

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

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

5. Phase I in the Build-Up of U.S. Forces: March – July 1965

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UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

1945 - 1967



==== VIETNAM TASK FORCE ====

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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PHASE I IN THE BUILD-UP OF U.S. FORCES

THE DEBATE

MARCH - JULY 1965

Séc Def Cont Nr. X-0295

SUMMARY

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PHASE I IN THE BUILD-UP OF U.S. FORCES, THE DEBATE

MARCH - JULY 1965

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The U.S. decision to deploy 44 US/FW battalions to Vietnam was the product of a debate over strategy, but more basically, a debate over objectives. Once the consensus developed that the U.S. would neither opt out of the conflict nor settle for a stalemate, 44 BLT's made more sense than 17 BLT's (agreed to at Honolulu in April) or fewer. When it emerged that the U.S. objective was to defeat the VC/NVA on the ground in order to assure an "independent, non-communist South Vietnam," an aggressive search and destroy strategy had to prevail over the more experimental and cautionary enclave approach.

The decision was made swiftly and in an atmosphere of crisis. After almost three months of euphoria (RVNAF was holding together and the Saigon government was stable), four factors converged in late May and early June to set the decision full speed in motion: (1) Rolling Thunder was recognized in itself as insufficient to convince Hanoi to negotiate; (2) on 12 June, the Quat government fell, and all the nightmares about no Saigon political authority reappeared; (3) the Viet Cong, it was supposed, was about to launch an all-out offensive, cut the country in two, and establish an alternate government-in-country; and (4) RVNAF, faced with an unfavorable force ratio, quickly demonstrated that it could not cope.

The major participants in the decision knew the choices and understood the consequences. The strategy of base security for the air war against North Vietnam and the strategy of coastal enclaves were rejected with the knowledge that a quick solution was no longer possible. Unlike the sending of Marines to Da Nang, the 44 BLT decision was perceived as a threshold -- entrance into Asian land war. The conflict was seen to be long, with further U.S. deployments to follow. The choice at that time was not whether or not to negotiate, it was not whether to hold on for a while or let go -- the choice was viewed as winning or losing South Vietnam. Should negotiations come, should North Vietnam or the Viet Cong elect to settle before this victory, the U.S. would then be in a position of strength.

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I. Evolution of the Situation

In the history of the Vietnam War, the Year 1965 is notable for momentous and fateful U.S. decisions. In February, after a dramatic increase in activity initiated by the Viet Cong, the United States responded by increasing its own level of commitment to the Republic of Vietnam. For the first time, U.S. jet aircraft were authorized to support the RVNAF in ground operations in the South without restriction. In immediate retaliation for guerrilla raids on U.S. installations in the South, U.S. aircraft also began bombing targets in the southern reaches of North Vietnam. In early March, the latter program evolved into Rolling Thunder, the sustained bombing of the North. Also, during March, two U.S. Marine battalions were landed at Da Nang on the coast of Central Vietnam. The airbase at Da Nang was a major supporter of the Rolling Thunder bombing, and the mission of the Marines was to strengthen its defenses. Those troops represented the first U.S. ground combat commitment to the Asian mainland since Korea.

While the pace of military activity in 1965 was on the rise, the political situation in South Vietnam remained as unpredictable as it had been throughout the previous year. A very confusing series of events in the middle of February culminated in the departure from Vietnam of the volatile General Nguyen Khanh. Left in his stead were two civilians, Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat and Chief of State Phan Khac Suu.

The rate of ground combat activity dropped off in March and remained low for the next month and a half. The Viet Cong eased the pressure on the GVN considerably and yielded the initiative to the government armed forces. The performance of the RVNAF, whose effectiveness was called into question with the deployment of U.S. troops to look after major bases, began to improve according to the statistical indicators used to measure the progress of the war. Whenever the RVNAF succeeded in locating and fixing the Viet Cong, the government troops and their officers seemed to demonstrate more offensive spirit and willingness to engage.

Parallel to hopeful signs on the military side, Premier Quat, a quietly determined man, showed promise that for the first time the Vietnamese might be close to solving their frustrating political problems. Under Quat, the progressive deterioration in governmental stability seemed at long last to have halted.

The reaction of the U.S. community to the period of quiescence in the spring of 1965 was mixed. Pessimistic predictions in March as to the capability of the RVNAF to withstand the next wave of Viet Cong offensive activity were offset by convictions that ongoing U.S. aid programs were adequate to meet the situation provided the GVN resolved its internal contradictions and devoted its energies to the war.

