong were trained in the North and have been reinforced by North Vietnamese from the North Vietnamese army ... Our troops would come home tomorrow if the aggressors would go north - go back home, and stay at home... The missing piece is the lack of an indication that Hanoi is prepared to stop doing what it is doing, and what it knows that it is doing, to its neighbors. 79/

But when asked under what circumstances the U.S. might sit down to talk to Hanoi, Rusk was clearly as yet unwilling to appear publicly receptive:

I am not getting into the details of what are called preconditions, because we are not at that point - we are not at that point. Almost every postwar negotiation that has managed to settle in some fashion some difficult and dangerous question has been preceded by some private indication behind the scenes that such a negotiation might be possible. That is missing here -- that is missing here. 30/

Rusk's disinterest in negotiation -- except on "absolutist" terms -- was, of course, in concert with the view of virtually all the President's key advisors, that the path to peace was not open. Hanoi, at about that time, held sway over more than half of her southern neighbor and could see the Saigon Government crumbling before her very eyes. The balance of power in South Vietnam simply did not furnish the United States with a reasonable basis for bargaining and the signals from Hanoi and Moscow -- or lack thereof -- did not encourage optimism about the sort of hard settlement the U.S. had in mind. All this pointed directly to military pressures on North Vietnam and to other urgent measures to tilt the balance of forces the other way. Until these measures could have some visible and tangible effect, talk of negotiation could be little more than a hollow exercise.

At the same time, while neither Moscow nor Hanoi seemed in the least interested in U.S. style "conciliation," the likelihood of explosive escalation also seemed remote. So far there was no visible sign of

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

ominous enemy countermoves. An assessment of probable Soviet responses to the evolving U.S. "pressures" policy, cabled to the Department by Foy Kohler in Moscow, 81/ was moderately reassuring and indeed quite perceptive:

1. Soviets will make noises but not take decisive action in response to specific retaliatory strikes in southern areas DRV, probably including -- after publication "White Paper" -- strike against DRV sealift capabilities in this area. Indeed, Soviets likely to read our failure to continue carry out such strikes as confirmation their estimates re weakness our basic position in SVN.

2. Soviet military aid program in DRV is probably defensive in nature and Soviets would wish to keep it that way. However, if attacks on DRV become general, particularly if they are extended to industrial or urban targets and areas beyond border zone. Soviets will reassess our intent as well as basic politico-military situation. If reassessment leads them to see U.S. aim as ending existence of DRV as socialist state, Soviets will not only step up defensive aid but supply means of counterattack, e.g., aircraft for raids on SVN cities and heavy ground equipment. While aware of risk that this might bring Peiping actively into picture, Soviets will not hold back if existence of DRV seems threatened.

3. There seems no possibility of change in present hard Soviet posture at least until after March 1 CP meeting and its aftermath or until they somehow convinced of real danger of major escalation and direct confrontation.

4. Major factor underlying Soviet position is conviction that in Vietnam situation, unlike Cuban crisis, we are almost alone among allies and even U.S. public opinion seriously divided; any real and publicized improvement in this picture would correspondingly influence Soviet policy.

5. Apart their estimate as to our relative isolation, Soviet failure move toward negotiations on any basis conceivably acceptable to USG also reflects DRV and CPR posture and Moscow's unwillingness or inability to impel DRV to call off activities in SVN or yield control of territory they now hold. To extent Soviets can influence communist attitude toward negotiations, they might in face of increasingly dangerous situation decide to work toward settlement based on coalition Govt in SVN, convincing own allies that this only temporary situation.

6. Major Soviet Dilemma - Imperatives of commitment and position in communist world vs. interest in developing relations with US and West - will persist during Vietnam crisis.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

If they consider necessary to protect position in own camp, Soviets are probably prepared to see relations with US suffer for indefinite period.

With the immediate fear of escalation thus somewhat allayed and the public concern temporarily pacified, attention began to shift toward developing ROLLING THUNDER into a more forceful continuous program.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

VII. ROLLING THUNDER BECOMES A CONTINUING PROGRAM

A. McNamara's Concern Over Cost-Ineffectiveness of Strikes

As has been indicated, ROLLING THUNDER was finally inaugurated, after much delay and postponement, on March 2. On that day, 10⁴ USAF aircraft (B-52's, F-100's, F-105's, and refueling KC-135's) struck the Xom Bang Ammo Depot, while 19 VNAF A-1H's hit the Quang Khe Naval Base. ^{82/} This was the first strike on the North in which USAF aircraft played the dominant role. Although the attack was officially proclaimed "very successful," the loss of four USAF aircraft, three to anti-aircraft fire, intensified earlier OSD concern over the effectiveness of the strikes and over the vulnerability of US aircraft.

Shortly after the first two February reprisal raids, the Secretary of Defense had received some disturbing bomb damage assessment reports that indicated that,

...with a total of 267 sorties (including flak suppression, etc.) directed against 491 buildings, we destroyed 47 buildings and damaged 22.

The reports caused McNamara to fire off a rather blunt memorandum to the CJCS, dated 17 February 1965, which stated in part:

Although the four missions left the operations at the targets relatively unimpaired, I am quite satisfied with the results. Our primary objective, of course, was to communicate our political resolve. This I believe we did. Future communications of resolve, however, will carry a hollow ring unless we accomplish more military damage than we have to date. Can we not better meet our military objectives by choosing different types of targets, directing different weights of effort against them, or changing the composition of the force? Surely we cannot continue for months accomplishing no more with 267 sorties than we did on these four missions.

The Chairman of the JCS promptly asked his staff to look into the matter and reported back a few days later on some initial points of interest:

(1) We do not have sufficient or timely information about the results of the strikes;

(2) In light of prior detailed study of the targets (9⁴ Target Study), the weight of effort expended against at least two of them is open to question;

(3) The weaponeering against the directed targets is open to question.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In view of these deficiencies, the CJCS continued,

...I intend to ask the Joint Staff, in drafting its proposals for future strikes, to insure that the critical elements of target selection and weight of effort are evaluated as carefully as possible against specific and realistic military objectives. At the same time, I believe the commander of the operating force should have a degree of flexibility with respect to the weaponeering of the strikes and their timing. My concern here is that the operational commander be given adequate latitude to take advantage of his first-hand knowledge of the target and its defenses as well as of the changing conditions of weather and light.

2. I am also asking the Director, DIA, to propose a standardized and streamlined system of after-action reporting so that prompt and responsive analysis of strike results can be made available to those who require it. 83/

Immediately after the first ROLLING THUNDER strike on March 2, Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus R. Vance convened a meeting attended by Air Force Secretary Eugene M. Zuckert and other USAF officials to consider using the high-flying B-52's for pattern bombing in either North or South Vietnam to avoid Communist ground fire. The Air Staff and SAC recommended reserving B-52's for use against major targets in the North. The idea of B-52 pattern bombing was not again seriously considered until April. On the same date (March 2) Secretary McNamara asked that the Joint Staff prepare as soon as possible an analysis of US aircraft losses to hostile action in Southeast Asia. 84/ An expedited review and analysis of this subject was promptly undertaken, covering the experience in YANKEE TEAM (Reconnaissance), BARREL ROLL (Armed Reconnaissance/Interdiction), BLUE TREE (Photo Reconnaissance), PIERCE ARROW (Tonkin Gulf Reprisal), FLAMING DART and ROLLING THUNDER operations. The results were reported to the Secretary of Defense on March 10, 85/ and, aside from presenting some early and not too revealing statistical findings, the report urged that consideration be given to several measures that, the Chairman felt, might help minimize loss rates:

- (1) Authorize use of NAPAIM.
- (2) Provide "optimum" strike ordnance not yet available in the theater.
- (3) Allow the operational commander flexibility in strike timing and selection of alternate targets so as to minimize weather degradations and operational interferences at target.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

(4) Conduct random and frequent weather reconnaissance, and medium and low-level photo reconnaissance, over prospective strike areas of North Vietnam to reduce the likelihood of signaling our intentions.

(5) Improve security and cover and deception measures at US/VNAF air bases."

These and other measures were explored in greater depth in a USAF Study Team effort launched on March 15 and reported on in late May. 86/ Many of the recommendations to lift restrictions and improve air strike technology were being acted upon during this period and in subsequent days and weeks. For example, the restrictions on the use of FARMGATE and PACOM aircraft were lifted, permitting their use in combat operations in South Vietnam with USAF markings and without VNAF personnel aboard, effective 9 March; 87/ and use of napalm against North Vietnamese targets was approved by the President on the same date. 88/

B. Taylor's Concern Over Feeble, Irresolute Action

Sharp annoyance over what seemed to him an unnecessarily timid and ambivalent US stance on air strikes was expressed by Ambassador Taylor. The long delays between strikes, the marginal weight of the attacks, and the great ado about behind-the-scenes diplomatic feelers, led Taylor to complain:

I am concerned from standpoint our overall posture vis-a-vis Hanoi and communist bloc that current feverish diplomatic activity particularly by French and British tends to undercut our ability to convey a meaningful signal to Hanoi of USG determination to stick it out here and progressively turn the screws on DRV. Seaborn's estimate of mood of confidence characterizing DRV leadership despite our joint air strikes to date almost identical our estimate...It appears to me evident that to date DRV leaders believe air strikes at present levels on their territory are meaningless and that we are more susceptible to international pressure for negotiations than are they. Their estimate may be based in part on activities of "our friends" to which we seem to be active party.

In my view current developments strongly suggest that we follow simultaneously two courses of action: (1) attempt to apply brakes to British and others in their headlong dash to conference table and leave no doubt in their minds that we do not intend to go to conference table until there is clear evidence Hanoi (and Peking) prepared to leave neighbors alone; and (2) step up tempo and intensity of our air strikes in southern part of DRV in order convince Hanoi authorities they

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

face prospect of progressively severe punishment. I fear that to date ROLLING THUNDER in their eyes has been merely a few isolated thunder claps.

The same general considerations apply re our urging British to undertake further early soundings re Article 19 Laos Accords as Ambassador Martin so cogently states in his EXDIS 1278 to Dept. [in which Martin expresses concern over the risks of moving to the conference table too soon]. Many of the problems which worry him are also applicable to Vietnamese here and I share his reasoning and concern.

It seems to me that we may be in for a tough period ahead but I would hope we will continue to do whatever is required and that we try to keep fundamental objectives vis-a-vis Hanoi clear and simple. 89/

In a separate cable of the same date, 90/ Taylor, with General Westmoreland's explicit concurrence, offered his specific recommendations for increasing the tempo and intensity of the air strikes. In effect, he called for a more dynamic schedule of strikes, a several week program relentlessly marching North to break the will of the DRV:

We have a sense of urgent need for an agreed program for the measured and limited air action against military targets in DRV [previously] announced. The rate of once or twice a week for attacks involving two or three targets on each day appears to us reasonable as to frequency, and leaves open the possibility of increasing the effect on Hanoi by adding to the weight of the strikes (in types of ordnance and sorties per target) and by moving northward up the target system. What seems to be lacking is an agreed program covering several weeks which will combine the factors, frequency, weight and location of attack into a rational pattern which will convince the leaders in Hanoi that we are on a dynamic schedule which will not remain static in a narrow zone far removed from them and the sources of their power but which is a moving growing threat which cannot be ignored.

I have seen the JCS proposed eight-week program which has much to recommend it but, I believe, remains too long South of the 19th parallel. [It is] Seaborn's opinion that Hanoi has the impression that our air strikes are a limited attempt to improve our bargaining position and hence are no great cause for immediate concern. Our objective should be to induce in DRV leadership an attitude favorable to US objectives in as short a time as possible in order to avoid a build-up of international pressures to negotiate. But our efforts to date are falling far short of achieving the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

necessary impact. In formulating a more effective program of future attacks, I would be inclined to keep the rate as indicated, maintain the weight on target as for recent strikes, but begin at once a progression of US strikes North of 19th parallel in a slow but steadily ascending movement. The targets in the area South thereof could be reserved largely for VNAF and FARMGATE. It is true that the MIG threat will grow as we move North but we have the means to take care of it. If we tarry too long in the South, we will give Hanoi a weak and misleading signal which will work against our ultimate purpose.

General Westmoreland Concur.

Taylor's dissatisfaction with the tempo of the air campaign was by no means mitigated by the decision to launch the next scheduled attack, ROLLING THUNDER VI on March 13, as another isolated, stage-managed joint US/GVN operation. Notification of the decision to strike came to him in the following FLASH message: 91/

Decision has been taken here to execute ROLLING THUNDER VI during daylight hours Saturday 13 March Saigon time. If weather precludes effective strike Phu Qui ammo depot (Target 40) on this date, US portion of ROLLING THUNDER VI will be postponed until 14 March Saigon time or earliest date weather will permit effective US strike of Target 40. However if US strike weathered out, VNAF strike (with US support) on its own primary or alternate targets is still authorized to go. Request you solicit Quat's agreement this arrangement.

If joint US/GVN strike goes...would expect GVN/US press announcement be made in Saigon. NMCC has furnished time of launch in past and this has proven eminently satisfactory. Will continue this arrangement.

If US strike weathered out and GVN strike goes, recommend that GVN make brief unilateral press statement which would not detract from already agreed US/GVN statement, which we would probably wish use at time of US strike against Target 40. GVN unilateral press announcement should indicate strike made by GVN aircraft supported by US aircraft. Would hope that announcement, although brief, could also mention target, identifying it as military installation associated with infiltration.

Request reply by flash cable.

Washington's anticipation that the strike might be weathered out proved correct, and Taylor's pique at the further delay is reflected in his reply:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

As reported through military channels, VNAF is unable to fly today. Hence, there will be no ROLLING THUNDER Mission and no present need to see Quat. I am assured that VNAF will be ready to go tomorrow, 14 March.

With regard to the delays of ROLLING THUNDER VI, I have the impression that we may be attaching too much importance to striking target 40 because of its intrinsic military value as a target. If we support the thesis (as I do) that the really important target is the will of the leaders in Hanoi, virtually any target North of the 19th parallel will convey the necessary message at this juncture as well as target 40. Meanwhile, through repeated delays we are failing to give the mounting crescendo to ROLLING THUNDER which is necessary to get the desired results. 92/

When the strike finally came off, however, on March 14 and 15, it was the most forceful attack on the North launched to date. 24 VNAF Al-H's supported by US flak, CAP and pathfinder aircraft, struck weapon installations, depots, and barracks on Tiger Island, 20 miles off the North Vietnamese coast, and more than 100 US aircraft (two-thirds Navy, one-third USAF) hit the ammunition depot near Phu Qui, only 100 miles southwest of Hanoi. Some of the earlier hesitancy about bombing the North was beginning to wear off.

C. President's Concern Over Insufficient Pressure in South Vietnam

While attention was being increasingly focused on pressures against the North, disturbing assessments continued to come to the President's attention concerning developments in the South. One such estimate was Westmoreland's analysis, dated February 25, of the military situation in the four corps areas. It was essentially in agreement with a grave CIA appraisal issued the same day. Observing that the pacification effort had virtually halted, Westmoreland foresaw in six months a Saigon government holding only islands of strength around provincial and district capitals that were clogged with refugees and beset with "end the war" groups asking for a negotiated settlement. The current trend presaged a Viet Cong take-over in 12 months, although major towns and bases, with U.S. help, could hold out for years. To "buy time," permit pressure on North Vietnam to take effect, and reverse the decline, he proposed adding three Army helicopter companies, flying more close support and reconnaissance missions, opening a "land line" from Pleiku in the highlands to the coast, and changing U.S. policy on the use of combat troops. 93/ There was now real concern at the highest Administration level that the Vietnamese military effort might collapse in the South before pressures on the North could have any significant impact. On March 2, therefore, the President decided to dispatch Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson to Saigon with a high-ranking team. In an exclusive message for Ambassador Taylor, Secretary McNamara described General Johnson's mission as follows:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

After meeting with the President this morning, we believe it wise for General Johnson to go to Saigon to meet with you and General Westmoreland...Purpose of trip is to examine with you and General Westmoreland what more can be done within South Vietnam. He will bring with him a list of additional actions which has been developed for your consideration. Would appreciate your developing a similar list for discussion with him. In developing list, you may, of course, assume no limitation on funds, equipment or personnel. We will be prepared to act immediately and favorably on any recommendations you and General Johnson may make. The President is continuing to support such action against North as is now in progress but does not consider such actions a substitute for additional action within South Vietnam. The President wants us to examine all possible additional actions -- political, military, and economic -- to see what more can be done in South Vietnam... 94/

General Johnson returned from his survey mission on March 14 with a 21-point program which he submitted to the JCS and the Secretary of Defense and which was reviewed by the President on March 15. General Johnson's recommendations included but went beyond Westmoreland's prescriptions. With respect to the use of air power in South Vietnam, he proposed more helicopters and O-1 aircraft, possibly more USAF fighter-bombers (after further MACV evaluation), better targeting, and accelerated airfield expansion. These proposals were in keeping with recommendations that had been made previously by COMUSMACV, and especially insistently by CINCPAC, to expand the use of US airpower in SVN. For example, on February 26, in an exclusive message to General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp had written: "...the single most important thing we can do to improve the security situation in South Vietnam is to make full use of our airpower. 95/

For Laos, General Johnson favored reorienting BARREL ROLL operations to allow air strikes on infiltration routes in the Lao Panhandle to be conducted as a separate program from those directed against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese units. This program was subsequently authorized under the nickname STEEL TIGER (see below, p. 76).

With respect to air action against the North, the Army Chief of Staff made two recommendations (designated as points 5 and 6 in his 21-point program):

5. Increase the scope and tempo of US air strikes against the DRV. This action could tend to broaden and escalate the war. However, it could accomplish the US objective of causing the DRV to cease its support and direction of the Viet Cong aggression. To date, the tempo of punitive air strikes has been inadequate to convey a clear sense of US purpose to the DRV.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

6. Remove self-imposed restrictions on the conduct of air strikes against North Vietnam which have severely reduced their effectiveness and made it impossible to approach the goal of 4 missions per week. Restrictions which should be lifted are:

- a. Requirement that a US strike be conducted concurrently with a VNAF strike.
- b. Requirement that US aircraft strike the primary target only.
- c. Ban on use of classified munitions.
- d. Narrow geographical limitations imposed on target selection.
- e. Requirement to obtain specific approval from Washington before striking alternate targets when required by adverse weather conditions or other local conditions. 96/

After reviewing these recommendations, the President approved most of General Johnson's program. In regard to the air strikes against the North, the President authorized important new actions, as subsequently described by the JCS: 97/

Action (paras 5 & 6): The scope and tempo of air strikes against NVN is being increased in current plans. Depots, LOCs, and air defense ground environment facilities will be stressed in operations in the near future. The requirement for concurrent US-VNAF strikes has been removed. Only prime targets will be designated as primary or alternates for US aircraft, thus lifting restriction in 6b above. Greater timing flexibility will be provided for weather and other delays. Tactical reconnaissance has been authorized at medium level for targets south of the 20th parallel to support the expanded program. Specific recommendations on para 6c, quoted above, are requested. Restrictions in 6d and e, quoted above, have been lifted in ROLLING THUNDER SEVEN and will so remain in subsequent programs.

The Presidential decision marked a major turning point in the ROLLING THUNDER operation. Air action against the North was being transformed from a sporadic, halting effort into a regular and determined program.

D. ROLLING THUNDER VII -- Enter "Regularity" and "Determination"

The March 15 Presidential guidelines were clearly reflected in the instructions that Washington sent to Saigon describing the new character of ROLLING THUNDER to begin with RT VII on March 19. The instructions contain at least six novel features:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

- (1) The strikes were to be packaged in a week's program at a time;
- (2) precise timing of the strikes were to be left to field commanders;
- (3) the requirement for US-VNAF simultaneity was to be dropped;
- (4) the strikes were no longer to be specifically related to VC atrocities;
- (5) publicity on the strikes was to be progressively reduced; and
- (6) the impression henceforth to be given was one of regularity and determination.

Here is the full text of the Secretary of State's message to Ambassador Taylor, describing the new program: 98/

Having in mind considerations raised your ref tel [Taylor's Saigon 2889 of March 8th, quoted on pp. 66-67] and recommendations of General Johnson following his return, longer range program of action against North Viet Nam has been given priority consideration here and program for first week for ROLLING THUNDER VII, has been decided, for execution this week. Details this program which includes one US and one VNAF strike together with one US and two VNAF route armed recce is subject of instructions being sent through military channels. You will note these instructions leave to military commands in field decisions as to specific timing within period covered. Execution of first action under ROLLING THUNDER VII may take place anytime from daylight March 19 Saigon time. Although program contains full measure VNAF participation, requirement that US and VNAF operations proceed simultaneously is dropped.