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Expressions of cautious optimism, and of conviction that radical changes to U.S. strategy were unwarranted -- Ambassador Taylor's notable among them -- continued to reach Washington from Saigon through April and May. Among the less sanguine, even General Westmoreland expressed hope that perhaps, with the aid of increased U.S. air activity and signs of greater RVNAF resolve, a corner had indeed been turned. In the absence of dramatic action in Vietnam, most observers were prepared to wait and see what was to transpire when the military hiatus ended.

The drop in activity during the spring of 1965 was not unprecedented. The Viet Cong had traditionally yielded the initiative to the more highly mobile RVNAF during the dry season, and they were expected to reappear with the advent of the summer season, or rainy season, in May and June. The official estimates of the Viet Cong Order of Battle, including in April confirmed presence in the South of at least one battalion of the North Vietnamese Army, provided little cause for comfort. Coupled with reports that the Viet Cong were concentrating their forces in a few critical areas, the estimates of enemy capability were a sure indication that the coming summer monsoon in 1965 would provide a sore test of the RVNAF's ability.

The test began in earnest in May as the Viet Cong mounted a regiment-sized attack on the capital of Phuoc Long Province. The enemy scored again with the successful ambush of an ARVN infantry battalion and its rescue force near Quang Ngai in I Corps later that month. The Quang Ngai action left two ARVN battalions decimated, and American officers who had witnessed the battle went away with the distinct impression that the RVNAF were close to collapse. The impression was confirmed during the battle of Dong Xoai in mid-June. In a textbook display of tactical ineptitude, battalions of ARVN's finest reserves were frittered away piecemeal during the fighting. The violence of the action at Dong Xoai and the level of RVNAF casualties during the second week of June 1965 were both unprecedented.

As the summer wore on, the focus of the enemy campaign shifted to the highlands of the II Corps. By early July, Viet Cong successes in taking remote District Headquarters heralded the expected loss of the entire highlands area and the possible establishment there of a National Liberation Front government.

General Westmoreland responded immediately to the marked upsurge in Viet Cong activity by requesting in June U.S. and Third Country reinforcements to spell the RVNAF during their time of trial and to blunt the Viet Cong offensive by conducting operations throughout the country against them. The collapse of the Quat government in mid-June and its succession by an untested military regime further increased the urgency associated with Westmoreland's request. The debate in U.S. official circles over the extent of American involvement in the war -- a debate which had followed a devious course all through the spring of 1965 -- moved onto a higher plane at this juncture.

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II. Themes Germane to the Strategy Debate

Official hopes were high that the Rolling Thunder program begun in March would rapidly convince Hanoi that it should agree to negotiate a settlement to the war in the South. After a month of bombing with no response from the North Vietnamese, optimism began to wane. In the middle of April it was recognized that in addition to the bombing some manifestation of the Viet Cong's inability to win in the South was needed before the Communists would agree to negotiate. By the end of April, the North Vietnamese showed signs of preparing for a long siege under the bombing, while they waited for what they saw as the inevitable victory of the Viet Cong in the South. Indeed, the North Vietnamese proved their intractability when they failed to respond meaningfully to overtures made during a week-long pause in the bombing in May. By June, U.S. officials recognized that something dramatic was going to have to be added to the bombing program if the Communists were ever to be persuaded to call off their campaign in the South.

All through early 1965, officials in the U.S. Government debated the level of effort required of the United States in order to achieve its objectives in South Vietnam. Generally stated, those objectives were to insure that the Communist insurgents were defeated in their efforts to take over the government of South Vietnam and that a stable and friendly government was maintained in their place. The U.S. embarked on the Rolling Thunder bombing program in order to convince the North Vietnamese to cease their direction and support of the insurgency in the South. When the bombing program, which could have been halted almost as easily as it was initiated, gave indication that it was not going to succeed by itself, the U.S. was presented essentially with two options: (1) to withdraw unilaterally from Vietnam leaving the South Vietnamese to fend for themselves, or (2) to commit ground forces in pursuit of its objectives. A third option, that of drastically increasing the scope and scale of the bombing, was rejected because of the concomitant high risk of inviting Chinese intervention.

This paper deals essentially with the decision by the U.S. Government to intervene on the ground in South Vietnam. The debate over ground strategy was characterized by an almost complete lack of consensus throughout the first half of 1965. Proposals for levels of commitment ranging from a couple of battalions to several divisions were under consideration simultaneously. For each identifiable strategy -- and there are three discussed in this paper -- security, enclave, and search and destroy -- there were many proponents, some of them quite vociferous. The announcements of decisions regarding the ground build-up were invariably couched in terms which gave clear indication to more aggressive proponents that their turn might yet come.

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The initial steps in ground build-up appear to have been grudgingly taken, indicating that the President of the United States and his advisers recognized the tremendous inertial implications of ground troop deployments. Halting ground involvement was seen to be a manifestly greater problem than halting air or naval activity. In addition, the early build-up may have been permitted some leisure because of the lack of immediate urgency in the situation in Vietnam and the necessity to improve on an inadequate logistical base there.

III. Strategies for Ground Force Employment

A. Strategy of Security

The strategy of security arose with the beginning of the bombing programs and was designed simply to increase security of U.S. bases and installations supporting those programs. It was conceived at a time when enthusiasm for the bombing programs was high and its proponents were at pains to insure that U.S. troops did not get involved in the ground war. All 9 of the U.S. battalions deployed to Vietnam by June 1965 had base security as their primary mission, and 21 of the 44 U.S. and Third Country battalions deployed by the end of 1965 were so oriented. In part, however, most of those units were deployed for far more ambitious reasons. At a maximum, four Marine and possibly two Army battalions were recommended for deployment solely under the provisions of the security strategy, and the strategy was a dead letter by the time most of those deployments had been approved.

The strategy of security expired along with the early hopes that Rolling Thunder could succeed by itself. The non-involvement of the "security troops" in the ground war was designed to keep U.S. casualties to a minimum and to facilitate withdrawal. By deploying its own troops to secure bases, the U.S. showed lack of confidence in the RVNAF, but by keeping U.S. troops out of the fighting it demonstrated at the same time belief that the RVNAF would be able to hold on until the other side decided it had had enough. Because of the well-known shibboleth about U.S. involvement in an Asian ground war and because of the ponderous nature of ground force deployments, it was inevitable that some observers would see in the strategy of security the crossing of a threshold.

B. Enclave Strategy

The President decided during NSC meetings on 1 and 2 April 1965 to get U.S. ground combat units involved in the war against the insurgents.

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He did this in the sober awareness that Rolling Thunder was unlikely to produce immediate results, but also with the caveat that U.S. troops might not do too well in an Asian insurgency environment. The enclave strategy, which had been presented by Ambassador Taylor as a way to get U.S. troops engaged at relatively low risk, was implicitly endorsed by the President. The strategy proposed that U.S. troops occupy coastal enclaves, accept full responsibility for enclave security, and be prepared to go to the rescue of the RVNAF as far as 50 miles outside the enclave. Initially, the U.S. was to experiment with four Marine battalions in two coastal enclaves to see if the concept and the rules for operating with the RVNAF (which were to be worked out with the GVN) were feasible.

Without the benefit of any experimentation the number of battalions was increased at Honolulu in mid-April to 17 and the number of enclaves to 5. The enclave strategy as formalized at Honolulu was designed to frustrate the Viet Cong in the South while Rolling Thunder continued to hammer the North. The intent was not to take the war to the enemy but rather to deny to him certain critical areas while simultaneously providing ready assistance to the RVNAF if they should run into difficulty. The RVNAF were expected to continue aggressively prosecuting the war against the enemy's main forces, thereby bearing the brunt of the casualties.

The enclave strategy was controversial and expectations for it ran the gamut from extreme optimism to deep pessimism. The Ambassador expected it to buy some time for the Vietnamese to eventually save themselves. General Westmoreland and other military men expected it to guarantee defeat for the U.S. and the RVNAF, who were already demonstrating that they were incapable of defeating the enemy.

A masterpiece of ambiguity, the enclave strategy implied a greater commitment to the war on the part of the U.S., but simultaneously demonstrated in the placing of the troops with their backs to the sea a desire for rapid and early exit. While purporting to provide the basis for experimentation with U.S. soldiers in an unfamiliar environment, it mitigated against the success of the experiments by placing those troops in close proximity to the Vietnamese people, where the greatest difficulty would be encountered. In order to prove the viability of its reserve reaction foundation, it required testing; but the rules for commitment were not worked out until the strategy was already overtaken by events. As a consequence of this delay, several opportunities were passed up when the RVNAF really needed help and U.S. troops were available. The whole enclave concept implied that the RVNAF would ultimately prevail, but in any case the Viet Cong could never win as long as certain areas were denied to them. The enclave strategy tacitly yielded the initiative to the enemy, but the initiative was not seen as the vital factor. The key was to be able to outlast the enemy at lowest cost to the United States.