You are requested to see Pri Min ASAP in order to outline to him this further program we have in mind and to solicit GVN participation as specified therein. You should convey to PriMin that proposed program, on which you will be providing him with further information in successive weeks, is designed to maintain pressure on Hanoi and persuade North Vietnamese regime that costs of continuing their aggression becoming unacceptably high. At same time Quat should understand we continue seek no enlargement of struggle and have carefully selected targets with view to avoiding undesirable provocation. Further objective is to continue reassure Government and people South Viet Nam we are

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

and will continue fight by their side and we expect they will also be making maximum efforts in South Viet Nam where a real setback to Viet Cong would do more than perhaps anything else to persuade Hanoi stop its aggression.

With initiation ROLLING THUNDER VII we believe publicity given US and VNAF strikes should be progressively reduced, although in its place there should be picture of GVN and US pursuing with regularity and determination program against the North to enable South restore its independence and integrity and defend itself from aggression from North. Larger strikes (ROLLING THUNDER VII A and VII B) be announced as before but suggest in future that such announcements not contain references to Viet Cong atrocities, etc. Instead, these matters, which should get full attention, might be subject of separate and perhaps regular press briefings by GVN with full US support.

As regards route recce, we question whether we should take initiative to announce these missions since this could contribute to impression of substantial increase in activity. At same time we presume reporters will get wind of these missions, Hanoi will report them and VNAF may not wish maintain silence. Therefore seems difficult avoid replying to inevitable press questions. Request PIO meeting opening tomorrow Honolulu to look into this one and give us and Saigon its recommendations; possibility it should consider passing off all route recce missions in low key replies to queries as "routine recce."

ROLLING THUNDER had thus graduated to the status of a regular and continuing program. What now remained to be more carefully re-examined -- though hardly resolved -- was the problem of target emphasis.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

VIII. TARGET RATIONALE SHIFTS TOWARD INTERDICTION

Late February and early March, 1965 saw a significant refocusing of target emphasis. Up to that time -- in the initial U.S. reprisal strikes and the first ROLLING THUNDER actions -- target selection had been completely dominated by political and psychological considerations. Paramount in the Administration's target choices were such complex and often conflicting objectives as boosting the GVN's morale, evidencing the firmness of U.S. resolve, demonstrating the potential for inflicting pain upon the DRV, providing a legal rationale for our actions, and so forth. Relatively little weight was given to the purely physical or more directly military and economic implications of whatever target destruction might be achieved.

With the gradual acceptance, beginning in March, of the need for a militarily more significant, sustained bombing program, serious attention began to be paid to the development of a target system or systems that would have a more tangible and coherent military rationale. The first and most obvious candidate for such a target concept was that of interdicting the flow of men and supplies into South Vietnam by striking the lines of communication (IOC's) of the DRV. Since North Vietnamese "aggression" was the principal legal justification for U.S. bombing raids upon the DRV, attacking and impeding the visible manifestations of this aggression -- the infiltration -- also seemed logical and attractive from this international legality point of view.

The Secretary of Defense's attention was called to this target concept as early as 13 February, when the Joint Chiefs briefed McNamara in the Chairman's office on an analysis of the southern portion of the North Vietnamese railway system. It was pointed out in the briefing that South of the 20th parallel there exists about 115 miles of operable rail systems and that the vulnerable points on this southern portion of the system are five bridges of 300 feet or greater length and the railway classification yards at Vinh. It was argued that the bridges were very lightly defended and that only the rail yards at Vinh would pose any serious anti-aircraft defense problem. The CJCS felt that:

There is no doubt but that the six targets mentioned comprise an attractive, vulnerable and remunerative target system which would hurt the North Vietnamese psychologically, economically and militarily. As regards the latter, the destruction of the southern bridge system would hamper and delay the movement of DRV/CHICOM ground forces to the south and, likewise, would place a stricture on the quantities of materiel and personnel which can be infiltrated through Laos and South Vietnam. A minimum of 201 strike sorties would be required to attack with a high degree of assurance the six targets simultaneously which would be militarily the most desirable timing of attack.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In a follow-up memorandum, 99/ the CJCS forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a DIA analysis of VC attacks on the South Vietnamese railway system during 1963 and 1964, and indicated his concurrence with Ambassador Taylor that these attacks justified US/GVN strikes against the rail system in North Vietnam. The CJCS then added the following recommendation:

As discussed with you on 13 February, while I strongly recommend that we attack the North Vietnamese rail system as soon as possible, I would recommend against first striking the southern elements thereof. Should we do so I would anticipate that the DRV would take both passive and active defense measures to protect rolling stock and bridges and, probably, would start work on train ferries or truck by-passes in order to ameliorate the effects of our strike. As pointed out earlier I would advocate militarily that the entire southern segment of the rail system be struck simultaneously. Should this be politically objectionable, I would recommend that the two northern targets -- Dong Phuong rail/highway bridge and Thanh Hoa bridge (prestige bridge) -- be the first targets attacked in order to trap the maximum quantity of rolling stock south of the 20th parallel where we could destroy it at least.

The Secretary of Defense responded to this recommendation by inviting the JCS to develop a detailed plan for an integrated attack on the DRV rail system south of the 20th parallel, with the option of attacking the targets individually on an incremental basis rather than all at once. 100/ This request set in motion a planning effort by the Joint Staff and by U.S. military commands in the Pacific area, and gave rise to spirited discussions and recommendations that culminated at the end of March in the submission of the JCS 12-week bombing program, essentially built around the LOC interdiction concept.

General Westmoreland, with Ambassador Taylor's concurrence, strongly endorsed the interdiction rationale in mid-March. In a LINDIS cable to Admiral Sharp and General Wheeler, 101/ he called attention to the mounting VC attacks on transportation targets in South Vietnam, and argued that:

The Viet Cong's intensive efforts against lines of communications would make strikes against DRV LOC's highly appropriate at this time. In view heavy traffic recently reported moving south, such strikes would also be military desirable. Moreover, these attacks by interrupting the flow of consumer goods to southern DRV would carry to the NVN man in the street, with minimum loss of civilian life, the message of U.S. determination. Accordingly, early initiation of ROLLING THUNDER strikes and armed reconnaissance is recommended against DRV lines of communication with initial emphasis on railroad and highway bridges south of 19 degrees north.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Counter-infiltration operations also received a boost from the recommendation in General Johnson's report to the effect that BARREL ROLL be re-oriented to increase its military effectiveness against Lao Panhandle infiltration routes into South Vietnam. Acting upon that recommendation and upon a Presidential directive to make a maximum effort to shut off infiltration into SVN, a new program, nicknamed STEEL TIGER, was developed, for the conduct of greatly intensified air operations against routes and targets in Laos associated with infiltration. 102/

At about the same time, a Pacific Command study group developed a more comprehensive concept of air operations "to attrit, harass, and interdict the DRV south of 20 degrees." In a lengthy cable to the Joint Chiefs excerpted below, Admiral Sharp described the concept as follows: 103/

The program calls for an integrated strike, armed recce and recce program designed to cut, in depth, the NVN logistic network south of 20 degrees, and to continually attrit and harass by-pass and repair reconstitution efforts.

This program provides for primary bridge/ferry cuts and highway blockage/take out cuts on major long-haul road and rail routes. It additionally cuts the full road network including all feeder and by-pass routes which develop into 4 main entry/funnels to Laos and SVN. All targets selected are extremely difficult or impossible to by-pass. The program also provides for concurrent disruption of the sea-carry to SVN with strikes against suspect coastal staging points supporting end-running shipping into the area, as well as SVN.

LOC network cutting in this depth will degrade tonnage arrivals at the main "funnels" and will develop a broad series of new targets such as backed-up convoys, off-loaded materiel dumps, and personnel staging areas at one or both sides of cuts. Coupling these strikes with seeding and re-seeding missions to hamper repairs, wide ranging armed recce missions against "developed" targets, and coastal harass and attrit missions against coastal staging facilities, may force major DRV log flow to sea-carry and into surveillance and attack by our SVN coastal sanitization forces...

In summary: recommend concerted attacks against LOC targets recommended herein be initiated concurrently with interdiction targets programmed for ROLLING THUNDER 9-13. Preferentially, recommend a compressed "LOC cut program" similar to my proposal for a "Radar Busting Day." This should be followed by completion of attacks on other than

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

LOC targets in ROLLING THUNDER 10-13, Phase II armed recce would be conducted concurrently with these actions and would be continued indefinitely to make DRV support to the VC in SVN and PL/VM in Laos as difficult and costly as possible.

As these recommendations reached the JCS, the Joint Chiefs were intensely pre-occupied with an interservice division over the issue of the nature and extent of proposed large-scale U.S. troop deployments to South Vietnam, requiring adjudication among at least 10 separate proposals, and among widely differing views of the several Service Chiefs. There were also substantial differences over the future character of the bombing program. On this latter issue, Air Force Chief of Staff General McConnell took a maverick position, opting for a 28-day air program against North Vietnam to destroy all targets on the 94-target list. He proposed beginning the air strikes in the southern part of North Vietnam and continuing at two- to six-day intervals until Hanoi itself was attacked. "While I support appropriate deployment of ground forces in South Vietnam," McConnell wrote, "it must be done in concert with an overall plan to eliminate the source of the insurgency." McConnell believed that his proposal was consistent with previous JCS views on action against the North and would be a strong deterrent against open Chinese intervention. 104/

General McConnell withdrew his 28-day proposal from JCS consideration when it became apparent that the Joint Chiefs were inclined to accept much of the CINCPAC recommendation for a "LOC-cut program" as summarized above, and to incorporate some of McConnell's concepts in a 12-week air strike program that the Joint Staff was preparing in response to the Secretary of Defense's request and in accordance with his guidance. The JCS 12-week program was briefed to the Secretary of Defense conceptually on March 22 and submitted to him formally on March 27 under cover of a JCS memorandum of that date. 105/

The program is described in a detailed Annex to the memorandum as follows:

1. Concept. The concept, simply stated, is to conduct an air strike program during the remaining 10 weeks of a 12-week program which increases in intensity and severity of damage over the period. The program can be considered in four phases.

a. The initial phase consists of a three-week interdiction campaign against the vulnerable Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) LOCs south of the 20th parallel. The concept of this campaign is to conduct strikes against a number of inter-related but separated choke points which will disrupt the flow of military supplies and equipment and tax the DRV capability to restore these facilities. Essential to the success of this phase is the initial attacks on targets No. 14 and 18.8 Thanh

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Hoa and Dong Phuong RR/Highway bridges⁷. The dropping of at least one span in either and preferably both of these bridges will sever the main north-south railroad and highway routes in sufficient depth for an effective follow-on program. This initial action would be accompanied by an intense armed reconnaissance mission to destroy the isolated transport equipment. Subsequent strikes against choke points throughout the isolated area are designed to make the program effective and to complicate the DRV recovery program. Day and night armed reconnaissance would be conducted at random intervals to harass these recovery efforts and to sustain the interdiction, including armed reconnaissance against junk traffic over sea LOCs. This initial program should bring home to the population the effects of air strikes since consumer goods will be competing with military supplies for the limited transport. An effective interdiction in this area will also impede the DRV capability to mass sizeable military forces and to deploy air defense resources. The remaining few installation targets in this area would be left for later strikes by VNAF. Also, the interdiction in this area would be sustained by VNAF as US strikes moved to the north.

b. The second phase, the launching of the interdiction campaign north of the 20th parallel, introduces a consideration which was not a major factor in the campaign in the southern DRV; i.e., the possibility of MIG intervention as strikes are made against targets progressively closer to the Hanoi-Haiphong area. In order to reduce this possibility to a minimum, the first week of air operations north of the 20th parallel includes strikes against the radar net in the delta area to blind or minimize DRV early warning and intercept capability. Following these preparatory attacks, operations against the LOCs north of the 20th parallel are scheduled with the primary objective of isolating the DRV from external overland sources; i.e., rail and highway supply routes from Communist China. Subsequent to cutting these primary LOCs, the initial phase of the interdiction campaign would be completed by striking LOC targets in depth throughout the area of the DRV north of the 20th parallel.

c. Having completed the primary interdiction program in the delta area, a substantially lower effort should maintain its effectiveness. With his overland LOC cut, blocked, and harassed, the enemy can be expected to turn more and more to his port facilities and sea LOC. The ninth week air strikes will include attacks against these port facilities and the mining of seaward approaches to block the enemy from relieving his resupply problems over the sea LOC. Strikes will be initiated during the tenth week against ammunition and supply dumps to destroy on-hand stores of supplies and equipment to further aggravate his logistic problems.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

d. In the wind-up phase of the 12-week program (during the eleventh and twelfth week), strikes against on-hand supplies, equipment, and military facilities will be continued, attacking remaining worth-while targets throughout the DRV. As a part of this phase, industrial targets outside of population areas will be struck, leading up to a situation where the enemy must realize that the Hanoi and Haiphong areas will be the next logical targets in our continued air campaign.

2. [The program includes] an anti-MIG strike package; however, as provided in the policy guidance furnished the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this mission will not be executed unless the DRV MIG aircraft are able to impair the effectiveness of the strike forces. Combat air patrol aircraft, in sufficient numbers to deter MIG attack, will accompany all missions and will engage these DRV aircraft as required to protect the force. Strike forces and armed reconnaissance aircraft may persist in their missions but other reconnaissance missions will break off mission to avoid contact with MIG aircraft if feasible. Heavily populated areas will be avoided by both strike and armed reconnaissance missions.

3. Strike sorties for the next ten weeks would total approximately 3,000 or roughly 300 per week. CINCPAC has reported a capability to conduct approximately 1,600 strike sorties per week on a sustained basis. This leaves ample margin for US air support within South Vietnam and Laos and substantial armed reconnaissance to sustain the LOC interdiction...

Interestingly, the Joint Chiefs did not endorse the entire air strike program they submitted to the Secretary of Defense. They recommended that only the first phase (third, fourth, and fifth weeks of the program) be approved for execution. They had evidently failed to reach agreement on the later phases (weeks six through twelve), and indicated to the Secretary of Defense that they were still in the process of "considering alternatives for a follow-on program of air strikes beginning with the sixth week. They will advise you further in this regard, taking account of the developing situation, the current policy considerations, and military measures available to us."

As matters developed, however, even the three-week program endorsed by the JCS was not approved by the Secretary of Defense, 'though it strongly influenced the new interdiction-oriented focus of the attacks that were to follow, as well as the particular targets that were selected. But neither the Secretary of Defense nor the President was willing to approve a multi-week program in advance. They clearly preferred to retain continual personal control over attack concepts and individual target selection. Consequently, although the Joint Chiefs strongly urged

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

that "the field commander be able to detect and exploit targets of opportunity...", action in the air war against the DRV continued to be directed at the highest level and communicated through weekly guidance provided by the Secretary of Defense's ROLLING THUNDER planning messages.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

IX. REASSESSMENT AS OF APRIL 1 AND THE NSAM 328 DECISIONS

A. The Situation in South Vietnam

A curious phenomenon concerning the period of late March and early April 1965 was the great divergence among views that were being expressed about the then prevailing state of affairs in South Vietnam. Some quite favorable assessments emanated from Saigon. For example, MACV's Monthly Evaluations for March and April were most reassuring:

March, 1965: Events in March were encouraging...RVNAF ground operations were highlighted by renewed operational effort...VC activity was considerably below the norm of the preceding six months and indications were that the enemy was engaged in the re-supply and re-positioning of units possibly in preparation for a new offensive... In summary, March has given rise to some cautious optimism. The current government appears to be taking control of the situation and, if the present state of popular morale can be sustained and strengthened, the GVN, with continued U.S. support, should be able to counter future VC offensives successfully.

April, 1965: Friendly forces retained the initiative during April and a review of events reinforces the feeling of optimism generated last month...In summary, current trends are highly encouraging and the GVN may have actually turned the tide at long last. However, there are some disquieting factors which indicate a need to avoid overconfidence. A test of these trends should be forthcoming in the next few months if the VC launch their expected counter-offensive and the period may well be one of the most important of the war.

Similarly encouraging comments were contained in Ambassador Taylor's NODIS weeklies to the President -- e.g., in Saigon 2908, March 11, 1965:

The most encouraging phenomenon of the past week has been the rise in Vietnamese morale occasioned by the air strikes against North Vietnam on March 2, the announcement of our intention to utilize U.S. jet aircraft within South Vietnam, and the landing of the Marines at Danang which is still going on. The press and the public have reacted most favorably to all three of these events.

And in Saigon 2991, March 17, 1965:

With the growing pressure on North Vietnam, the psychological atmosphere continues to be favorable. What is still missing in this new atmosphere is the image of a Vietnamese Government giving direction and purpose to its people.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

On the other hand, a much more sobering assessment was contained in General Westmoreland's Commander's Estimate of the Situation in South Vietnam, dated 26 March 1965, which bluntly asserted that RVNAF would not be able to build up their strength rapidly and effectively enough to blunt the coming VC summer offensive or to seize the initiative from them. The document also estimated that the program of air activity against the North, while it might ultimately succeed in causing the DRV to cease its support of the war, would not in the short run have any major effect on the situation in the South.

The view from Washington was even less hopeful. Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton summed up the situation in the following words:
106/

The situation in general is bad and deteriorating. The VC have the initiative. Defeatism is gaining among the rural population, somewhat in the cities, and even among the soldiers -- especially those with relatives in rural areas. The Hop Tac area around Saigon is making little progress; the Delta stays bad; the country has been severed in the north. GVN control is shrinking to enclaves, some burdened with refugees. In Saigon we have a remission: Quat is giving hope on the civilian side, the Buddhists have calmed, and the split generals are in uneasy equilibrium.

A more complete and balanced overview was prepared by McGeorge Bundy in a memorandum outlining "Key Elements for Discussion" for an April 1 meeting with the President:

Morale has improved in South Vietnam. The government has not really settled down, but seems to be hopeful both in its capacity and in its sense of political forces. The armed forces continue in reasonably good shape, though top leadership is not really effective and the ratio of armed forces to the VC build-up is not good enough.

The situation in many areas of the countryside continues to go in favor of the VC, although there is now a temporary lull. The threat is particularly serious in the central provinces, and the VC forces may be regrouping for major efforts there in the near future.

Hanoi has shown no signs of give, and Peiping has stiffened its position within the last week. We still believe that attacks near Hanoi might substantially raise the odds of Peiping coming in with air. Meanwhile, we expect Hanoi to continue and step up its infiltration both by land through Laos and by sea. There are clear indications of different viewpoints in Hanoi, Peiping, and Moscow (and even in the so-called Liberation Front), and

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

continued sharp friction between Moscow and Peiping. However, neither such frictions nor the pressure of our present slowly ascending pace of air attack on North Vietnam can be expected to produce a real change in Hanoi's position for some time, probably 2 - 3 months, at best.

A key question for Hanoi is whether they continue to make real headway in the south, or whether the conflict there starts to move against them or at least appear increasingly tough. If the former, even a major step-up in our air attacks would probably not cause them to become much more reasonable; if the latter, the situation might begin to move on a political track -- but again in not less than 2 - 3 months, in our present judgment.

B. International Diplomatic Moves

On the diplomatic front, there had been no indication of any desire for talks from Hanoi, Peking, or Moscow. The British Co-Chairmen initiative had been turned down by the Soviet Government, which first floated a totally unacceptable counterproposal -- in the form of a statement condemning the U.S. "gross violation of the Geneva Accords" and calling on the U.S. "to immediately cease their aggressive acts against the DRV and to withdraw their troops..." -- and then totally rejected the British proposal. By March 16, when Gromyko met with UK Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart in London, it had become quite clear that the two Geneva Co-Chairmen would not be able to agree on a message sufficiently objective to be mutually acceptable to other members of the Conference. 107/ Gromyko had made a public statement after the meeting in London to the effect that the United States would have to deal directly with Hanoi on the Vietnam situation, to which Secretary Rusk had replied. 108/

I agree with Mr. Gromyko that Hanoi is the key to peace in Southeast Asia. If Hanoi stops molesting its neighbors, then peace can be restored promptly and U.S. forces can come home. I regret that the Soviet Union, which was a signatory of the 1954 and 1962 accords, appears disinclined to put its full weight behind those agreements.