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C. Search and Destroy Strategy

Almost in reaction to the dearth of proposals to seize the initiative from the enemy, General Westmoreland provided consistent pressure for a free hand to maneuver U.S. and Third Country forces in South Vietnam. His search and destroy strategy, which was given Presidential sanction during the summer of 1965, was articulated by both Westmoreland and the JCS in keeping with sound military principles garnered by men accustomed to winning. The basic idea behind the strategy was the desire to take the war to the enemy, denying him freedom of movement anywhere in the country and taking advantage of the superior firepower and maneuverability of U.S. and Third Country forces to deal him the heaviest possible blows. In the meantime, the RVNAF, with superior knowledge of the population and the role of the Viet Cong, would be free to concentrate their efforts in populated areas.

The strategy of search and destroy was given approval at a time when there was very little hope for results from the Rolling Thunder program. The bombing became, therefore, an adjunct to the ground strategy as the war in the South assumed first priority. Accompanying the strategy was a subtle change of emphasis -- instead of simply denying the enemy victory and convincing him that he could not win, the thrust became defeating the enemy in the South. This was sanctioned implicitly as the only way to achieve the U.S. objective of a non-communist South Vietnam. It was conceivable, of course, that sometime before total defeat the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong might decide that they had had enough. In this event, the U.S. could halt its efforts short of complete defeat of the insurgents and negotiate a settlement to the conflict from a much stronger position than that offered by any of the alternate strategies.

The strategy described above with all its implications evolved in piecemeal fashion during June and July 1965. Westmoreland was first given authority in June to commit U.S. ground forces anywhere in the country when, in his judgment, they were needed to strengthen the relative position of the RVNAF. His first major operation with U.S. troops under the new aegis was on 27 June, and that force made a deep penetration into the Viet Cong base area of War Zone "D" NW of Saigon. Once the forces had been liberated from the restrictions of the coastal enclaves, the next step was to decide how much reinforcement was needed in order to insure that the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese allies could not win. The force decided upon was 44 U.S. and Third Country battalions, and the President approved that number sometime in mid-July. Finally, the amount of additional force required to seize the initiative from the enemy and to commence the "win" phase of the strategy was the next topic of discussion after the 44 battalions had been approved. Secretary McNamara received Westmoreland's first estimate during talks in Saigon, 16 to 20 July 1965. Based on what he knew then of Viet Cong and DRV intentions and capabilities, Westmoreland asked for 24 additional

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maneuver battalions and a healthy support package. The figure was revised upward several times later in the year as increased intelligence revealed the extent of DRV infiltration and Viet Cong build-up.

Force levels for the search and destroy strategy had no empirical limits. The amount of force required to defeat the enemy depended entirely on his response to the build-up and his willingness to continue the fight. The 44 battalions seen in mid-summer 1965 as the amount required to deny victory to the Viet Cong exceeded the amount forecast by the enclavists to achieve that end for two reasons. First, the enemy had by the end of June revealed that he was much stronger than had originally been surmised. Second, the 44 battalions had a dual mission: they were not only to hold the fort, but were also to lay the groundwork for the subsequent input of forces to implement the next phase of the strategy.

Ambassador Taylor expected the search and destroy strategy and the force associated with it to accomplish little more than would have been accomplished by the enclave strategy at less cost. He was convinced that only the Vietnamese could save their own country, and too aggressive use of foreign troops might even work against them in that regard. George Ball of the State Department wrote that there was no assurance no matter what the U.S. did that it could defeat the enemy on the battlefield or drive him to the conference table. The larger force associated with the search and destroy strategy signified to Ball no more than acceptance by the U.S. of a higher cost to ultimately be incurred. The 44 battalion force seemed to William Bundy of State to be an ultimatum presented to the DRV which would in all probability trigger some sort of dire response. Westmoreland expected the 44 battalions and the search and destroy strategy to hold things together long enough to prepare the way for later input of greater force. With enough force to seize the initiative from the Viet Cong sometime in 1966, Westmoreland expected to take the offensive and, with appropriate additional reinforcements, to have defeated the enemy by the end of 1967. Exactly what the President and his Secretary of Defense expected is not clear, but there are manifold indications that they were prepared for a long war.