A second initiative had been launched by President Tito of Yugoslavia in early March. Tito had written to President Johnson on March 3, urging immediate negotiations on Vietnam without either side imposing conditions. The President had replied on March 12, describing the background of our involvement in Vietnam and stating that there would be no bar to a peaceful settlement if Hanoi ceased "aggression against South Vietnam."

Tito's concern prompted him to convene a conference of 15 nonaligned nations which met in Belgrade from March 13 to 18 and issued an appeal, ultimately signed by 17 nations. (Afghanistan, Algeria, Cyprus, Ceylon,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Iraq, Kenya, Nepal, Syria, Tunisia, UAR, Uganda, Yugoslavia, and Zambia.) The declaration blamed "foreign intervention in various forms" for the aggravation of the Vietnam situation and repeated Tito's call for negotiations without preconditions.

Yet another third-party peace initiative came from U.N. Secretary General U Thant. U Thant proposed a three-month period in which there would be "a temporary cessation of all hostile military activity, whether overt or covert, across the 17th parallel in Vietnam."

McGeorge Bundy commented on these propositions in his April 1 "Key Elements for Discussion" Memorandum in a manner suggesting that he had very little expectation that any of these initiatives would lead to an early conference:

We think the U Thant proposal should be turned off. (Bunche tells us U Thant will not float it publicly if we reject it privately). It is not clear that the trade-off would be to our advantage, even if it could be arranged, and in any case, we prefer to use U Thant for private feelers rather than public proposals. We can tell U Thant that we have no objection on his sounding out Hanoi on this same point, however, and that if he gets a response, we would be glad to comment on it.

The 17 nation proposal is more attractive. We are inclined to propose to Quat that both South Vietnam and the U.S. should accept it with a covering statement of our good, firm, clear objectives in any such negotiation. The President has already made it clear that he will go anywhere to talk with anyone, and we think the 17 nation proposal is one to which we can make a pretty clear response. Tactically, it will probably not lead to any early conference, because the position of Hanoi and Peking will be that they will not attend any meeting until our bombings stop. The Secretary of State will elaborate on these propositions.

C. An End to "Reprisal"

In mid-morning of March 29, VC terrorists exploded a bomb outside the U.S. embassy in Saigon, killing and wounding many Americans and Vietnamese. It was the boldest and most direct Communist action against the U.S. since the attacks at Pleiku and Qui Nhon which had precipitated the FLAMING DART reprisals. Almost simultaneously, Ambassador Taylor enplaned for talks in Washington--and both cities were instantly abuzz with speculation that the war had entered a new and perhaps critical phase.

Indeed, Admiral Sharp promptly urged the JCS to recommend a forceful reply to the VC outrage, in the form of an out-of-turn

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

spectacular bombing attack upon a significant target in the DRV outside of the framework of ROLLING THUNDER. 109/ The plea, however, did not fall on responsive ears. At this point, the President preferred to maneuver quietly to help the nation get used to living with the Vietnam crisis. He played down any drama intrinsic in Taylor's arrival by having him attend briefings at the Pentagon and the State Department before calling at the White House; and he let it be known that the U.S. had no intention of conducting any further specific reprisal raids against North Vietnam in reply to the bombing of the embassy. Instead, he confined himself to a public statement:

The terrorist outrage aimed at the American Embassy in Saigon shows us once again what the struggle in Viet-Nam is about. This wanton act of ruthlessness has brought death and serious injury to innocent Vietnamese citizens in the street as well as to American and Vietnamese personnel on duty." He added that the Embassy was "already back in business," and that he would "at once request the Congress for authority and funds for the immediate construction of a new chancery.

After his first meeting with Taylor and other officials on March 31, the President responded to press inquiries concerning dramatic new developments by saying, "I know of no far-reaching strategy that is being suggested or promulgated."

But the President was being less than candid. The proposals that were at that moment being promulgated, and on which he reached significant decisions the following day, did involve a far-reaching strategy change: acceptance of the concept of U.S. troops engaged in offensive ground operations against Asian insurgents. This issue greatly overshadowed all other Vietnam questions then being reconsidered.

D. NSAM 328 -- Issues Posed and Decisions Made

The underlying question that was being posed for the President at this time was well formulated by Assistant Defense Secretary John McNaughton in a draft memorandum of March 24, entitled "Plan of Action for South Vietnam." The key question, McNaughton thought, was:

Can the situation inside SVN be bottomed out (a) without extreme measures against the DRV and/or (b) without deployment of large numbers of US (and other) combat troops inside SVN?" And the answer, he believed, was "perhaps -- but probably no.

To get closer to an answer, McNaughton began by restating U.S. objectives in Vietnam, and by attempting to weigh these objectives by their relative importance:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

- 70% - To avoid a humiliating US defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor).
- 20% - To keep SVN (and then adjacent) territory from Chinese hands.
- 10% - To permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life.
- ALSO - To emerge from crisis without unacceptable taint from methods used.
- NOT - To "help a friend," although it would be hard to stay in if asked out.

McNaughton then proceeded to enumerate some twenty-odd ways in which the GVN might collapse, and noted that in spite -- or perhaps precisely because -- of the imminence of this collapse and the unpromising nature of remedial action, U.S. policy had been drifting. As he saw it, the "trilemma" of U.S. policy was that the three possible remedies to GVN collapse -- (a) heavy will-breaking air attacks on the DRV, (b) large U.S. troops deployments to SVN, and (c) exit by negotiations -- were all beset with difficulties and uncertainties. Strikes against the North, he felt, were balked "(1) by flash-point limits, (2) by doubts that the DRV will cave and (3) by doubts that the VC will obey a caving DRV. (Leaving strikes only a political and anti-infiltration nuisance.)" Deployment of combat forces, he believed, was blocked "by French-defeat and Korea syndromes, and Quat is queasy. (Troops could be net negatives, and be besieged.)" And negotiations he saw as "tainted by the humiliation likely to follow."

McNaughton then proceeded to review in detail the purposes, alternatives, and risks of the bombing program as it then stood, treating the issue more comprehensively and systematically than it has been considered elsewhere. His schematic exposition is, therefore, reproduced here in full:

Strikes on the North (program of progressive military pressure)

- a. Purposes:
 - (1) Reduce DRV/VC activities by affecting DRV will.
 - (2) To improve the GVN/VC relative "balance of morale."
 - (3) To provide the US/GVN with a bargaining counter.
 - (4) To reduce DRV infiltration of men and materiel.
 - (5) To show the world the lengths to which US will go for a friend.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

- b. Program: Each week, 1 or 2 "mission days" with 100-plane high damage US-VNAF strikes each "day" against important targets, plus 3 armed recce missions -- all moving upward in weight of effort, value of target or proximity to Hanoi and China.

ALTERNATIVE ONE: 12-week DRV-wide program shunning only "population" targets.

ALTERNATIVE TWO: 12-week program short of taking out Phuc Yen (Hanoi) airfield.

- c. Other actions:
- (1) Blockade of DRV ports by VNAF/US-dropped mines or by ships.
 - (2) South Vietnamese-implemented 34A MAROPS.
 - (3) Reconnaissance flights over Laos and the DRV.
 - (4) Daily BARREL ROLL armed recce strikes in Laos (plus T-28s).
 - (5) Four-a-week BARREL ROLL choke-point strikes in Laos.
 - (6) US/VNAF air & naval strikes against VC ops and bases in SVN.
 - (7) Westward deployment of US forces.
 - (8) No DeSoto patrols or naval bombardment of DRV at this time.
- d. Red "flash points." There are events which we can expect to imply substantial risk of escalation:
- (1) Air strikes north of 17^o. (This one already passed.)
 - (2) First US/VNAF confrontation with DRV MIGs.
 - (3) Strike on Phuc Yen MIG base near Hanoi.
 - (4) First strikes on Tonkin industrial/population targets.
 - (5) First strikes on Chinese railroad or near China.
 - (6) First US/VNAF confrontation with ChiCom MIGs.
 - (7) First hot pursuit of ChiCom MIGs into China.
 - (8) First flak-suppression of ChiCom- or Soviet-manned SAM.
 - (9) Massive introduction of US ground troops into SVN.
 - (10) US/ARVN occupation of DRV territory (e.g., Ile de Tigre).
 - (11) First Chi/Sov-US confrontation or sinking in blockade.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

- e. Blue "flash points." China/DRV surely are sensitive to events which might cause us to escalate:
- (1) All of the above "Red" flash points.
 - (2) VC ground attack on Danang.
 - (3) Sinking of a US naval vessel.
 - (4) Open deployment of DRV troops into South Vietnam.
 - (5) Deployment of Chinese troops into North Vietnam.
 - (6) Deployment of FROGs or SAMs in North Vietnam.
 - (7) DRV air attack on South Vietnam.
 - (8) Announcement of Liberation Government in I/II Corps area.
- f. Major risks:
- (1) Losses to DRV MIGs, and later possibly to SAMs.
 - (2) Increased VC activities, and possibly Liberation Government.
 - (3) Panic or other collapse of GVN from under us.
 - (4) World-wide revulsion against us (against strikes, blockade, etc.).
 - (5) Sympathetic fires over Berlin, Cyprus, Kashmir, Jordan waters.
 - (6) Escalation to conventional war with DRV, China (and USSR?).
 - (7) Escalation to the use of nuclear weapons.
- g. Other Red Moves:
- (1) More jets to NVN with DRV or Chicom pilots.
 - (2) More AAA (SAMs?) and radar gear (Soviet-manned?) to NVN.
 - (3) Increased air and ground forces in South China.
 - (4) Other "defensive" DRV retaliation (e.g., shoot-down of a U-2).
 - (5) PL land grabs in Laos.
 - (6) PL declaration of new government in Laos.
 - (7) Political drive for "neutralization" of Indo-China.
- h. Escalation control. We can do three things to avoid escalation too-much or too-fast:
- (1) Stretch out: Retard the program (e.g., 1 not 2 fixed strikes a week).
 - (2) Circuit breaker. Abandon at least temporarily the theory that our strikes are intended to break DRV will, and

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"plateau" them below the "Phuc Yen airfield" flash point on one or the other of these tenable theories:
(a) That we strike as necessary to interdict infiltration. (b) That our level of strikes is generally responsive to the level of VC/DRV activities in South Vietnam.

- (3) Shunt. Plateau the air strikes per para (2) and divert the energy into:
(a) a mine-and/or ship-blockade of DRV ports. (b) Massive deployment of US (and other?) troops into SVN (and Laos?): (1) To man the "enclaves," releasing ARVN forces. (2) To take over Pleiku, Kontum, Darlac provinces. (3) To create a 16+⁰ sea-Thailand infiltration wall.

i. Important Miscellany:

- (1) Program should appear to be relentless (i.e., possibility of employing "circuit-breakers" should be secret).
(2) Enemy should be kept aware of our limited objectives.
(3) Allies should be kept on board.
(4) USSR should be kept in passive role.
(5) Information program should preserve US public support.

McNaughton's memorandum dealt in similar detail with the two other forms of remedial action that were then being considered: US troop deployments and exit negotiations. Neither of these, however, is a matter of prime concern within the scope of this paper. It is well to remember, however, that the April 1 Presidential policy review was not confined to the air campaign against the DRV. It embraced the whole panoply of military and non-military actions that might be undertaken in South and North Vietnam, but the main focus was clearly on actions within South Vietnam, and the principal concern of Administration policy makers at this time was with the prospect of major deployments of US and Third Country combat forces to SVN.

Unlike McNaughton's memorandum, the McGeorge Bundy discussion paper of April 1 which set forth the key issues for consideration and decision by the President; gave only the most superficial treatment to the complex matter of future air pressures policy. In fact, the Bundy paper merely listed a series of action recommendations, seemingly providing little room for debate or for consideration of alternatives. The actions proposed amounted to little more than a continuation of the ongoing modest ROLLING THUNDER program, directed, with slowly rising intensity, at the LOC targets that were then beginning to be hit. One must assume that the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

recommendations were not subjected to any searching debate when they were discussed with the President on April 2, since the wording of the President's decision in the NSAM issued on April 6, 110/ is verbatim identical with the wording of the McGeorge Bundy recommendation that was circulated to the Principals before the meeting:

Subject to continuing review, the President approved the following general framework of continuing action against North Vietnam and Laos:

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

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

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

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

Air operation in Laos, particularly route blocking operations in the Panhandle area, should be stepped up to the maximum remunerative rate.

E. The Director of Central Intelligence Demurs

As has been indicated, the dramatic element in the President's decisions of April 2 was not in the sphere of air strikes against the North, but in the area of the mission of US ground forces in South Vietnam. NSAM 328 promulgated the significant decision to change the role of the Marine battalions deployed to Vietnam from one of advice and static defense to one of active combat operations against the VC guerrillas. The fact that this departure from a long-held policy had momentous implications was well recognized by the Administration leadership. The President himself was greatly concerned that the step be given as little prominence as possible. In NSAM 328 his wishes in this regard were stated as follows:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The President desires that with respect to (these) actions ...premature publicity be avoided by all possible precautions. The actions themselves should be taken as rapidly as practicable, but in ways that should minimize any appearance of sudden changes in policy, and official statements on these troop movements will be made only with the direct approval of the Secretary of Defense, in that these movements and changes should be understood as being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy.

Whether and to what extent there was support or opposition to this step among top Administration advisers is not recorded in the documentation available to this writer. But one interesting demurrer was introduced by the Director of Central Intelligence, John A. McCone, in a memorandum he circulated on April 2 to Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and Ambassador Taylor.

McCone did not inherently disagree with the change in the U.S. ground force role, but felt that it was inconsistent with the decision to continue the air strike program at the feeble level at which it was then being conducted. McCone developed his argument as follows:

I have been giving thought to the paper that we discussed in yesterday's meeting, which unfortunately I had little time to study, and also to the decision made to change the mission of our ground forces in South Vietnam from one of advice and static defense to one of active combat operations against the Viet Cong guerrillas.

I feel that the latter decision is correct only if our air strikes against the North are sufficiently heavy and damaging really to hurt the North Vietnamese. The paper we examined yesterday does not anticipate the type of air operation against the North necessary to force the NVN to reappraise their policy. On the contrary, it states, "We should continue roughly the present slowly ascending tempo of ROLLING THUNDER operations ----," and later, in outlining the types of targets, states, "The target systems should continue to avoid the effective GCI range of MIG's," and these conditions indicate restraints which will not be persuasive to the NVN and would probably be read as evidence of a U.S. desire to temporize.

I have reported that the strikes to date have not caused a change in the North Vietnamese policy of directing Viet Cong insurgency, infiltrating cadres and supplying material. If anything, the strikes to date have hardened their attitude.

I have now had a chance to examine the 12-week program referred to by General Wheeler and it is my personal opinion that this program is not sufficiently severe or damaging to the North Vietnamese to cause them to compromise their present policy.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

On the other hand, we must look with care to our position under a program of slowly ascending tempo of air strikes. With the passage of each day and each week, we can expect increasing pressure to stop the bombing. This will come from various elements of the American public, from the press, the United Nations and world opinion. Therefore time will run against us in this operation and I think the North Vietnamese are counting on this.

Therefore I think what we are doing is starting on a track which involves ground force operations which, in all probability, will have limited effectiveness against guerrillas, although admittedly will restrain some VC advances. However, we can expect requirements for an ever-increasing commitment of U.S. personnel without materially improving the chances of victory. I support and agree with this decision but I must point out that in my judgment, forcing submission of the VC can only be brought about by a decision in Hanoi. Since the contemplated actions against the North are modest in scale, they will not impose unacceptable damage on it, nor will they threaten the DRV's vital interests. Hence, they will not present them with a situation with which they cannot live, though such actions will cause the DRV pain and inconvenience.

I believe our proposed track offers great danger of simply encouraging Chinese Communist and Soviet support of the DRV and VC cause, if for no other reason than the risk for both will be minimum. I envision that the reaction of the NVN and Chinese Communists will be to deliberately, carefully, and probably gradually, build up the Viet Cong capabilities by covert infiltration on North Vietnamese and, possibly, Chinese cadres and thus bring an ever-increasing pressure on our forces. In effect, we will find ourselves mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win, and from which we will have extreme difficulty in extracting ourselves.

Therefore it is my judgment that if we are to change the mission of the ground forces, we must also change the ground rules of the strikes against North Vietnam. We must hit them harder, more frequently, and inflict greater damage. Instead of avoiding the MIG's, we must go in and take them out. A bridge here and there will not do the job. We must strike their airfields, their petroleum resources, power stations and their military compounds. This, in my opinion, must be done promptly and with minimum restraint.

If we are unwilling to take this kind of a decision now, we must not take the actions concerning the mission of our ground forces for the reasons I have mentioned above.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The record does not show whether this memorandum was ever submitted to or discussed with the President. In any event, the President had already made his decision by the time the above memorandum reached the addressees. McCone, however, persisted in his concern over what he felt was an inadequately forceful air strike program and he did subsequently make his views known to the President, by way of a personal memorandum and a coordinated intelligence estimate he handed to the President on April 28, the date on which his successor, Admiral Raborn, was sworn in. The memorandum itself is not available to this writer, but both the estimate and Admiral Raborn's reaction to the two documents are at hand. They are discussed in Section XIII below.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

X. APRIL 7th INITIATIVE -- THE BILLION DOLLAR CARROT

A. Mounting Public Criticism

During the latter half of March and the beginning of April, from near and far more and more brickbats were being hurled at the Administration's position on Vietnam. At home, columnist Walter Lippman raised his voice to observe that U.S. policy "is all stick and no carrot. We are telling the North Vietnamese that they will be very badly hurt if they do not quit...But we are not telling the North Vietnamese what kind of future there would be for them and the rest of Indochina if the war ended as we think it should end."

Abroad, in an empty but well-publicized gesture, philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre canceled a lecture trip to the U.S. on the ground that Gallup polls indicated most Americans are in favor of the air raids into North Vietnam. "Where contradictory opinions thus have hardened," said the reluctant Nobel Prize winner, "dialogue is impossible." And in a considerably more potent gesture, the government of Charles de Gaulle chose this particular juncture to renew its annual trade agreement with North Vietnam and to extend Hanoi medium-term credits for the purchase of French goods.

Within the Administration there was a growing feeling that somewhere along the line the hand had been misplayed, that somehow the mix of increased military pressure and increased diplomatic efforts for settlement had not been right. In late March, therefore, the President began to try to alter the mix. He began by spending much time on efforts at personal persuasion, talking to Congressmen and other visitors in his office about the restraint and patience he was showing in operation ROLLING THUNDER. Evans and Novak 111 describe one of these sessions as follows:

To illustrate his caution, he showed critics the map of North Vietnam and pointed out the targets he had approved for attack, and to the many more targets he had disapproved. As for Communist China, he was watching for every possible sign of reaction. Employing a vivid sexual analogy, the President explained to friends and critics one day that the slow escalation of the air war in the North and the increasing pressure on Ho Chi Minh was seduction, not rape. If China should suddenly react to slow escalation, as a woman might react to attempted seduction, by threatening to retaliate (a slap in the face, to continue the metaphor), the United States would have plenty of time to ease off the bombing. On the other hand, if the United States were to unleash an all-out, total assault on the North - rape rather than seduction - there could be no turning back, and Chinese reaction might be instant and total. Johnson's language left nothing to the imagination and shocked those who heard it. It made an unforgettable image. The United States was engaged in a period of testing against Ho Chi Minh, but the exercise was seduction, not rape.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

But despite the full use of his power to influence, the President could not stop the critics. Condemnation of the bombing spread to the campuses and to a widening circle of Congressmen. From many directions the President was being pressed to make a major public statement welcoming negotiations.

Up to this time, the official U.S. position had been unreceptive to negotiations, although the President had paid lip-service to his willingness to "do anything and go anywhere in the interests of peace." Past inaction he blamed entirely on Hanoi. It was, he said, Hanoi that would not talk peace, Hanoi that was subverting South Vietnam, Hanoi that was making it possible for the war to continue by funneling supplies and manpower over the Ho Chi Minh trail. Washington was not to blame. But now the formula no longer seemed adequate, and the President began to look for a more spectacular way of dramatizing his peaceful intent. He found it in three ingredients which he combined in his renowned Johns Hopkins address of April 7th.

B. Ingredients for Johns Hopkins

Three elements combined to make the President's Johns Hopkins speech an important initiative: First, a new formulation of U.S. readiness to negotiate, in the shape of an acceptance by the President of the spirit of the 17-Nation Appeal of March 15, which had called upon the belligerents to start negotiations as soon as possible "without posing any preconditions." Here are the words of the speech which the President hoped would satisfy the principal demand of the doves:

We will never be second in the search for...a peaceful settlement in Viet-Nam.

There may be many ways to this kind of peace: in discussion or negotiation with the governments concerned; in large groups or in small ones; in the reaffirmation of old agreements or their strengthening with new ones.

We have stated this position over and over again 50 times and more to friend and foe alike. And we remain ready with this purpose for unconditional discussions.

A second key element of the speech was drawn from ideas long propounded by such old Southeast Asia hands as former U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Kenneth Young, involving a massive regional development effort for the area, based on the Mekong River basin. This was precisely the kind of hopeful and positive gesture the President needed to put a bright constructive face on his Vietnam policy. Painting the picture of a potentially peaceful five-nation area, the President said:

The first step is for the countries of Southeast Asia to associate themselves in a greatly expanded cooperative effort for development. We would hope that North Viet-Nam would

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

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TOP SECRET - Sensitive

take its place in the common effort just as soon as peaceful cooperation is possible.

And the President then offered his munificent carrot:

For our part I will ask the Congress to join in a billion-dollar American investment in this effort as soon as it is underway.

And he underlined the grandioseness of the vision by characterizing the effort as being conceived "on a scale to dwarf even our TVA.

There was a third key element to the Johns Hopkins speech which the President added almost literally at the last minute -- an illustrious name, a person of unquestioned stature, to lend some credibility and prestige to the somewhat improbable peaceful development gambit in the midst of war. The President found that ingredient in the person of Eugene Black, former President of the World Bank, a figure of high prominence in international finance, and a politician enjoying Congressional confidence and open lines to both Democrats and Republicans. In a whirlwind performance, the President recruited Black just a few short hours before his scheduled appearance at Johns Hopkins, and was able to announce that appointment in his speech.

C. Hanoi and Peking "Close the Door"

While the President's speech evoked a good press and much favorable public reaction throughout the world, 112/ its practical consequences were meager. It failed to silence the Peace Bloc and it failed to bring the Communists to the negotiating table.

It is worth noting that the President's initiative of April 7 was in accord with the "pressures-policy" rationale that had been worked out in November, 1964, which held that U.S. readiness to negotiate was not to be surfaced until after a series of air strikes had been carried out against important targets in North Vietnam. Significantly, during the two weeks prior to the President's address, ROLLING THUNDER VIII (the "Radar Busting Week") and IX (the first week of the "anti-LOC" campaign) had inaugurated an almost daily schedule of bombing. Thus the U.S. was now attempting to achieve, through a deliberate combination of intensified military pressures and diplomatic enticements, what it had hoped would result from a mere token demonstration of capability and resolve. The carrot had been added to the stick, but the stick was still the more tangible and visible element of U.S. policy. And the President made sure that this coercive element would remain very much in the foreground, when he stated, in the April 7 speech:

I wish it were possible to convince others with words of what we now find it necessary to say with guns and planes: armed hostility is futile - our resources are equal to any

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

challenge - because we fight for values and we fight for principle, rather than territory or colonies, our patience and our determination are unending.

But neither pressures nor blandishments succeeded in moving Hanoi. On the day following the President's speech, North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong published his famous "Four Points," recognition of which he made clear, was the sole way in which "favorable conditions" could be created for peaceful settlement of the war. Two days later, in a telling denunciation of the President's John Hopkins speech, North Vietnam said that the United States was using the "peace" label to conceal its aggression and that the Southeast Asia development proposal was simply a "carrot" offered to offset the "stick" of aggression and to seek to allay domestic and international criticism of U.S. policy in Vietnam. The following day, an article in a Chinese Communist newspaper denounced President Johnson's proposal for unconditional discussions as "a swindle pure and simple." To complete the rejection of Western initiatives, Hanoi turned down the appeal of the seventeen non-aligned nations on April 19, reiterating that Pham Van Dong's "Four Points" were the "only correct way" to resolve the Vietnam problem; and three days later Peking's Peoples' Daily gave the coup-de-grace to the 17-nation appeal, saying that it amounted to "legalizing the United States imperialist aggression" and that "the Viet-Nameese people will never agree to negotiations 'without any preconditions.'"

D. President's Reprise: Tragedy, Disappointment -- But
No Bombing Pause

The rejection of the President's initiative had been total. And other Western peace feelers were equally bluntly turned away. British former Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker who sought to visit Peking and Hanoi on a self-appointed peace mission to sound out both governments on the possibilities of negotiations was unceremoniously denied entry to both Mainland China and North Vietnam.

In the light of these developments, the President made another public statement, 113/ opening with the words, "This has been a week of tragedy, disappointment, and progress."

We tried to open a window to peace," the President said, "only to be met with tired names and slogans and a refusal to talk." But he tried once more:

They want no talk with us, no talk with a distinguished Briton, no talk with the United Nations. They want no talk at all so far. But our offer stands. We mean every word of it...

The window to peace is still open. We are still ready for unconditional discussion. We will impose no conditions

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of any kind on any government willing to talk, nor will we accept any. On this basis we are ready to begin discussion next week, tomorrow, or tonight...

To those governments who doubt our willingness to talk the answer is simple - agree to discussion, come to the meeting room. We will be there. Our objective in Viet-Nam remains the same - an independent South Vietnam, tied to no alliance, free to shape its relations and association with all other nations. This is what the people of South Vietnam want, and we will finally settle for no less.

But this is as far as the President was willing to go in his concessions to the Peace Bloc at this time.

To the clamor from many directions, including from Senator Fulbright and from Canada's Prime Minister Lester Pearson, that the U.S. should pause in its air strikes to bring about negotiations, the Administration responded with a resounding "No." Secretary Rusk made the U.S. position clear on this, in a statement read to news correspondents on April 17:

We have thought long and soberly about suspending, for a period, the raids on North Viet-Nam. Some have suggested this could lead to an end of aggression from the North. But we have tried publicly and privately to find out if this would be the result, and there has been no response. Others say such a pause is needed to signal our sincerity, but no signal is needed. Our sincerity is plain.

If we thought such action would advance the cause of an honorable peace, we would order it immediately, but now our best judgment tells us it would only encourage the aggressor and dishearten our friends who bear the brunt of battle.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

XI. HONOLULU, APRIL 20 -- IN SEARCH OF CONSENSUS

A. Background and Conclusions of Conference

By the middle of April, communications between Washington and Saigon were becoming increasingly strained, as it began to dawn upon Ambassador Taylor that Washington was determined, with the President's sanction, to go far beyond the agreements to which Taylor had been a party at the beginning of April and that had been formalized in NSAM 328. From April 8 onward, Taylor had been bombarded with messages and instructions from Washington testifying to an eagerness to speed up the introduction to Vietnam of U.S. and Third Country ground forces and to employ them in a combat role, all far beyond anything that had been authorized in the April 2 NSC decisions. Ambassador Taylor's ill-concealed annoyance at these mounting pressures and progressively more radical proposals changed to outright anger and open protest when, on April 18, he received another instruction, 114/ allegedly with the sanction of "highest authority," proposing seven additional complicated measures having to do with combat force deployment and employment, on the justification that "something new must be added in the South to achieve victory." Taylor's exasperated response to McGeorge Bundy the same day made it clear that meaningful communication between Washington and Saigon had all but broken down and that something needed to be done quickly to restore some sense of common purpose and to provide Taylor with a revised set of instructions.

It was with this background that Secretary McNamara convened a conference in Honolulu on very short notice, bringing together most of the key personalities involved in Vietnam policy-making: Chairman Wheeler of the JCS, General Westmoreland, COMUSMACV, Admiral Sharp, CINCPAC, Ambassador Taylor from Saigon, William Bundy of State, and John McNaughton of Defense.

Precisely what transpired during the one-day meeting in Honolulu on April 20th is not known to this writer. But clearly the meeting was called for the explicit purpose of ironing out differences and smoothing ruffled feathers. The immediate concern was to reach specific agreement on troop deployments; but an underlying objective was to restore a semblance of consensus about assessments and priorities.

The record contains two documents that report on the results of the meeting. (1) The minutes of the meeting prepared by John McNaughton, and (2) a Memorandum for the President prepared by the Secretary of Defense on April 21 which is almost, but not quite, identical with McNaughton's minutes. The differences are significant in that they suggest an effort on McNamara's part to stress even more than did McNaughton the unanimity of view that was achieved at Honolulu.

Sections of the two documents relevant to the air war are quoted below. Where the two texts differ, both versions are shown -- McNamara's in brackets [], McNaughton's in parentheses ():

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

(Secretary McNamara, accompanied by) Mr. William Bundy (and) Mr. McNaughton [and I] met with Ambassador Taylor, General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland in Honolulu on Tuesday, April 20. (The minutes of that meeting follow:) [Following is my report of the meeting:]

1. (There was consensus that) [None of them expect] the DRV/VC (cannot be expected) to capitulate, or come to a position acceptable to us, in less than six months. This is because they believe that a settlement will come as much or more from VC failure in the South as from DRV pain in the North, and that it will take more than six months, perhaps a year or two, to demonstrate VC failure in the South.

2. With respect to strikes against the North, (it was agreed) [they all agree] that the present tempo is about right, that sufficient increasing pressure is provided by repetition and continuation. All of them envisioned a strike program continuing at least six months, perhaps a year or more, avoiding the Hanoi-Haiphong-Phuc Yen areas during that period. There might be fewer fixed targets, or more restrikes, or more armed reconnaissance missions. Ambassador Taylor stated what appeared to be a (shared) [majority] view, that it is important not to "kill the hostage" by destroying the North Vietnamese assets inside the "Hanoi do-nut." (It was agreed) [They all believe] that the strike program is essential to our campaign -- both psychologically and physically -- but that it cannot be expected to do the job alone. [They] All considered it very important that strikes against the North be continued during any talks.

3. None of (the participants) [them] sees a dramatic improvement in the South in the immediate future. (The) [Their] strategy for "victory" (proposed by Ambassador Taylor, General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland) [however] is to break the will of the DRV/VC by denying them victory. Ambassador Taylor put it in terms of a demonstration of Communist impotence, which will lead eventually to a political solution. They see slow improvement in the South, but all (participants) emphasized the critical importance of holding on and avoiding -- for psychological and morale reasons -- a spectacular defeat of GVN or US forces. And they all suspect that the recent VC lull is but the quiet before a storm...

The documents continue with specific force deployment recommendations that were agreed upon at the meeting. In addition, McNaughton's minutes contain the following concluding item:

It was agreed that tasks within South Vietnam should have first call on air assets in the area and that, if at any time there are not enough air assets in the area to perform all

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

necessary tasks, more air should be brought in. Secretary McNamara directed that this policy be implemented at once.

From this evidence, it seems apparent that Honolulu marked the relative downgrading of pressures against the North, in favor of more intensive activity in the South. The key to success, it was now felt, was not to destroy or defeat the enemy, but to frustrate him -- "to break the will of the DRV/VC by denying them victory" and, above all, to avoid, for our part, a dramatic defeat. Thus the decision at this point was to "plateau" the air strikes more or less at the prevailing level, relying on "repetition and continuation" to provide increasing pressure, rather than to pursue the relentless dynamic course that had been so ardently advocated by Ambassador Taylor and Admiral Sharp in February and March, or the massive destruction of the North Vietnamese target complex so consistently advocated by the Joint Chiefs. If Honolulu represented more than a "shotgun wedding," if it reflected in fact a relatively uncoerced expression of views, the leading U.S. actors in the Vietnam drama must have undergone, in the intervening weeks, a reordering of expectations with respect to the results that bombing might achieve. Their views at this point, in any event, were strikingly more restrained on the bombing issue than they had been previously.

An alternative -- and less charitable -- explanation might be that, in the meantime, attention had shifted from the air war to the subject of U.S. combat force deployments, and had thus generated a need to concentrate on issues, arguments and rationalizations that would serve to promote and justify these new actions. Preoccupation with pressures against the North had long been viewed as something of a competitor, something of a distraction, by many advocates of a more forceful U.S. role in the South. Thus it seems logical that, with the decision to begin a major U.S. ground force commitment, the air campaign should have been reduced in rank to second billing.

B. Interdiction is Surfaced

Along with the levelling-off of the air strikes and a reordering of expectations as to their likely effectiveness came the decision to publicize the fact that "interdiction" was now a major objective of the strikes. It will be recalled that LOC interdiction had become a key element in the U.S. target rationale beginning with ROLLING THUNDER IX (week of April 2). After Honolulu, with the prospective deepening of the U.S. involvement on the ground and the need to justify that involvement in terms of "resisting NVN aggression," it seemed desirable to stress that aspect of U.S. action more explicitly in public. Whereas previously there had been only passing reference to the fact that U.S. air attacks on North Vietnam had been aimed at targets "associated with infiltration," it was now decided to feature interdiction as the objective of U.S. bombing.

Secretary Rusk made first public mention of this new rationale on April 23, 115/ when he stated:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The bombing is designed to interdict, as far as possible, and to inhibit, as far as may be necessary, continued aggression against the Republic of Viet-Nam.

Three days later, Secretary McNamara gave a special briefing to the press corps at the Pentagon, complete with maps and photographs, driving home the point of massive infiltration from the North:

Now the current [VNAF and U.S.] strikes against North Vietnam have been designed to impede this infiltration of men and materiel, and infiltration which makes the difference between a situation which is manageable and one which is not manageable internally by the Government of South Vietnam.

The air strikes have been carefully limited to military targets, primarily to infiltration targets. To transit points, to barracks, to supply depots, to ammunition depots, to routes of communication, all feeding the infiltration lines from North Vietnam into Laos and then into South Vietnam.

More recently there has been added to this target system railroads, highways, and bridges which are the foundation of the infiltration routes...

The strikes have been designed to increase the dependence on an already over-burdened road transport system by denying the use of the rail lines in the South. In summary, our objectives have been to force them off the rails onto the highways and off the highways onto their feet...

Supplementing the bridge strikes, armed reconnaissance is being conducted along truck convoy routes against maritime traffic and rolling stock on the rail lines...

These carefully controlled rail strikes will continue as necessary to impede the infiltration and to persuade the North Vietnamese leadership that their aggression against the south will not succeed...

C. Political Objectives are Reviewed

Now that interdiction was being publicly embraced as a major objective of the bombing, at least one high-ranking Administration official began to realize that insufficient attention had been paid to the U.S. political posture in the event that the DRV became persuaded "that their aggression will not succeed."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

As early as April 1, 116/ McGeorge Bundy expressed his concern that the eventual bargaining tradeoffs had not received the careful consideration that they deserved. As he saw it:

We have three cards of some value: our bombing of North Vietnam, our military presence in South Vietnam, and the political and economic carrots that can be offered to Hanoi. We want to trade these cards for just as much as possible of the following: an end to infiltration of men and supplies, an end of Hanoi's direction, control, and encouragement of the Viet Cong, a removal of cadres under direct Hanoi control, and a dissolution of the organized Viet Cong military and political forces. We do not need to decide today just how we wish to mesh our high cards against Communist concessions. But we will need to be in such a position soon, if only to exchange views with Quat. On this more general point, we believe more exploratory conversation with the President is needed today. [April 1]

Apparently, however, any exploratory conversation that took place on that and other occasions failed to lead to a clarification of what the U.S. and the GVN could regard as "a satisfactory outcome" in Vietnam. McGeorge Bundy continued to feel a sense of urgency about beginning discussions with the Saigon Government on this matter. Thus on April 25 he circulated a Memorandum to the Principals, lamenting the lack of progress toward such discussions:

We have had a lot of discussion among ourselves and with Embassy Saigon on the negotiating track, but we have not yet had serious discussions with the Republic of Vietnam. Such serious discussions are the necessary preliminary of any substantial improvement in our political posture, because our whole position depends on the legitimacy of that independent government.

But we have had great difficulty in talking to Quat so far because our thinking has focused so sharply on the complexities of the bargaining problem itself:

At what stage would we stop bombing?

At what point and with what guarantees could we begin to withdraw?

What are the real terms of an effective cease-fire?

These are very difficult questions and the truth is that they cannot be answered today. They are precisely the problems which will have to be settled by a combination of action

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

on the ground and hard bargaining. Moreover, it is very hard for us to look these questions in the eye with Quat & Company lest each of us begins to suspect the determination of the other.

It is perhaps worth observing that these very same questions were still as difficult to answer and as devious in April, 1968 as they seemed to Bundy in April, 1965. But at that time Bundy felt that a different approach might be more productive. Thus the main purpose of his memorandum was:

...to suggest that there is a better place to begin on this problem: namely, by getting a clearer and more comprehensive statement of the elements of a good eventual solution inside South Vietnam. We can and should work out with Quat a program whose elements could include:

1. Internationally validated free elections, first locally, then regionally, and finally on a national basis.
2. A broad and generous offer of political amnesty to all who abandon the use of force, coupled with the right of repatriation to the North, or opportunities for peaceful resettlement in the South.
3. A clear opportunity for the people of South Vietnam themselves to express themselves directly on the peaceful presence of Americans and other foreigners in helping with the peaceful progress of Vietnam.
4. Reciprocal guarantees against any border violation with all neighbors of South Vietnam, and a readiness to accept international patrols along these borders.
5. A declaration of intent to work for the unification of all Vietnam by the free choice of its people and a readiness to accept nationwide free elections for this purpose if this position is:
 - a. Supported by the people of South Vietnam in appropriate constitutional process.
 - b. Accepted by the Government of North Vietnam, and
 - c. Validated by effectively guaranteed rights of free political activity for all parties in both parts of the country.

There are other elements to a strong GVN program, and closer study may well show that the GVN has already accepted a number of these positions. My present point is simply that

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

our own political position needs now to be built on a clearer and stronger statement of objectives from Saigon itself.

Once this stronger position of Saigon is established, the US could add its own support and its own determination to be guided by the freely expressed wishes of the people of South Vietnam. It could express its readiness to give peaceful help to such a settled country, and it could reaffirm its readiness to participate in appropriate international guarantees. It could also reaffirm its determination to support the GVN until this program is accepted.

But the "strong GVN program" Bundy had in mind clearly did not contemplate any serious compromise with the NLF. It was a politically strengthened, internationally guaranteed, Western-oriented government Bundy was seeking to create -- at least in appearance if not in reality. The grinding problem of the ultimate role of the NLF was left unaddressed and in limbo:

The probability is that any such program would and should leave open the exact opportunities open to the Liberation Front and its members in the new politics of South Vietnam. This is as it should be, since this point is precisely the one which can only be settled by events and bargaining.

It is a striking fact that, in April, 1968, three years later, this crucial point was still viewed as one which can only be settled by events and bargaining.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

XII. PROJECT MAYFLOWER -- THE FIRST BOMBING PAUSE

A. The Background

Pressure for some form of bombing halt had mounted steadily throughout April and early May. As early as April 2, Canada's Prime Minister Lester Pearson, on his way to meet with President Johnson, had stopped off to make a speech in Philadelphia in which he suggested that the President should order a "pause" in the bombing of North Vietnam.

Pearson's gratuitous advice was particularly galling to the President because the pause had become the battle slogan of the anti-Vietnam movement. Students had picketed the LBJ Ranch in Texas, demanding a cessation of bombing. A massive teach-in had been scheduled for May 15 in Washington, with academicians who wanted withdrawal of American influence from the Asian mainland, ready to demand as a first step an immediate end of the bombing. Pressure for a pause was building up, too, in Congress among liberal Democrats. 117/ The U.N. Secretary General was on a continual bombing pause kick, with a proposal for a three month suspension of bombing in return for Hanoi's agreement to cease infiltration in South Vietnam. U Thant had told Ambassador Stevenson on April 24 that he believed such a gesture would facilitate renewed non-aligned pressure upon Hanoi to negotiate.

Evidently, however, the President was not impressed with the widespread clamor that such a gesture would evoke any response from Hanoi. He had responded favorably to the 17-Nation appeal in his April 7th speech, only to be answered with blunt rejection by Hanoi and Peking. The U.S. had responded favorably to the idea of a Cambodian Conference that would provide opportunities for "corridor contacts" with Communist powers on the Vietnam problem, but Peking had apparently blocked that initiative. Encouragement had been given to a UK approach to the Soviets in February looking toward consultations under Article 19 of the 1962 Geneva Accords, but no response from the USSR had been received. The Radhakrishnan proposal for a cease-fire along the 17th parallel, supervised by an "Afro-Asian Force" was being favorably considered by the U.S. only to be denounced as a "plot" by Peking and as an "offense" by Hanoi. Publicly, the President was plaintive:

There are those who frequently talk of negotiations and political settlement and that they believe this is the course we should pursue, and so do I. When they talk that way I say, welcome to the club. I want to negotiate. I would much rather talk than fight, and I think everyone would. Bring in who you want us to negotiate with. I have searched high and wide, and I am a reasonably good cowboy, and I can't even rope anybody and bring them in who is willing to talk and

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

settle this by negotiation. We send them messages through allies - one country, two countries, three countries, four or five countries - all have tried to be helpful. The distinguished British citizen, Mr. (Patrick Gordon) Walker, has been out there, and they say, we can't even talk to you. All our intelligence is unanimous in this one point, that they see no need for negotiation. They think they are winning and they have won and why should they sit down and give us something and settle with us. 118/

But while the public clamor persisted and became more and more difficult to ignore, the President was receiving intelligence assessments from Saigon and from Washington that tended to confirm his reading of Hanoi's disinterest in negotiations, but that provided him with a quite different argument for a bombing pause at this time: if the conflict was going to have to be expanded and bombing intensified before Hanoi would "come to reason," it would be easier and politically more palatable to do so after a pause, which would afford an opportunity for the enemy's intentions to be more clearly revealed.

On May 4, in response to an urgent request from Washington, Ambassador Taylor submitted a U.S. Mission "Assessment of DRV/VC Probable Courses of Action During the Next Three Months." The assessment confirmed the Washington view that Hanoi continued to have a very favorable view of its prospects for victory:

...Tone of statements emanating from Hanoi since February and March indicate that the DRV has not weakened in its determination to continue directing and supporting Viet Cong and seeking further intensification of war in the South.

From DRV viewpoint, outlook is probably still favorable despite air strikes on North. Although their general transportation system in North has been significantly damaged, thus somewhat reducing their infiltration capability, Hanoi may calculate it can accept level of damage being inflicted as reasonable price to pay for chance of victory in South. Viet Cong forces in south retain capability of taking local initiatives on ground, although they must accept cost of heavier losses from tactical air support, and their morale possibly has been reduced by recent developments. GVN force levels still are not adequate to cope with these Viet Cong capabilities. Despite relative longevity of Quat Govt., which marks improvement over previous recent Govts., political situation is still basically unstable. While military and civilian morale has risen, rumblings among generals continue, suspicion among political and religious groups persist and are subject to exploitation by communists. On balance, Hanoi probably believes it has considerable basis

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

for expectation that Viet Cong, who were clearly making progress as recently as February, can regain the initiative and, by the application of offensive power, can create an atmosphere in which negotiations favorable to the DRV can be instituted.

Given this situation, the report argued, the most probable course of action that Hanoi would pursue is to continue its efforts to expand its military action in the South, "including covert introduction of additional PAVN units on order of several regiments. This course offers ...the prospect of achieving major military gains capable of offsetting US/GVN application of air power. Such gains would expand Viet Cong areas of control and might lead to political demoralization in South Vietnam."
119/

A similarly unencouraging assessment had been submitted to the President by the Board of National Estimates on April 22. In a "highly sensitive, limited distribution" memorandum, the leading personalities of the U.S. intelligence community concurred in the prediction that:

If present US policies continue without the introduction of large additional forces or increased US air effort, the Communists are likely to hold to their existing policy of seeking victory in the local military struggle in South Vietnam. They will try to intensify that struggle, supporting it with additional men and equipment. At the same time, DRV air defenses will be strengthened through Soviet and perhaps Chinese aid.

If, however, the U.S. deepens its involvement by increasing its combat role and intensifying its air effort, the intelligence officers believed:

...that the Viet Cong, North Vietnam, and China would initially...try to offset the new enemy strength by stepping up the insurgency, reinforcing the Viet Cong with the men and equipment necessary. They would likely count on time being on their side and try to force the piecemeal engagement of US troops under conditions which might bog them down in jungle warfare, hoping to present the US with a de facto partition of the country. The Soviet Union... would almost certainly acquiesce in a decision by Hanoi to intensify the struggle. 120/

This lack of any real prospect of "give" on the enemy's part was also confirmed by Admiral Raborn, shortly after he had succeeded John McCone as Director of Central Intelligence. On the day of Raborn's swearing-in (April 28), the President had given him a letter from McCone (apparently worded along the lines of his memorandum described in Section IX.E. of this study) which McCone had handed to the President as his last official act. The President had asked Raborn to prepare

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

his own comments on McCone's views. Raborn's comments, circulated to Secretaries Rusk and McNamara on May 6, included the following:

Our limited bombing of the North and our present ground-force build-up in the South are not likely to exert sufficient pressure on the enemy to cause him to meet our present terms in the foreseeable future. I note very recent evidence which suggests that our military pressures are becoming somewhat more damaging to the enemy within South Vietnam, but I am inclined to doubt that this damage is increasing at a rate which will bring him quickly to the conference table.

With particular reference to McCone's recommendation that the US add much heavier air action against the North to its planned combat force deployment to the South, Raborn indicated his agreement, and expressed his belief that such an action would have the following consequences:

The DRV is, in my view, unlikely to engage in meaningful discussions at any time in coming months until US air attacks have begun to damage or destroy its principal economic and military targets. I thus concur with the USIB's judgment of 18 February 1965, that, given such US punishment, the enemy would be "somewhat more likely" to decide to make some effort to secure a respite, rather than to intensify the struggle further and accept the consequent risks.

And then he added the following advice:

Insofar as possible, we should try to manage any program of expanded bombings in ways which (1) would leave the DRV an opportunity to explore negotiations without complete loss of face, (2) would not preclude any Soviet pressures on Hanoi to keep the war from expanding, and (3) would not suddenly produce extreme world pressures against us. In this connection, the timing and circumstances in which the bombings were extended northward could be of critical importance, particularly in light of the fact that there have been some indications of differing views between Moscow, Peiping, and Hanoi. For example, it would probably be advantageous to expand bombings after, not before, some major new VC move (e.g., obvious concentration for imminent attack on Da Nang or Kontum) and after, not before, any current possibilities of serious negotiations have been fully tested. And such bombings should not be so regular as to leave no interval for the Communists to make concessions with some grace. Indeed, we should keep in mind the possibility of a pause at some appropriate time, which could serve to test the Communist intentions and to exploit any differences on their side. (Emphasis supplied)

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

One other consideration may have entered into the President's bombing pause calculus at this time. On April 5, a TROJAN HORSE photography mission had revealed the first SA-2 SAM site under construction fifteen miles SSE of Hanoi, confirming the long-rumored shipment of Soviet surface-to-air missiles to North Vietnam. 121/ Moreover, the SAMs were only the most dramatic form of considerably increased quantities of modern military equipment beginning to be furnished to the DRV by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was now in the process of becoming visibly committed to assisting North Vietnam in resisting U.S. attacks on its territory, and a more direct confrontation of US and USSR military force was rapidly approaching. Indeed, the Joint Chiefs had indicated, on April 14, their desire to obtain approval for air strikes against the sites on short notice as they become operational, had estimated, on May 6, that the first site construction could be completed by May 15, and had instructed CINCPAC to commence planning to conduct air strikes against that site. 122/ A decision involving a major Soviet "flashpoint", therefore, would soon have to be faced, and the President may well have wished to provide a prior opportunity for a quiet Hanoi backdown, before proceeding with more forceful military activity.

B. Setting the Stage

On the evening of May 10 the President sent a personal FLASH message to Ambassador Taylor, 123/ informing him that he (the President) had decided to call a brief halt to air attacks in the North and instructing him to obtain Premier Quat's agreement to the plan. The text of the message follows:

I have learned from Bob McNamara that nearly all ROLLING THUNDER operations for this week can be completed by Wednesday noon, Washington time. This fact and the days of Buddha's birthday seem to me to provide an excellent opportunity for a pause in air attacks which might go into next week and which I could use to good effect with world opinion.

My plan is not to announce this brief pause but simply to call it privately to the attention of Moscow and Hanoi as soon as possible and tell them that we shall be watching closely to see whether they respond in any way. My current plan is to report publicly after the pause ends on what we have done.

Could you see Quat right away on Tuesday and see if you can persuade him to concur in this plan. I would like to associate him with me in this decision if possible, but I would accept a simple concurrence or even willingness not to oppose my decision. In general, I think it important that he and I should act together in such matters, but I have no desire to embarrass him if it is politically difficult for him to join actively in a pause over Buddha's birthday.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

We have noted your [recent cables] but do not yet have your appreciation of the political effect in Saigon of acting around Buddha's birthday. From my point of view it is a great advantage to use Buddha's birthday to mask the first days of the pause here, if it is at all possible in political terms for Quat. I assume we could undertake to enlist the Archbishop and the Nuncio in calming the Catholics.

You should understand that my purpose in this plan is to begin to clear a path either toward restoration of peace or toward increased military action, depending upon the reaction of the Communists. We have amply demonstrated our determination and our commitment in the last two months, and I now wish to gain some flexibility.

I know that this is a hard assignment on short notice, but there is no one who can bring it off better.

I have kept this plan in the tightest possible circle here and wish you to inform no one but Alexis Johnson. After I have your report of Quat's reaction I will make a final decision and it will be communicated promptly to senior officers concerned.

Ambassador Taylor promptly relayed the President's plan to Quat, whose major objection was to the notion of linking the pause in any way with Buddha's birthday. Taylor reported this objection to Washington 124/ and received the following additional instructions from the Department in return. 125/

We have decided here to go ahead commencing on Thursday [May 13] for period of approximately 5 - 7 days. Orders through military channels will place stand-down on basis "in order to observe reaction of DRV rail and road transportation systems" and will order increase in photo recce of DRV and bombing within SVN. You should tell Westmoreland true basis for his personal use only so that you and he and Alex Johnson remain the only three Americans in Saigon aboard. We have informed Dobrynin tonight and are instructing Kohler to convey message to Hanoi through DRV Ambassador in Moscow. I will also be telling British and Canadian Foreign Ministers personally tomorrow and we will convey message to Menzies through Embassy here. However, each of these being informed only at highest levels and their Saigon representatives will not repeat not be witting.

You should take following actions:

1. Inform Quat we are going ahead. You should not specify period but let us know if he raises question or still insists on as short a period as 4 - 5 days. Tell him we will definitely

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

refrain at all times from associating action with Buddha's birthday and that our initial plan will be to refer all press queries to Washington and to hold as long as possible simply to operational factors as explanation. You should raise with him question of what he will tell generals urging in strongest terms that he tell them only what we are saying through military channel and preferably delay even this until question arises. If Quat raises question of what we are saying to Communist side, you will have copies tonight's talk with Dobrynin and instructions to Kohler by septels and may draw generally on these for his personal use only.

2. To deal with any possibility adverse Catholic reaction you should inform Archbishop and/or Nuncio very privately that any variation in actions in forthcoming period will be USG decisions not related in any way to Buddha's birthday or any appeal or issue connected with it. You may of course also reiterate that any such variations have no effect whatever on our determination as clearly shown in recent months. We leave timing this approach to you but believe it should be done earliest before any speculation arises.

3. At appropriate time you should instruct Zorthian to report simply that no operations other than reconnaissance were conducted on each day and to refer press queries, preferably by indirection, to Washington.

A few hours later, Secretary McNamara, with the concurrence of Secretary Rusk and McGeorge Bundy, sent the following FLASH joint State/Defense message through military channels to Ambassador Taylor, CINCPAC and COMUSMACV: 126/

In order to observe reaction of DRV rail and road transportation systems, bombing (including armed recce and other strike operations) of targets within DRV will cease for several days effective 2400 12 May Saigon time. CINCPAC should issue the necessary instructions to US forces and Ambassador should seek to obtain compliance of VNAF.

During the period in which bombing operations are suspended, photo and eyeball reconnaissance flights over DRV, in so far as they can be carried out without flak suppression escorts and within currently approved rules relating to altitudes and latitudes, will be increased to the level required to permit a thorough study of lines of communication. The bombing sorties which would have been directed against the DRV during this period, to the extent practical, will be targeted against appropriate targets in South Vietnam.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

ROLLING THUNDER 15 as outlined in JCS 1736 has been approved. It is to be executed upon receipt of appropriate execution orders.

Press guidance for the period during which bombing operations are suspended will be furnished in a separate message.

Acting on these instructions, Taylor saw Quat in Saigon on the morning of May 12, and reported back as follows: 127/

Along with Alex Johnson, I called this morning to convey to Quat the information contained in Department's instructions. I told him that his views with regard to linking the pause with Buddha's birthday had been accepted and that this element had been removed from the plan. I explained that the pause begins tomorrow (Saigon time) and will continue for several days. As he did not raise any question with regard to the precise duration, I did not elaborate. He liked the military justification for the pause as explained in REFTEL and undertook to remain within this language in dealing with his generals. I assured him that General Westmoreland would do the same in his military contacts.

We explained to Quat how the message was being conveyed to the USSR and Hanoi. He had no comment except to express doubt that any detectable change in DRV conduct will take place during the suspension of attacks.

As for comment to the press, he repeated his intention to ward off queries by references to "Operational Requirements."

While securing Quat's support has been somewhat easier than I had anticipated, I am sure that he and his colleagues will become uneasy very quickly if this pause runs beyond the "four to five days" which Quat has indicated to be acceptable from his point of view. I would hope that our purposes can have been fulfilled within the five day period.

With regard to paragraph 2 [of Department's instructions], Johnson and I feel that it is unnecessary and probably undesirable to approach Archbishop Binh or the Nuncio at this time. We will watch closely the local reaction to the suspension and convey the message to the Catholic leadership, if necessary, at a timely moment.

Much additional attention was lavished by Washington upon maintaining near-absolute secrecy, preserving a plausible front vis-a-vis the press, and other aspects of stage management. On May 12, the operation was given the codeword MAYFLOWER, and all communications on it were thenceforth to be slugged with that indicator. Besides Taylor and Johnson, the only American Ambassadors informed of the political purpose

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of MAYFLOWER were William Sullivan in Vientiane, Foy Kohler in Moscow, and Winthrop Brown in Seoul -- the latter only for the purpose of informing President Park Chung Hee who was about to embark on a state visit to Washington and who, the Department felt, should be forewarned so that he might more effectively fend off press probings.

On the evening of May 11, Secretary Rusk made two moves designed to inform "the other side" of the fact that a bombing halt was being called and of its political purpose:

1. He sent a cable 128/ to Foy Kohler in Moscow, instructing him to make urgent contact with the DRV Ambassador in Moscow to convey a carefully prepared message to him, as quoted below. The cable set forth the instructions and rationale as follows:

...We are using you as channel to avoid using Soviets as intermediaries and also to insure that message is accurately and directly delivered. We leave appropriate method of arranging contact to you and are not concerned if Soviets should become aware you are making such contact. You should of course make maximum effort avoid any attention by any third party.

Message you should deliver should be oral but confirmed by written piece of paper which you should hand to Ambassador with request he deliver message to Hanoi. Message is as follows:

BEGIN TEXT. The highest authority in this Government has asked me to inform Hanoi that there will be no air attacks on North Viet-Nam for a period beginning at noon, Washington time, Wednesday, May 12, and running into next week.

In this decision the United States Government has taken account of repeated suggestions from various quarters, including public statements by Hanoi representatives, that there can be no progress toward peace while there are air attacks on North Viet-Nam. The United States Government remains convinced that the underlying cause of trouble in Southeast Asia is armed action against the people and Government of South Vietnam by forces whose actions can be decisively affected from North Vietnam. The United States will be very watchful to see whether in this period of pause there are significant reductions in such armed actions by such forces. (The United States must emphasize that the road toward the end of armed attacks against the people and Government of Vietnam is the only road which will permit the Government of Vietnam (and the Government of the United States) to bring a permanent end to their attacks on North Vietnam.)...

In taking this action the United States is well aware of the risk that a temporary suspension of these air attacks may

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

be misunderstood as an indication of weakness, and it is therefore necessary for me to point out that if this pause should be misunderstood in this fashion, by any party, it would be necessary to demonstrate more clearly than ever, after the pause ended, that the United States is determined not to accept aggression without reply in Vietnam. Moreover, the United States must point out that the decision to end air attacks for this limited trial period is one which it must be free to reverse if at any time in the coming days there should be actions by the other side in Vietnam which required immediate reply.

But my Government is very hopeful that there will be no such misunderstanding and that this first pause in the air attacks may meet with a response which will permit further and more extended suspension of this form of military action in the expectation of equally constructive actions by the other side in the future. END TEXT.

2. He summoned Soviet Ambassador Anatol Dobrynin to his office in the State Department and made virtually the same oral statement to him, confirmed by a parallel written version handed to him. Rusk, that same evening described the meeting to Foy Kohler in a second cable, 129/ sent immediately after the message quoted above:

I explained we were not indicating any precise number of days, that we retained freedom of action, and that we would convey similar message to Hanoi. I also said we would make no announcement although we expected press pressures, and made clear our action related only to strikes of any sort and not to continued reconnaissance. (Paper itself makes clear action confined to DRV and does not include Laos or SVN.)

I also said we did not know what to expect but that Hanoi knows what it is doing and can find a way to make its response clear.

Dobrynin noted we were merely informing Soviets and was clearly relieved we not asking them to act as intermediary. Asked about my trip to Vienna and indicated there might be further conversations there Saturday with Gromyko. Asked basically whether action represented any change in fundamental US position.

I replied that it did not and that this should be no surprise.

I reviewed recent indications that Cambodia conference blocked by Peiping despite favorable mention in DRV-Moscow communique and that three-party talks on Laos likewise in

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

abeyance apparently following Peiping and perhaps Hanoi pressure. President on April 7 had tried open up discourse but thus far channels blocked. If attacks on DRV were part of problem, Communist response to present action might open up channels.

Dobrynin said he thought we would get some answer but could not predict what.

I underscored importance action not be misunderstood in Hanoi. Hanoi appears to have impression they may succeed, but US will not get tired or be affected by very small domestic opposition or by international pressures, Hanoi cannot rely on Saigon instability. They may have wrong ideas on these points and important they not misunderstand our action.

Dobrynin responded he saw no danger of misunderstanding but problem was to find way.

Parallel with the Secretary's diplomatic moves, the President made a major public address on the first day of the bombing pause, in which he made no reference to the pause, but in which he urged Hanoi to consider a "political solution." The speech, embracing the theme of the "three faces of war" (1. armed conflict, 2. diplomacy and politics, and 3. human need) contained the following passage:

The second face of war in Viet-Nam is the quest for a political solution - the face of diplomacy and politics - of the ambitions and the interests of other nations. We know, as our adversaries should also know, that there is no purely military solution in sight for either side. We are ready for unconditional discussions. Most of the non-Communist nations of the world favor such unconditional discussions. And it would clearly be in the interest of North Vietnam to now come to the conference table. For them the continuation of war, without talks, means only damage without conquest. Communist China apparently desires the war to continue whatever the cost to their allies. Their target is not merely South Viet-Nam; it is Asia. Their objective is not the fulfillment of Vietnamese nationalism; it is to erode and to discredit America's ability to help prevent Chinese domination over all of Asia.

In this domination they will never succeed. 130/

C. Transmitting the Messages

Foy Kohler in Moscow, upon receiving the Secretary's instructions, directed his Deputy Chief of Mission to telephone the North Vietnamese Embassy on the morning of May 12 to request an urgent appointment for Ambassador Kohler with the North Vietnamese Ambassador. The latter, however,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

declined to receive the American Ambassador "in view of the absence of diplomatic relations between our two countries," and suggested instead that the "important, high level private message" from the US Government which Ambassador Kohler wished to communicate to the NVN Ambassador be sent to the Soviet Government "in its capacity as Co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference."

Kohler felt it would not be productive to press the NVN embassy further, and cabled the Department for instructions as to which of two alternatives he should pursue: "(1) Transmit message by letter via messenger to NVN ambassador; or (2) seek appointment with Acting Foreign Minister Kuznetsov to convey message." 131/

The Department's reply was as follows:

Believe you should pursue both alternatives urgently, explaining to Kuznetsov (who will by now have heard from Dobrynin) that you recognize reluctance of Soviets to act as intermediary and are asking solely that Soviets transmit message to DRV Ambassador in accordance with DRV suggestion. 132/

Kohler acted promptly on both alternatives. He transmitted the "oral" communication to the DRV Ambassador under cover of a letter signed by Kohler, which read as follows:

In accordance with the suggestion made by a member of your staff today, I am attempting to reach the Acting Foreign Minister tonight.

Since this may not be possible and because of its importance, I enclose the message I had hoped to be able to convey to you personally earlier today.

However, though hand-delivered by an American embassy employee to a DRV employee, the communication was returned the following morning in a plain envelope addressed simply Embassy of US of A. 133/

At the same time, Kohler sought an urgent appointment with Acting Foreign Minister Kuznetsov (Gromyko being out of town) but Kuznetsov was not available and Kohler was able to see only Deputy Foreign Minister Firubin. The latter, after some temporizing, flatly refused his government's services as an intermediary and lectured Kohler at length upon the US misconception of the real nature of the conflict in Vietnam. Kohler's account of the conversation follows: 134/

I informed Firubin that as he must know from report of Dobrynin's conversation with Secretary, US Government has made decision which we hoped would be both understood and not misunderstood. I had been informed by several high

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Soviet sources that decision we had taken was precisely what was called for but none had been in position to predict reaction. Our purpose in reaching this significant decision was to attempt to ascertain if a way could be found to peaceful solution of current crisis in Southeast Asia. We had hoped we would be able to deliver oral communication conveying this decision to DRV authorities and I had attempted to do so today through DRV Ambassador. Unfortunately Ambassador let it be known that he did not wish to receive me personally and when his embassy was informed that the message I sought to deliver was of extreme importance, it was suggested that we transmit the message through the Soviet Government in its capacity as Geneva Co-Chairman. It was because of these circumstances that I had found it necessary to disturb Mr. Firyubin tonight. I pointed out that although DRV Ambassador had refused to receive me, embassy had succeeded in delivering a copy of oral communication to employee of DRV embassy earlier this evening (2015 Local) who agreed to bring it to attention of Ambassador (communication as set forth in DEPTTEL 3103 then translated in full for Firyubin with sole interruption being Firyubin's inquiry if cessation attacks applied only to those from air - which I confirmed.) After receiving confirmation from me that communication was of oral nature, Firyubin said he viewed communication as based on old erroneous conception on which US has proceeded, a conception which precludes US recognizing that the South Vietnamese people are fighting for their freedom and are struggling against aggression and control by Saigon puppets. Furthermore it indicated to Firyubin that we continued to view the picture incorrectly when we referred again to the struggle in South Vietnam as being organized and directed by the DRV. The absurdity of this view, he said, is obvious and naturally the Soviet Government cannot agree with it as it has made clear in numerous statements. Firyubin could only view the communication as repetition of the threat against the DRV -- now a threat of renewed and expanded aggression. This was the only way he could interpret the reference to the risk that a suspension of attacks involved. Obviously we are suffering from a gross misunderstanding if we think that such aggression will go unpunished, without response. The only constructive approach to a peaceful settlement of the situation in South Vietnam was to end the aggression, recall troops from South Vietnam and give the Vietnamese people the right to choose their own form of Government -- a choice which can be made freely only if the so-called specialists should be withdrawn and their opportunity of exercising influence on the Vietnamese thus removed. Firyubin said that he well acquainted with the countries and peoples of Southeast Asia; he therefore was aware and could understand the feelings caused by our actions there as well as the reaction in many other parts of the world.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

I told Firyubin I had asked to see him to put a very simple question to him. Does the Soviet Government agree to transmit the oral communication to the DRV? I said this was the whole purpose of my visit.

Firyubin said the DRV embassy had not put such a request to the Soviet Government. I must agree that for Soviets to act as intermediary between us and DRV is very unusual. Naturally he would report my request to his Government and if the DRV should request this service he would not exclude the possibility of transmitting the communication to the DRV Government. Meanwhile he would be interested in knowing just how the DRV embassy had responded to our approach.

I again described for Firyubin our efforts to deliver the message to the DRV through its embassy in Moscow and told him that the end result was a suggestion by the embassy that we transmit the message through the Soviet Government in its capacity as Geneva Co-Chairman. Firyubin repeated his promise to report my request to his Government and to inform me of the results.

While the conversation continued in this vein, Firyubin had passed a note to a Foreign Office assistant, Kornienko, who attended him, and the latter left the room. After some time, Kornienko reappeared and handed a note to Firyubin, which the latter read carefully. After reading the note, Firyubin said flatly that the Soviet Government would not transmit the U.S. Government's message to the DRV, that the DRV embassy had not requested this service and that it was the U.S. responsibility to find a convenient way of passing the message. Kohler's account continues:

I said I wished to understand him correctly. Was he rejecting my request to transmit the communication to the DRV?

He said this was a correct understanding of the Soviet Government position. We must ourselves find the way.

I said that what I was seeking was the cooperation of the Soviet Government and Firyubin's remarks indicated clearly that the Soviet Government was refusing this. Firyubin said, "I am not a postman" and again said we could find our own ways of transmitting messages.

I pointed out to Firyubin that the cooperation I had requested is a well-known and not unprecedented process in international diplomacy. I had great difficulty in reconciling Soviet Government refusal to cooperate with its declaration in support of peaceful settlement of disputed questions.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Kornienko chimed in that he had recalled statement by both the President and Secretary of State on several occasions that the U.S. Government has channels for transmitting messages direct to Hanoi. On this the conversation ended but it should be noted that Firyubin made no effort to return to me the text of the oral communication which I had handed him at the outset of the conversation.

After further reflection on his meeting with Firyubin, Kohler sent a follow-on message to Washington that afternoon, 135/ in which he sought to present the Soviet position with some sympathy and to promote an understanding of the Soviet rebuff in the light of the "rather strenuous nature" of the document we were asking them to transmit. Kohler's comments were as follows:

I came away from my meeting with Firyubin last night with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I was annoyed at the apparent Soviet rebuff of an effort to take heat out of admittedly dangerous situation in SEA and impatient with flimsy rationale for Soviet refusal offered by Firyubin. On the other hand, I could understand, if not sympathize with, Soviet sensitivity, given Chicom eagerness to adduce proof of their charges of collusion against Soviets and, frankly, given rather strenuous nature of document they were being asked to transmit to DRV.

Implicit in latter view, of course, is assumption that Soviets in fact want bombing to stop, are genuinely concerned at possibilities escalation, and are interested in working out some sort of modus vivendi which would take heat out of situation while not undercutting their own position in Commie world as loyal socialist ally. We cannot be sure that this is way Soviets view situation, and it entirely possible they so confident our ultimate defeat in Vietnam that no gesture on our part would meet with encouraging response. Believe at this point, however, we lose nothing assuming Soviets have not completely forgotten lesson Cuba and there is some flexibility in Soviet position which we should seek to exploit.

I would hope, therefore, we would not regard Firyubin's reaction last night as evidence conscious hardening of Soviet attitude. It may simply be reflection of bind Soviets find themselves in at moment. Meanwhile, we can feel sure message is already in DRV hands -- copies now available thru Dobrynin, Firyubin, and DRV embassy here -- and I would suggest we go through with original plan and be on alert, both here and on the scene for any signs reaction from other side. Seen from here, we would lose nothing by doing so; and we gain at least with our friends and the unaligned.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive.

By this time (1:00 p.m. March 13, Moscow time), though Kohler was not aware of it, the bombing pause had already been in effect for seventeen hours. It had gone into effect as planned at 2400 on May 12, Saigon time, and the Department so informed Kohler. The Department also decided, in spite of Kohler's confidence that the U.S. "oral" communication had reached Hanoi, to make doubly sure by asking the U.K. Government to instruct its Consul in Hanoi to transmit the same message, in writing, to his normal contact in the DRV. Informed by the Department that this step was about to be taken, Kohler expressed his dissatisfaction with the character and tone of the communication by recommending that, in any resubmission, the message be shortened and softened:

...I would recommend we shorten and revise wording of "oral" communication to DRV if we plan resubmit through British Consul Hanoi. If cast in present form, I think we are simply inviting rebuff, and exercise-Hanoi would prove as fruitless as our efforts in Moscow. Something along lines following would get essential message across:

BEGIN TEXT. The highest authority in this Government has asked me to inform Hanoi that there will be no air attacks on North Vietnam for a period beginning at noon, Washington time, Wednesday, May 12 and running into next week.

In this decision the United States Government has taken account of repeated suggestions from various quarters, including public statements by Hanoi representatives, that there can be no progress toward peace while there are air attacks on North Vietnam.

The United States Government expects that in consequence of this action the DRV will show similar restraint. If this should not prove to be the case, then the United States Government will feel compelled to take such measures as it feels are necessary to deal with the situation in Vietnam.
END TEXT. 136/

Kohler's recommendation was not accepted, and the message was transmitted to the DRV by the British Consul in Hanoi in its original form. As in the Moscow case, the message was shortly thereafter returned to the sender, ostensibly unopened.

As a footnote to the "unopened letter" episodes, it may be worth noting that Canadian ICC Commissioner Blair Seaborn, on an early-June visit to Hanoi, was approached by the Czech Ambassador to the DRV, who recounted to him the story of Kohler's unsuccessful effort to deliver the message to the DRV Ambassador in Moscow, with the message having been returned ostensibly unopened. The Czech Ambassador said "everybody" in Hanoi knew the story. 137/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

D. Awaiting a Response

While the Administration expected little in the way of a positive Hanoi response, a watchful eye was kept for any signals or actions that might suggest North Vietnamese or Soviet receptivity to any further diplomatic explorations. Such signals as were received, however, were entirely negative. On May 15 a Hanoi English language broadcast noted Western news reports of the bombing cessation, terming them "a worn out trick of deceit and threat..." On the same day, in a conversation with British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart in Vienna, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko indicated the USSR's disinclination to participate in any negotiations on Indochina.

In the meantime, in Saigon, the U.S. Mission was hard at work trying to clarify its own thinking -- and that of Washington -- on the persuasive, or rather coercive, possibilities of bombing pauses. In particular, the Mission was hoping to link the intensity of US bombing after the resumption closely to the level of VC activity during the pause. The purpose would be to make it clear to Hanoi that what we were trying to accomplish with our bombing was to get the DRV to cease directing and supporting the VC and to get VC units to cease their military activities in the South. In this approach, a downward trend in VC activities would be "rewarded" in a similar manner by decreasing US bombing. Thus it was hoped that, during the bombing pause, the DRV would offer the first step in a series of events which might ultimately "lead to the termination of hostilities on satisfactory [i.e., U.S.] terms, without engaging in formal negotiations."

Ambassador Taylor described this approach to Washington in a lengthy cable 138/ concurred in by Deputy Ambassador Johnson and General Westmoreland. The Ambassador recognized that there were one or two minor pitfalls in the scheme, but seemed undaunted in his confidence that US bombing could be designed to have powerful coercive effects. Taylor admitted that:

Any success in carrying out such a scenario [would] obviously depend on a considerable amount of cooperation from the DRV side based on a conviction arising from self-interest that the DRV must accept a settlement which excludes the conquest of SVN by NVN. There is little likelihood that the Hanoi leaders are yet ready to reach such a conclusion, but a rigorous application of air attacks at a tempo related to Hanoi/VC activities accompanied by pressure on the ground to compel the VC to engage in incidents or retreat appears to us to have possibilities. Conceivably, these ground operations might eventually result in herding VC units into "safe havens"...Whatever its other weaknesses, such a program would eliminate in large measure the danger which we may now be facing of equating our bombing activity to VC initiated incidents, and of seeming to suggest that we will stop bombing for good if the VC will simply lie low.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

A quite different approach to a settlement was proposed in a rather puzzling informal contact between Pierre Salinger and two somewhat shadowy Soviet officials in Moscow. On the evening of May 11 (i.e., one full day prior to the inauguration of the bombing pause) Salinger, who was in Moscow at the time on private movie production business, was invited to dinner by Mikhail Sagatelyan, whom Salinger had known in Washington during the Kennedy years as the TASS Bureau Chief, and who was at this time assigned to TASS headquarters in Moscow. Salinger reported his conversation to Ambassador Kohler who related it to Secretary Rusk in a cable 139/ as follows:

Sagatelyan probed Salinger hard as to whether he was on some kind of covert mission and seemed unconvinced despite latter's reiterated denials. In any case, Sagatelyan, protesting he was speaking personally, talked at length about Viet-Nam. He wanted Salinger's opinion on hypothetical formula for solution approximately on following lines:

1. US would announce publicly temporary suspension of bombing DRV;
2. DRV or USSR or both would make statement hailing suspension as step toward reasonable solution;
3. Soviet Union would intercede with Viet Cong to curtail military activities;
4. De facto cease fire would thus be accomplished.
5. Conference would be called on related subject (not specifically Viet-Nam). Viet Cong would not be participant but have some kind of observer or corridor status (this followed Salinger's expression of opinion US Government would never accept Viet Cong as participant in any conference).
6. New agreement would be worked out on Viet-Nam providing for broader-based SVN Government not including direct Viet Cong participation but including elements friendly to Viet Cong.

In a follow-up dinner conversation between Salinger and Sagatelyan two nights later, in which a Foreign Office representative, identified only as "Vassily Sergeyevich" also participated, the Soviet interlocutors generally confirmed the proposal quoted above, modifying points three and four by suggesting that an actual cease fire could take place only after initiation of negotiations and that a cease fire would in fact be the first item on the agenda of any negotiations. 140/ Additional items of interest were reported by Kohler as follows:

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Soviet interlocutors talked at length about President Kennedy's forbearance post-Cuba period and broadly implied that Soviets now interested in reciprocating such forbearance. It was clear from their remarks that Soviets assume we would welcome some avenue of withdrawal so long as this would not involve loss of American prestige.

Soviets informed Salinger that Soviet Government had received a "Rusk proposal" with regard Vietnam but would not answer proposal or act on it in any way until Soviet Government had some idea as to how current exercise with Salinger would turn out...

As to mechanics of carrying on exercise, Sagatelyan suggested Salinger might convey proposal to US Government through embassy Paris and he himself would fly immediately Paris in order receive from Salinger there any official reaction. Alternatively, if Salinger wished to proceed direct Washington, contact could be designated there, probably either Zinchuk (Soviet embassy counselor) or Vadvichenko (TASS Washington Bureau).

Throughout conversation Soviets made clear to Salinger that because of sensitive Soviet position any progress toward political settlement Vietnam problem must be initiated and carried through, at least in preliminary stages, on basis unofficial contacts, clear implication being if leak should occur or if scheme should go awry, Soviet Government would be in position disavow whole affair. At same time, it was clear from remarks as well as presence of Foreign Office representative that proposal by Sagatelyan had official backing.

Salinger had one further contact with Sagatelyan and Vassily the following day, where it became apparent that the Soviet officials' interest in the proposal had waned. By the time Salinger had returned to Washington and saw Ambassador Thompson at the State Department on May 18, the Soviet disinterest in any role for themselves during the current bombing pause had been made clear through other channels, and Salinger's contacts were not further pursued.

Of these other channels, the most important (and also the most casual) was a brief Kaffeeklatsch between Secretary Rusk and Foreign Minister Gromyko at the Austrian Chancellor's residence in Vienna on May 15. The proceedings are described in a Rusk cable 141 to Undersecretary Ball as follows:

Have just returned from Chancellor's lunch for visiting dignitaries. After lunch Gromyko and I and our wives were at a small table for coffee. I commented to Gromyko that we

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

were in something of a dilemma about Southeast Asia. We felt there might be some value in a serious exchange of views between our two Governments but that we did not know whether they themselves wished to discuss it.

He commented with considerable seriousness that the Soviets will not negotiate about Viet-Nam. He said there were other parties involved in that situation and that the United States would have to find ways of establishing contact with them, and he specifically mentioned the DRV. He said they will continue to support North Viet-Nam and will do so "decisively." He then made reference to a fellow socialist country under attack.

I interrupted to point out that the problem was not that a socialist country was subject to attack but that a socialist country was attacking someone else. I said that American military forces are in South Vietnam solely because North Vietnam has been sending large numbers of men and arms into the South.

He denied these facts in the usual ritual fashion but added that in any event it was not up to the United States to be the judge between Vietnamese. I reminded him that he must know by now that a North Korean attack against South Koreans would not be accepted merely because both were Korean. He merely commented that there were important differences between those two situations.

He referred to Dobrynin's talk with me and said that the temporary suspension of bombing was "insulting." I said I could not understand this in view of the fact that Hanoi, Peiping and Moscow have all talked about the impossibility of discussions while bombing was going on.

At this point Chancellor Klaus joined the table to express great happiness that Gromyko and I were sitting together. Neither one of us dispelled his illusion.

I do not know whether Gromyko will pursue the matter further when the four foreign ministers meet briefly with Quaison-Sackey this afternoon or when we all assemble for the opera tonight.

Thompson and I both have the impression that Gromyko's attitude clearly means that the Salinger talk was of little substance and that we should now merely consider what kind of signal we wish to get back by way of Salinger as a part of the closing out process.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

I do not believe that we should assume from Gromyko's remarks that we ourselves should not put to Moscow our own most serious views of the situation, whether they are willing to discuss them or not. It is quite clear, however, that Gromyko wanted me to believe that they are not prepared to work toward a settlement in Hanoi and Peiping and that, indeed, unless we abandon our effort in South Viet-Nam there will be very serious consequences ahead.

E. Resuming the Bombing

Having thus been unmistakably rebuffed by Moscow, Hanoi, and Peking, the President determined on the evening of May 16 that the bombing raids should be resumed, beginning on the morning of May 18 Saigon time. In addition to the ROLLING THUNDER XV execute message sent by the JCS to CINCPAC on the 16th, Secretary Rusk sent messages of a political nature to Saigon, London, and Ottawa on May 17, so that the action could be cleared with Premier Quat (which Taylor promptly accomplished), and so that the foreign ministers of the Commonwealth countries would be informed beforehand. 142/

You should see Fon Min immediately to inform that beginning Tuesday morning, Saigon time, bombing of North Viet-Nam will be resumed by US and South Vietnamese forces, marking the end of a five-day suspension.

You should convey message from me that we regret that the reception of the other side to the idea of a pause was not merely negative but hostile. Gromyko told Rusk that our message to Dobrynin on subject was "insulting." Nevertheless we do not exclude possibility of other such attempts in future.

There will be no public announcement of the resumption of bombing. When press questions are asked, it will be pointed out that there have been and may again be periods when no bombing will take place in response to operational factors and that we do not discuss these operational questions.

Ambassador Kohler, upon receiving word of the resumption, suggested that the US might inform the NATO Council and the 17 non-aligned nations of our actions, in advance of any resumption, to underline the seriousness of the President's response to the Unaligned Appeal. The Department, however, responded negatively to Kohler's suggestion: 143/

There will be no official public statement from here concerning suspension or resumption. Decision at highest levels is to avoid any discussion Project MAYFLOWER, which now

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

concluded, outside of restricted circle designated when Project begun. Despite disappointing response, we wish to keep open channel with Soviets on this subject and we hope eventually with DRV via Soviets. We feel that use of this channel another time might be precluded if we appear to have carried through Project MAYFLOWER solely for credit it might earn us with third parties and public opinion in general. Therefore we would not now wish inform NATO Council and 17 Non-aligned countries.

Only British, Canadians, Australians, UN Secretary General and Korean President Park (here on state visit) were in fact informed in advance of resumption bombing and also of negative outcome of soundings of other side.

In addition to this limited circle of allied intimates, a larger circle of friendly governments was provided with Ambassadorial briefings on the bombing pause after the resumption. An instruction to this effect went out to American ambassadors in New Delhi, Tokyo, Bangkok, Vientiane, Manila, Wellington, and Paris: 144/

You should take first opportunity see Pri. Minister, Fon Min, or other appropriate high level official to inform him that the U.S. and South Vietnamese Governments suspended bombing against North Viet-Nam for a period of five days which ended on May 18. The initiation of this pause in bombing was accompanied by an approach by us to the Governments of the Soviet Union and North Viet-Nam which took note of repeated calls from that side for cessation of bombing and their statements that discussions could not take place while bombing continued. Unfortunately the reception of our approach was not merely negative but hostile...In view of the complete absence of any constructive response, we have decided the bombing must be resumed. Nevertheless we do not exclude possibility of other such attempts in the future.

You should add that the record of the past several weeks is discouraging in that Communists and particularly Peking appear intent on rejecting every effort from whatever quarter to open up contacts and conversations which might lead to a resolution of the Viet-Nam situation. The rejection of President Johnson's April 7 proposals for unconditional discussions, of the appeal of the Seventeen Non-aligned countries and of President Radhakrishnan's proposal all illustrate the point together with Peking and Hanoi's obvious efforts to obstruct the convening of a conference on Cambodia. We will nevertheless continue to explore all possibilities for constructive discussion, meanwhile maintaining with the Government of South Viet-Nam our joint military efforts to preserve that country's freedom.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

On the evening of May 18, the DRV Foreign Ministry issued a statement denouncing the gesture as a "deceitful maneuver designed to pave the way for new U.S. acts of war," and insisted U.S. planes had, since May 12, repeatedly intruded into DRV airspace "for spying, provocative and strafing activities."

Communist China's Foreign Ministry issued a statement May 21 fully endorsing Hanoi's position and denouncing the suspension with characteristic intemperateness.

F. Aftermath

A still somewhat ambiguous diplomatic move was made by Hanoi on May 18, shortly after the bombing had been resumed.

It appears that in Paris, on the morning of May 18, Mai Van Bo, head of the DRV economic delegation there, approached the Asian Direction of the Quai d'Orsay to explain the reasons for the DRV's rejection of the Radhakrishnan proposals (involving a cordon sanitaire by Afro-Asian troops along the 17th parallel). More important, however, Bo explained with text in hand that the Pham Van Dong Four Points, enunciated on April 8, should not be isolated from the declaration that had followed the four points. He then softened the language of that declaration by pointing out that the four points constituted the "best basis" from which to find the "most just" solution, and that recognition of these principles would create favorable conditions for a solution of the problem and would open the possibility of convoking a conference.

When asked if Hanoi recognized that realization of its proposed "principle of withdrawal" of American forces would depend upon the "conclusions of a negotiation," Bo responded "exactly," and indicated that if there were agreement on the "bases," the "ways and means" of application of "principles" would be found and in a peaceful manner; the possibilities were many; a way out (porte de sortie) should be found for the US; "our suggestion humiliates no one."

This happening, which occurred on May 18, was first reported by a Quai official to the US Embassy's Political Counsellor in Paris unofficially on May 19, in a highly glossed version, making it appear that the DRV was clearly responding to the bombing pause by a significant softening of its position on "prior conditions." In the official version that Lucet, the Director of Political Affairs of the French Foreign Office conveyed to the DCM on May 20, however, the continued ambiguity of the DRV position -- as to whether or not recognition of the four points remained a precondition to talks of any sort -- was fully revealed.

This ambiguity was in no sense resolved a few weeks later, when Blair Seaborn raised this question with the DRV Foreign Minister in Hanoi. The U.S. had asked Seaborn in late May to seek an appointment with Pham

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Van Dong and on its behalf reiterate the March message and U.S. determination to persist in the defense of South Vietnam, to regret that Hanoi had not responded positively to the various recent initiatives, including the bombing pause, and to state that, nevertheless, the United States remained ready "to consider the possibility of a solution by reciprocal actions on each side." If the Vietnamese brought up Pham Van Dong's four points, Seaborn was authorized to endeavor to establish whether Hanoi insisted that they be accepted as the condition for negotiations. On June 3, Seaborn succeeded in gaining an audience with the DRV Foreign Minister (and concurrent Deputy Premier) Nguyen Duy Trinh, who reluctantly heard him out after stating that the U.S. position was too well known to require restatement. Trinh's reaction to the message was totally negative, and in the exchange preceding its recitation he studiously avoided going beyond the vague statement that Pham Van Dong's four points were the "basis for solution of the Vietnam question."145/

As there was considerable misunderstanding concerning the Mai Van Bo approach of May 18, and misleading accounts of it were circulating, the State Department informed several U.S. ambassadors (Saigon, Paris, Bonn) of what it considered the true facts in the case. 146/

Facts are that bombing was actually resumed on morning May 18 Saigon time. Subsequently on morning May 18, Paris time, but undoubtedly on antecedent instructions, DRV economic delegate in Paris, Mai Van Bo, approached Quai urgently for appointment. His message was to explain negative Hanoi attitude toward Indian proposal (cessation of hostilities on both sides and Afro-Asian force) but second, and more important, to discuss Pham Van Dong's four points originally stated April 8 and later included in Hanoi statement referring to appeal of 17 Non-aligned nations... Bo repeated four points with slight variations from public statements, apparently softening language by indicating that four points might be "best basis" for settlement and apparently insisting less strongly that their recognition was required as condition to negotiations. During course of conversations, French asked whether withdrawal US forces visualized as prior condition or as resulting from negotiations, and Bo responded that latter was correct.

French passed us this message on May 20 (delaying two days) so that we had in fact resumed well before we heard of it. More important, message still left ambiguity whether recognition of four points remained precondition to talks of any sort. Accordingly, we saw no reason to alter conclusion based on Hanoi propaganda denunciation of pause, plus fact that pace of Hanoi-directed basic actions in South had continued and even increased -- that Hanoi not ready to respond to pause and that we must resume.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Subsequently, Canadian ICC Representative, Seaborn, visited Hanoi commencing May 31. He himself raised same questions with DRV Foreign Minister and response indicated DRV evasive, and in effect negative, apparently taking position recognition four points, plus some element US withdrawal, were preconditions to any talks.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

XIII. DEBATE OVER BOMBING STRATEGY AND EFFECTIVENESS CONTINUES

A. The Rostow "Victory" Thesis

With the resumption of the bombing at 0600 on 18 May (Saigon time), the arguments over the usefulness and intensity of the U.S. air attacks against the North were taken up again with full energy.

ROLLING THUNDER XV (week of 18-24 May) was designed to attack principally fixed military installations, while continuing the interdiction of LOC's south of the 20th parallel. The attacks were carried out with a weight of effort similar to the pre-pause level, i.e., 40 sorties per day, with a maximum of 200 sorties for the entire week. 147/

It was at this time that Walt W. Rostow, then State Department Counselor and Chairman of the Policy Planning Council, floated a memorandum entitled "Victory and Defeat in Guerrilla Wars: The Case of South Vietnam," 148/ in which he argued that a clear-cut victory for the U.S. in Vietnam was a possibility and that what it required mainly was more pressure on the North and effective conduct of the battle in the South. Rostow's memo follows:

In the press, at least, there is a certain fuzziness about the possibility of clear-cut victory in South Viet-Nam; and the President's statement that a military victory is impossible is open to misinterpretation.

1. Historically, guerrilla wars have generally been lost or won cleanly: Greece, China mainland, North Viet-Nam, Malaya, Philippines. Laos in 1954 was an exception, with two provinces granted the Communists and a de facto split imposed on the country.

2. In all the cases won by Free World forces, there was a phase when the guerrillas commanded a good part of the countryside and, indeed, placed Athens, Kuala Lumpur, and Manila under something close to siege. They failed to win because all the possible routes to guerrilla victory were closed and, in failing to win, they lost. They finally gave up in discouragement. The routes to victory are:

a) Mao Stage Three: going to all-out conventional war and winning as in China in 1947-49;

b) Political collapse and takeover: North Viet-Nam;

c) Political collapse and a coalition government in which the Communists get control over the security machinery; that is, army and/or police. This has been an evident Viet Cong objective in this

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

war; but the nearest precedents are Eastern European takeovers after 1945, rather than guerrilla war cases.

d) Converting the bargaining pressure generated by the guerrilla forces into a partial victory by splitting the country: Laos. Also, in a sense, North Viet-Nam in 1954 and the Irish Rebellion after the First World War.

3. If we succeed in blocking these four routes to victory, discouraging the Communist force in the South, and making the continuance of the war sufficiently costly to the North there is no reason we cannot win as clear a victory in South Viet-Nam as in Greece, Malaya, and the Philippines. Unless political morale in Saigon collapses and the ARVN tends to break up, case c), the most realistic hope of the VC, should be avoidable. This danger argues for more rather than less pressure on the North, while conducting the battle in the South in such a way as to make VC hopes of military and political progress wane.

4. The objective of the exercise is to convince Hanoi that its bargaining position is being reduced with the passage of time; for, even in the worst case for Hanoi, it wants some bargaining position (rather than simply dropping the war) to get U.S. forces radically reduced in South Viet-Nam and to get some minimum face-saving formula for the VC.

5. I believe Hanoi understands its dilemma well. As of early February it saw a good chance of a quite clean victory via route c). It now is staring at quite clear-cut defeat, with the rising U.S. strength and GVN morale in the South and rising costs in the North. That readjustment in prospects is painful; and they won't, in my view, accept its consequences unless they are convinced time has ceased to be their friend, despite the full use of their assets on the ground in South Viet-Nam, in political warfare around the world, and in diplomacy.

6. Their last and best hope will be, of course, that if they end the war and get us out, the political, social, and economic situation in South Viet-nam will deteriorate in such a way as to permit Communist political takeover, with or without a revival of guerrilla warfare. It is in this phase that we will have to consolidate, with the South Vietnamese, a victory that is nearer our grasp than we (but not Hanoi) may think.

Rostow had long been a strong bombing advocate, and an outspoken proponent of air attack on elements of the North Vietnamese industrial target system. As early as April 1, 1949/ he had expressed a conviction that Hanoi attaches a high premium to the maintenance of its industrial establishment and that the optimum U.S. bombing objective should be not the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

destruction, but the paralysis of the DRV's industrial and urban life. By taking out all the major electric power stations, he believed, Hanoi would be presented "with an immediate desparate economic, social, and political problem which could not be evaded."

In the May memorandum, however, he was not confining his confident expertise to the sphere of targeting strategy, but extending it to the much larger sweep of the U.S. policy objectives in Vietnam. Rostow's grand historic perspective of the road to victory, unfortunately, never focused down upon the nagging practical problem of how the U.S. might "make VC hopes of military and political progress wane" when compelled to fight in behalf of a long-besieged, teetering GVN that was, by this time, hopelessly incapable of coping with the military and political tasks required of it. The critical problem of how to preserve and restore political effectiveness in the GVN never engaged Rostow's serious attention nor, for that matter, that of his contemporaries in the administration.

B. "ARC LIGHT" Comes to South Vietnam -- Attacks on the North Edge Upward

In line with the April decision to give priority to South Vietnam over North Vietnam in the employment of U.S. air power, a major administration decision was taken after the bombing pause to assign saturation bombing missions in the South to SAC B-52 bombers which had long been alerted, but never used, to attack North Vietnam. General Westmoreland, with Ambassador Taylor's political endorsement, presented his case to CINCPAC in the following terms: 150/

1. During recent months firm intelligence has been collected using all possible sources which confirms existence of various VC headquarters complexes and troop concentrations in RVN. Each of these targets (COSVN, NAMBO, Military Region Hqs, VC battalions in jungle assembly areas, etc,) is spread over a relatively large area and consists of groups of buildings or huts, foxholes, trenches, tunnels, etc., connected by trails. General topography is more suitable for area carpet bombing than for pinpoint tactical fighter weapon delivery. In most areas two and three canopy jungle growth hides surface target. Even if accurate coordinates fixed on maps (with inherent map inaccuracies) or photos, solid jungle canopy provides few reasonable aiming points for delivery aircraft.

2. Operation Black Virgin 1 on 15 April 1965 was an attack on the military component of the Central Office South Vietnam (COSVN), (the main VC military headquarters). 443 sorties were applied against an area of approximately 12 square kilometers, dropping approximately 900 tons of ordnance. As a result of this effort, the existence of the target complex was confirmed by the uncovering of over 100 buildings

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

and the occurrence of several large secondary explosions. We have determined that the attack created a drastic effect within the VC military headquarters. Individual components were disrupted for several days, and even though these components now appear to be functioning again, they have not re-assembled into an integrated headquarters complex as they were before the attack. In spite of the apparent success of the attack we still have no information concerning the number of casualties caused and have only fragmentary information concerning other damage accomplished.

3. During the attack the target area became completely covered by smoke and resulting bomb pattern was spotty. BDA photography shows that as a result, the distribution of bombs throughout the target was poor. Some areas received a heavy concentration of bomb impacts while other parts of the target area received no hits. If an attack could have been launched in which the bombs were evenly distributed, results would have been far more effective. An attack compressed into a shorter period of time would also have been much more likely to kill VC before they could evacuate the area and would have allowed ground troops to enter the area the same day.

4. It is essential that we keep these selected VC headquarters and units under attack. We are developing target information on the headquarters of the 325th PAVN Division, Headquarters Military Region V and Headquarters Military Region VII where current reports indicated a large VC troop build-up. We know from interrogation of VC captives and from agent reports that VC fear air attacks. We also know that their plans can be upset by unexpected events. The best way for us to keep them off balance and prevent large-scale VC attacks is to keep them under constant pressure in their base areas.

5. Continued use of tactical fighters for pattern bombing does not get the job done properly; it diverts them from other important work for which they are better suited; it creates an unacceptable drain on ordnance assets; and it disrupts all SEA air programs in and out of country. We will, of course, continue to use tactical fighters as the major punch against tactical targets which constitute the vast majority of the in-country air requirements, but for attacks on VC base areas, we must provide a capability which will permit us to deliver a well planned pattern of bombs over large areas and preferably within a short period of time.

6. The problem has been discussed with representatives of the Strategic Air Command and believe that their conventional bombing tactics based on pattern bombing techniques are ideally suited to meet this requirement. I strongly recommend, therefore, that as a matter of urgency, we be authorized to employ SAC B-52 aircraft against selected area targets in RVN...

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Washington first authorized the use of ARC LIGHT B-52 forces for radar photography over target areas in the Kontum and War Zone D regions on May 17. 151/ A month later, despite the misgivings of the Air Staff and the SAC commander, the first B-52 bombing raid was authorized (ARC LIGHT I, June 18, 1965) attacking the War Zone D VC stronghold near Saigon. On July 4 and 7 further attacks were undertaken, and ARC LIGHT became a regular bombing program in South Vietnam.

As the weight of air attacks increased significantly in South Vietnam, there was also some rise in the level of air strikes in the North. Combined U.S.-VNAF combat sorties totaled about 3,600 in April, 4,000 in May, and 4,800 in June. USAF aircraft flew less than half the mission. But an analysis by JCS Chairman Wheeler on 4 April and another by the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) early in July showed that the strikes had not reduced appreciably North Vietnam's ability to defend its homeland, train its forces, and infiltrate men and supplies into South Vietnam and Laos. 152/

But this rising level of attacks did not satisfy the Air Staff. At the end of June, General McConnell continued to stress the need for more air pressure on Hanoi, saying he was:

more convinced than ever that these [air] operations cannot be divorced from and are the essential key to the eventual defeat of the Viet Cong. In November 1964...[the] JCS unanimously agreed that direct, decisive, action against the DRV was needed immediately. This course of action was not adopted and intelligence reports indicate that the current air strike program, while inconveniencing the DRV had done little to curtail or destroy their will and capability to support the insurgency, largely due to the restraints on the air strike program. In fact, the restraints have provided the DRV with the incentive and opportunity to strengthen both their offensive and defensive capabilities.

So [the] C/S USAF considers an intensified application of air power against key industrial and military targets in North Vietnam essential to the result desired. During the period of time required to introduce more forces, any build-up of and support for the Viet Cong offensive should be denied....Failing this, more serious difficulties and casualties for U.S. and allied troops can be expected.

McConnell urged again that the Air Force be allowed to strike targets in the 94 target list, as well as others. 153/

C. McNamara Reviews the Program

At the end of July, in response to a Presidential request, Secretary McNamara undertook a review and evaluation of the bombing program

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

against North Vietnam. The results of this review were forwarded to the President in a memorandum, dated July 30, 1965. Since it represents an effective wrap-up, the memorandum is reproduced in full.

1. Rationale for bombing the North. The program of bombing RVN began in an atmosphere of reprisal. We had had the August Tonkin Gulf episode; we had absorbed the November 1 attack on Bien Hoa Airfield and the Christmas Eve bombing of the Brinks Hotel in Saigon. The attacks at U.S. installations at Pleiku on February 7 and Qui Nhon on February 10 were the immediate causes of the first strikes against North Vietnam. The strike following Pleiku was announced as a 'response' -- a 'reprisal'; our strike following Qui Nhon was called a response to more generalized VC terrorism. The major purposes of the bombing program, however, were:

a. To promote a settlement. The program was designed (1) to influence the DRV to negotiate (explicitly or otherwise), and (2) to provide us with a bargaining counter within negotiations.

b. To interdict infiltration. The program was calculated to reduce the flow of men and supplies from the North to the South -- at the least, to put a ceiling on the size of war that the enemy could wage in the South. [Author's Note: This is not entirely accurate; interdiction did not become a program rationale within the Administration until late March, and publicly not until late April (see Sections VIII and XI.B.)] Supplemental purposes of the program were (c) to demonstrate to South Vietnam, North Vietnam and the world the U.S. commitment to see this thing through, (d) to raise morale in South Vietnam by punishing North Vietnam, the source of the suffering in the South, and (e) to reduce criticism of the Administration from advocates of a bombing program.

2. Achievement of major purposes. The potential targets, targets struck and per cent of destruction are shown at Tab A. In terms of the purposes of the program, its results have been as follows:

a. To promote a settlement. Obviously, this objective has not yet been attained. We recognized at the start of the program, as we do now, that the influence of the bombing on a settlement would not be great until the North Vietnamese had been disappointed in their hopes for a quick military success in the South. There is no doubt that the bombing program has become an important counter in the current tacit and explicit bargaining process and will be an important counter in any future bargaining.

b. To interdict infiltration. It is believed that regular North Vietnamese units now in South Vietnam (estimated to be one

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

division) require about 4 tons of supplies daily for the 'current' level of combat but would require 67 tons of supplies daily for 'light' combat. ('Current' levels are operations conducted largely in small units; 'light' combat would involve larger elements in action on the average of every third day, with expenditures of one-third of each unit's basic load of ammunition on each action.) It is believed that regular North Vietnamese units and Pathet Lao forces in the Laos Panhandle require about 21 and 51 tons daily respectively for the two levels of combat. Viet Cong arms, ammunition and other supply requirements are estimated at 8 tons daily for 'current' combat and 115 tons for 'light' combat. The effect of the interdiction program on the movement of supplies is summarized below:

The 440-ton per day rail traffic from Hanoi south to Vinh has been cut off at Ninh Binh (40 miles south of Hanoi). Supplies still move by sea and over the parallel highway system. The latter has been badly damaged and is subject to armed reconnaissance; sea traffic into SVN is under surveillance. At a minimum, supply is slower and less regular and delivered at increased cost in resources and energy expended. Roads into Laos have been subjected to similar interdiction and armed recce. Only limited interdiction has been imposed on the key rail and road net northwest of Hanoi, and none on the railway net northeast of Hanoi; and port destruction has been minimal. Thus, substantially uninterrupted supply continues from China by rail into Hanoi and by sea into Haiphong to meet major North Vietnamese military, industrial and civilian needs.

The effect of the bombing on military operations is estimated to have been as follows:

(1) For regular North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces. The interdiction program has caused North Vietnam increasing difficulty in supplying their units in Laos and South Vietnam. How severe this difficulty is or how stretched North Vietnam's supply capabilities are cannot be estimated precisely. Our interdiction efforts may have either prevented or deterred the North from sending more troops than they already have. The interdiction programs in North Vietnam and Laos also may have influenced a Communist decision to forego a 1965 offensive in Laos.

(2) For Viet Cong forces. Because the VC require significantly less infiltrated arms and ammunition and other supplies than do the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces, the interdiction program probably has had less of an adverse effect on their operations. By raising VC fears concerning adequacy of supplies, however, the program may have caused the VC summer offensive to be less intense, aggressive and unrelenting than it would otherwise have been.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

It should be noted that the program has not been a 'strategic' bombing program; it has been limited to selected targets of fairly direct military relevance. Populations and targets such as dikes and basic industries have not been struck. Furthermore, the immediate vicinities of Hanoi and Haiphong have been avoided, partly because the targets there are primarily of the 'strategic' type and partly because strikes there would involve even more serious risks of confrontations with the Soviet Union and China.

3. Other effects of the program.

a. Deterrence of VC terrorism. There is no evidence that strikes against North Vietnam have affected one way or another the level or kind of VC incidents of terror in South Vietnam.

b. Morale in South Vietnam. Morale in South Vietnam was raised by the initiation of the bombing program (as, later, by the deployment of additional troops). Now -- with the bombing programs having become commonplace and with the failure of the situation to improve -- morale in South Vietnam is not discernibly better than it was before the bombing program began. In a sense, South Vietnam is now 'addicted' to the program; a permanent abandonment of the program would have a distinct depressing effect on morale in South Vietnam.

c. Reduction of criticism of the Administration. Some critics, who advocated bombing, were silenced; others are now as vocal or more vocal because the program has been too limited for their taste. The program has generated a new school of criticism among liberals and 'peace' groups, whose activities have been reflected especially in teach-ins and newspaper criticisms.

d. Damage to peaceful image of the US. The price paid for improving our image as a guarantor has been damage to our image as a country which eschews armed attacks on other nations. The hue and cry correlates with the kind of weapons (e.g., bombs vs. napalm), the kind of targets (e.g., bridges vs. people), the location of targets (e.g., south vs. north), and not least the extent to which the critic feels threatened by Asian communism (e.g., Thailand vs. the UK). Furthermore, for a given level of bombing, the hue and cry is less now than it was earlier, perhaps to some extent helped by Communist intransigence toward discussions. The objection to our 'warlike' image and the approval of our fulfilling our commitments competes in the minds of many nations (and individuals) in the world, producing a schizophrenia. Within such allied countries as UK and Japan, popular antagonism to the bombings per se, fear of escalation and belief that the bombings are the main obstacle to negotiation, have created political problems for the governments in their support of US policy.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

e. Pressures to settle. More countries are now, as a consequence of the bombing program, more interested in taking steps to help bring the war to an end.

f. Impact on US-Soviet detente. The bombing program -- because it appears to reject the policy of 'peaceful co-existence,' because it involves an attack on a 'fellow socialist country,' because the Soviet people have vivid horrible memories of air bombing, because it challenges the USSR as she competes with China for leadership of the Communist world, and because US and Soviet arms are now striking each other in North Vietnam -- has strained the US-Soviet detente, making constructive arms-control and other cooperative programs more difficult. How serious this effect will be and whether the detente can be revived depend on how far we carry our military actions against the North and how long the campaign continues. At the same time, the bombing program offers the Soviet Union an opportunity to play a role in bringing peace to Vietnam, by gaining credit for persuading us to terminate the program. There is a chance that the scenario could spin out this way; if so, the effect of the entire experience on the US-Soviet detente could be a net plus.

g. Risk of escalation. The bombing program -- especially as strikes move toward Hanoi and toward China and as encounters with Soviet/Chinese SAMs/MIGs occur-- may increase the risk of escalation into a broader war.

4. The future of the program. Even with hindsight, I believe the decision to bomb the DRV was wise and I believe the program should be continued. The future program should:

a. Emphasize the threat. It should be structured to capitalize on fear of future attacks. At any time, 'pressure' on the DRV depends not upon the current level of bombing but rather upon the credible threat of future destruction which can be avoided by agreeing to negotiate or agreeing to some settlement in negotiations.

b. Minimize the loss of DRV 'face.' The program should be designed to make it politically easy for the DRV to enter negotiations and to make concessions during negotiations. It may be politically easier for North Vietnam to accept negotiations and/or to make concessions at a time when bombing of their territory is not currently taking place.

c. Optimize interdiction vs. political costs. Interdiction should be carried out so as to maximize effectiveness and to minimize the political repercussions from the methods used. Physically, it makes no difference whether a rifle is interdicted on its way

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

into North Vietnam, on its way out of North Vietnam, in Laos or in South Vietnam. But different amounts of effort and different political prices may be paid depending on how and where it is done. The critical variables in this regard are (1) the type of targets struck (e.g., port facilities involving civilian casualties vs. isolated bridges), (2) type of aircraft (e.g., B-52s vs. F-105s), (3) kind of weapons (e.g., napalm vs. ordinary bombs), (4) location of target (e.g., in Hanoi vs. Laotian border area), and (5) the accompanying declaratory policy (e.g., unlimited vs. a defined interdiction zone).

d. Coordinate with other influences on the DRV. So long as full victory in the South appears likely, the effect of the bombing program in promoting negotiations or a settlement will probably be small. The bombing program now and later should be designed for its influence on the DRV at that unknown time when the DRV becomes more optimistic about what they can achieve in a settlement acceptable to us than about what they can achieve by continuation of the war.

e. Avoid undue risks and costs. The program should avoid bombing which runs a high risk of escalation into war with the Soviets or China and which is likely to appall allies and friends.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

FOOTNOTES

1. JCSM 460-64, 30 May 1964, TOP SECRET; JCS 2343/383-2, 24 August 1964, TOP SECRET. (Subsequently, of course, the list grew to comprise many hundreds of targets.)
2. JCSM 746-64, 26 August 1965, TOP SECRET; CM 124-64, 9 September 1964, TOP SECRET.
3. These recommendations were made orally to the SecDef on 1 November, and subsequently formalized in JCSM 933-64, 4 November 1964, TOP SECRET.
4. Draft NSAM on Southeast Asia, 29 November 1964, TOP SECRET.
5. JCSM 955-64, 14 November 1964, TOP SECRET; and JCSM 982-64, 23 November 1964, TOP SECRET.
6. See JCS 2339/164, 12 December 1964, TOP SECRET.
7. In this connection, it may be noted that the small expansion of the U.S. military contingent in South Vietnam that occurred during 1964, from 16,000 to 23,000 men, did not take place until after the election.
8. A U.S. officers' billet in the heart of Saigon which was bombed by the VC with the loss of two Americans killed and 63 injured. It was precisely the type of incident which seemed to fall within the Phase I guidelines as to what would justify a reprisal. The JCS recommended such a reprisal (JCSM 1076-64, 24 December 1964, TOP SECRET), but the timing was unpropitious--with Saigon in the throes of a political crisis and Washington disinclined to launch a reprisal strike on a Christmas day.
9. JCSM 1074-64, 24 December 1964, TOP SECRET.
10. Jacob Von Staaveren, USAF Plans and Operations in Southeast Asia, 1965, October, 1966, pp. 1-2 (TOP SECRET).
11. Memorandum for the Secretary from William P. Bundy, Subject: "Notes on the South Vietnamese Situation and Alternatives," dated January 6, 1965 (TOP SECRET).
12. Cut and Paste of McNaughton Ideas (from drafts August 1964 to February 1965) --"Action for South Vietnam," TOP SECRET.
13. 1 October 1964 SNIE 53-2-64, The Situation in South Vietnam, TOP SECRET.
14. 4 February 1965 SNIE 53-65, Short Term Prospects in SVN, TOP SECRET.
15. Memorandum to the President from McGeorge Bundy re The Situation in Vietnam, dated February 7, 1965 (TOP SECRET).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

16. 9 October 1964 SNIE 10-3-64, Probable Communist Reactions... (TOP SECRET).
17. 18 February 1965 SNIE 10-3/1-65, Communist Reactions to Possible U.S. Courses of Action Against North Vietnam, (TOP SECRET).
18. 2 June 1965, SNIE 10-6-65, Probable Communist Reactions... (TOP SECRET, SENSITIVE).
19. Saigon 2010, 31 December 1964 (TOP SECRET - NODIS).
20. Memorandum for the Secretary, "Notes on the South Vietnamese Situation and Alternatives, 6 January 1965 (TOP SECRET).
21. McNaughton Papers, "Situation in SVN After Khanh Re-coup," 27 January 1965 (TOP SECRET).
22. Saigon 2086, 8 January 1965 (TOP SECRET).
23. JCSM-70-65, 29 January 1965 (TOP SECRET).
24. Deputy SecDef Cyrus Vance assured the CJCS, in a Memorandum dated 4 February 1965, that their views "will be given the fullest consideration in determining future courses of action."
25. CINCPAC Frag Order Nr. 2 18 Sept. 1964 TOP SECRET.
CINCPAC Frag Order Nr. 3 28 Oct. 1964 TOP SECRET.
26. Appendix B to JCSM-70-65, 29 Jan 65 TOP SECRET.
27. JCS 1887 to CINCPAC (J-3 sends) 14 Nov 64 TOP SECRET.
28. JCS 4244 to CINCPAC 28 Jan 65 TOP SECRET LIMDIS.
29. JCS 4484 to CINCPAC 3 Feb 65 TOP SECRET.
30. JCS 4484 to CINCPAC 3 Feb 65 TOP SECRET.
31. CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF and COMUSMACV 4 Feb 65 TOP SECRET LIMDIS.
32. JCSM 70-65, 29 Jan 65, Appendix B TOP SECRET.
33. CJCS 4612 to CINCPAC 4 Feb 65 SECRET.
34. Saigon 2762 (?) March 1965 TOP SECRET EXDIS.
35. "Refutation of the New Leaders of the CPSU on 'United Action,'" Peking Review No. 46, November 12, 1965, pp. 15-16. See also the Chinese account reported by Peter Grose, The New York Times, Sept. 12, 1966.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

36. CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT 5 Feb 65 SECRET LIMDIS; J-3M 181-65 from Director of Ops, Joint Staff to Military Assistant SecDef, dated 9 Feb 65. SECRET
37. Jacob Von Staaveren, USAF Plans and Operations in Southeast Asia, 1965, p. 7 (TOP SECRET). To the consternation of careful U.S. target planners, Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky who led the VNAF attack, in a last-second switch, dumped his flight's bomb loads on an unassigned target in the Vinh Linh area, in order, as he later explained, to avoid colliding with USAF aircraft which, he claimed, were striking his originally assigned target when his flight arrived over the target area. CINCPAC 100100 February to JCS, TOP SECRET.
38. Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution, New York: Harper & Row, 1965, p. 305.
39. See p. 30 below.
40. Department of State Bulletin, Vol LII, No. 1339, Feb 22, 1965, p. 238.
41. Ibid., p. 239.
42. Ibid., p. 239.
43. Van Staaveren, op.cit., p. 7.
44. Department of State Bulletin, 1 March 1965, p. 290 and 291.
45. Philip Geyelin, Lyndon B. Johnson and the World, pp. 214 and 219.
46. Newsweek, Feb 22, 1965, p. 19.
47. Economist, Feb. 13, 1965 pp. 637-8.
48. CIA-IM "Free World Reaction to the Vietnamese Air Strikes" 9 Feb 1965 CONFIDENTIAL.
49. SNIE 10-3-64, 9 Oct 1964 TOP SECRET
50. Foreign Broadcast Information Division, Special Memorandum, 10 Feb 1965, p. 3, CONFIDENTIAL.
51. Ibid., p. 1.
52. Ibid., p. 4.
53. Memorandum to the President from McGeorge Bundy, Re: The Situation in Vietnam, February 7, 1965 TOP SECRET
54. Saigon 2445, February 9, 1965, TOP SECRET EXDIS

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

55. Saigon 2445, February 9, 1965 TOP SECRET EXDIS
56. Saigon 2536, February 12, 1965 TOP SECRET EXDIS
57. Saigon 2495, February 11, 1965 TOP SECRET EXDIS
58. CINCPAC 170217 Feb to JCS TOP SECRET
59. Memorandum to the SecDef JCSM-100-65, February 11, 1965, TOP SECRET SENSITIVE
60. Van Staaveren, op.cit., p. 10.
61. Memo Maj. Gen. S. J. McKee D/Plans, DCS/P&O to C/S USAF, 7 Mar 65, subj: "Use of B-52's in SVN" (TOP SECRET).
62. Deptel 1718 to Saigon, Feb 13, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS
63. Made at the close of an address before the National Industrial Conference Board at Washington, D. C., on Feb 17 (White House press release).
Department of State Bulletin, March 8, 1965, p. 333.
64. Saigon 2583, Feb 14, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS
65. Deptel 1268 to Bangkok Feb 18, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS (also sent to Vientiane, Canberra, Wellington, Tokyo, Seoul, Taipei, Manila; Info CINCPAC, Saigon, London)
66. Saigon 2665, Feb 19, 1965 TOP SECRET
67. Deptel Bangkok 1270, Feb 19, 1965 TOP SECRET
68. Deptel 1744 for Ambassador from Secretary, Feb 17, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS
69. Memcon "Conversation with Lord Harlech, British Ambassador", Feb 19, 1965 TOP SECRET
70. Moscow 2430 to SecState, Feb 19, 1965 TOP SECRET
71. Deptel 2268 to Moscow, Feb 20, 1968 TOP SECRET NODIS
72. Deptel 1783 to Saigon, Feb 20, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS
73. Depel 5327 to London, Feb 24, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

74. The ROLLING THUNDER Program: JCS Proposals and Implementation, Feb 20-Jun 3, 1965 TOP SECRET
75. Deptel 4444 to Paris, Feb 25, 1965 SECRET EXDIS
76. U. S. Department of State, Aggression from the North: The Record of North Vietnam's Campaign to Conquer South Vietnam. U. S. Government Printing Office, February 1965.
77. Secretary Rusk's News Conference, Feb 25, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, March 15, 1965.
78. Ibid.
79. Address by Secretary Rusk, "Some Fundamentals of American Policy", March 4, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, March 22, 1965.
80. Secretary Rusk's interview of "Face the Nation", March 7, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, March 29, 1965.
81. Moscow 2569 to SecState, March 2, 1965 SECRET NODIS
82. B-52's on Guam were alerted but not used. See Van Staaveren, op.cit., p. 13.
83. Memorandum for the SecDef CM-446-65, 23 February 1965 SECRET.
84. Memorandum for General Wheeler from Military Assistant to SecDef, March 2, 1965 SECRET.
85. CJCS Memorandum for the SecDef, CM-469-65, 10 March 1965 TOP SECRET.
86. Memorandum from Secretary of the Air Force to SecDef, "Report of USAF Combat Operations in SEA", May 22, 1965 SECRET.
87. JCS 6692 (JCS send) to CINCPAC, 9 March 1965 TOP SECRET.
88. As noted by McNamara's hand on McNaughton Memorandum to SecDef, Subject: "Use of Napalm Against NVN Targets", 9 March 1965 TOP SECRET.
89. Saigon 2889 to SecState, March 8, 1965 SECRET NODIS.
90. Saigon 2888 to SecState, March 8, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
91. Deptel 1975 to Saigon, March 12, 1965 TOP SECRET EXDIS.
92. Saigon 2949 to SecState, March 13, 1965 TOP SECRET EXDIS.
93. COMUSMACV Situation Report, appended as Tab B to Report of General H. K. Johnson, Army C/S to SecDef et.al. 14 March 1965, Subject: "Vietnam Trip 5-12 March 1965" TOP SECRET.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

94. DEF 6181 to Saigon March 2, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
95. CINCPAC 262155 February 1965 to CJCS TOP SECRET. See also CINCPAC 050400 March 1965 to Gen. Westmoreland from Sharp TOP SECRET.
96. C/S Army Report to SecDef, March 14, 1965 TOP SECRET.
97. JCS 7484 to CINCPAC (JCS send) 20 March 1965, TOP SECRET SENSITIVE EXDIS.
98. Deptel 3000 to Saigon March 16, 1965 TOP SECRET EXDIS.
99. CM-438-65 to the SecDef, 19 February 1965 SECRET.
100. SecDef Memo to CJCS, 27 February 1965 SECRET.
101. COMUSMACV MAC J31 7315 March 10, 1965 TOP SECRET
102. Deptel 809 to Vientiane, March 20, 1965 TOP SECRET LIMDIS.
103. CINCPAC 210525 March 1965 to JCS TOP SECRET LIMDIS.
104. Van Staaveren, op.cit., p. 22.
105. JCSM-221-65, 27 March 1965 TOP SECRET SENSITIVE
106. Draft Memorandum, "Plan of Action for South Vietnam" dated March 24, 1965 TOP SECRET.
107. "Recent Exchanges Concerning Attempts to Promote a Negotiated Settlement of the Conflict in Vietnam", Series Vietnam No. 3 (1965), Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs by Command of Her Majesty, London, August 1965.
108. Statement by Secretary Rusk, released March 19, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, April 5, 1965, p. 489.
109. CINCPAC 310407 March 1965 to JCS TOP SECRET.
110. National Security Action Memorandum No. 328, April 6, 1965 TOP SECRET.
111. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power, New York, 1966, p. 539.
112. USIA Research and Reference Service, "Foreign Reaction to President Johnson's Johns Hopkins Speech," R-44-65, April 14, 1965.
113. Made to news correspondents at the LBJ Ranch on April 17, 1965, Department of State Bulletin, May 3, 1965, pp. 650-52.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

114. Joint Defense/State cable to Ambassador Taylor from Asst. Secy. McNaughton, dated April 18, 1965 TOP SECRET.
115. Address made before the American Society of International Law at Washington, D. C. (Department of State Press Release 82).
116. In his "Key Elements" Memorandum (see Sections IX A and D).
117. See Evans and Novack, op.cit., p. 547.
118. Remarks by President Johnson at the White House to a group of Senators and Congressmen on May 4, 1965. Department of State Bulletin, May 24, 1965, p. 819-20.
119. Saigon 3632 to SecState, May 4, 1965 SECRET LIMDIS.
120. Memo TS #185843-c, revised April 22, 1965 TOP SECRET.
121. JCSM-275-65 to SecDef, 14 April 1965 TOP SECRET.
122. CM-600-65 to SecDef, 6 May 1965 TOP SECRET; the Joint Chiefs continued to urge throughout May and June that attacks be authorized against the SA-2 sites near Hanoi as well as against IL-28's and MIG's at Phuoc Yen. But since the SAM's had not then interfered with US operations, and since Ambassador Johnson, with General Westmoreland's concurrence, recommended against striking the IL-28's, Secretary McNamara disapproved (Memo for CJCS from SecDef., 15 June 1965 TOP SECRET).
123. Deptel 2553 to Saigon, May 10, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
124. Saigon 3731 to SecState, May 11, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
125. Deptel 2557 to Saigon, May 11, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
126. DEFO01900 SEC DEF SENDS, 11 May 1965, TOP SECRET LIMDIS.
127. Deptel 2565 to Saigon, May 12, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
128. Deptel 3101 to Moscow (Info. to Saigon) May 11, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS (STRICTLY EYES ONLY FOR AMBASSADORS FROM SECRETARY).
129. Deptel 3104 to Moscow, May 11, 1965 (Info Saigon) TOP SECRET NODIS (STRICTLY EYES ONLY FOR AMBASSADORS FROM SECRETARY).
130. Made before the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists at the White House on May 13 (White House press release; as-delivered text).
131. Moscow 3378 to SecState, May 12, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

132. Deptel 3105 to Moscow (also transmitted London for Secretary's eyes only) May 12, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
133. Moscow 3393 to SecState May 13, 1965 TOP SECRET.
134. Moscow 3391 to SecState (Info London, for Secretary's eyes only) May 12, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
135. Moscow 3394 to SecState (Info London for Secretary's eyes only) May 13, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
136. Moscow 3425 to SecState (Info Vienna for Secretary's eyes only) May 14, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
137. Saigon 4084 to SecState, June 6, 1965 TOP SECRET EXDIS.
138. Saigon 3781 to SecState, May 16, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
139. Moscow 3395 to SecState (Info to London - eyes only for Secretary) May 13, 1965 SECRET NODIS.
140. Moscow 3416 to SecState, May 14, 1965 SECRET NODIS.
141. Vienna 29 to SecState (For Undersecretary from the Secretary) May 15, 1965 SECRET NODIS.
142. Deptel 7323 to London (1211 to Ottawa) from Secretary to Ambassadors May 17, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
143. Moscow 3444 to SecState, May 17, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS. Deptel 3171 to Moscow, May 17, 1965 TOP SECRET NODIS.
144. Deptel 2425 to New Delhi (From Secretary to Ambassadors) May 18, 1965 SECRET NODIS.
145. Saigon 4083 to SecState, June 6, 1965 CONFIDENTIAL LIMDIS.
146. Deptel 3696 to Bonn, June 9, 1965 TOP SECRET EXDIS.
147. JCS 002230 to CINCPAC (JCS send), 171201Z May 1965 TOP SECRET.
148. Memorandum to the Secretary from W. W. Rostow, May 20, 1965 SECRET.
149. Memorandum to the Secretary from W. W. Rostow, "An Electric Power Cut-through in North Vietnam", April 1, 1965 SECRET.
150. COMUSMACV 16006 (from MAC J-312) to CINCPAC, May 14, 1965 TOP SECRET.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

151. JCS 002249 (JCS send) to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, COMUSMACV, 17 May 1965
TOP SECRET.
152. Memoranda for the SecDef CM-534-65, 6 April 1965; JCSM 498-65,
2 July 1965 TOP SECRET.
153. Memorandum for the JCS, CSAF M-105-65, 30 June 1965 TOP SECRET.