The acceptance of the search and destroy strategy and the eclipse of the denial of victory idea associated with the enclave strategy left the U.S. commitment to Vietnam open-ended. The implications in terms of manpower and money are inescapable. Written all over the search and destroy strategy was total loss of confidence in the RVNAF and a concomitant willingness on the part of the U.S. to take over the war effort. U.S. involvement in an Asian ground war was a reality.

IV. Caveats

The bulk of this paper is taken up in describing the various proposals put forward by exponents of the strategies. The numerous decision

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points are identified and the expectations of decision-making principals involved are analyzed. Ancillary reasons for advancing proposals are identified as such and discussed. The position of each of the principals is described only as clearly as it emerges from the files of the Secretary of Defense. Thus, the JCS are treated as a monolith, although it is common knowledge that there is always considerable dissension and debate amongst the Chiefs themselves. While they might have been unanimous in their recognition that U.S. bases needed securing, the Chiefs did not see eye to eye during ensuing debates over enclave or search and destroy. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the Commandant of the Marine Corps were known proponents of the enclave concept, but the Chairman of the JCS and the Chief of Staff of the Army were equally determined to see the deployment of several divisions of troops for unlimited combat operations. The record of their debate, interesting though it may be, remains in the JCS files.

Through all of the strategy debate in early 1965 ran a common thread -- the concern with possible intervention in the conflict by elements of the North Vietnamese Army or the Communist Chinese Army or a combination of both. A variety of CINCPAC contingency plans were in existence at the time which addressed the problem and called for various deployments, some of them pre-emptive, to deal with it. The JCS consistently mentioned the problem as an additional justification for deployments they were advocating, but the National Intelligence Board just as consistently discounted the possibility of such intervention. Covert infiltration of elements of the North Vietnamese Army, however, was another matter. It was recognized early in the debate as something to be reckoned with even though the real extent of the infiltration was not confirmed for some time. In any case, contingency deployments were not intended to deal with the latter type of provocation.

V. Issues

In conclusion, it seems clear that the debate over ground commitments and accompanying strategy followed closely the course of expectations about the Rolling Thunder bombing program and the development of the situation in South Vietnam itself. The strategy of security was eclipsed because Rolling Thunder was taking too long. The enclave strategy was never unanimously endorsed and it never got off the ground. It was based on the assumption that victory could be denied to the enemy in the South while Rolling Thunder punished him in the North. Eventually, the U.S. would achieve its objectives because the enemy in frustration would give up. The whole enclave idea was conceived in a period of relative quiet, and certainly the experimentation aspect of it pre-supposed a relatively stable situation. In the heat of the summer monsoon offensive, it became a moot question whether or not a negative approach like the enclave strategy could deny victory, and more important, whether or not there would be an RVNAF left to shore up.

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In June, Rolling Thunder and the ground strategy switched places in the order of priorities as far as achieving U.S. objectives was concerned. First, a positive strategy for the employment of the forces, the search and destroy strategy, was approved. Secondly, a force of 44 battalions was recognized as sufficient to prevent collapse while the stage was being set for further deployments. 44 battalions was probably about the maximum the traffic would have borne at that juncture in any case. Final acceptance of the desirability of inflicting defeat on the enemy rather than merely denying him victory opened the door to an indeterminate amount of additional force.

The 44 battalions, or Phase I as they were later called, were supposed to stem the tide of the Viet Cong insurgency and enable the friendly forces to assume the offensive. As the GVN did not collapse, it can reasonably be concluded that they did stem the tide. It is just possible, however, that rather than stem the tide, they increased it through provocation of greater infiltration from North Vietnam. In any case, it is debatable whether the allied forces actually did assume the offensive the following year.

No further proof of the monumental implications of the endorsement in the summer of 1965 of the search and destroy strategy, the 44 battalions, and the "win" concept is required beyond the present state of the war in Vietnam. At this writing, the U.S. has reached the end of the time frame estimated by General Westmoreland in 1965 to be required to defeat the enemy. It has committed 107 battalions of its own forces and a grand total of 525,000 men. The strategy remains search and destroy, but victory is not yet in sight.

CHRONOLOGY

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CHRONOLOGY OF BUILD-UP ACTIVITY

| <u>Date 1965</u> | <u>Document or Event</u> | <u>Agency & Action</u> | <u>Number of Maneuver Battalions Physically in Vietnam</u> | <u>Disposition</u> |
|------------------|------------------------------|--|--|--------------------|
| 11 Feb | JCSM 100-65 | JCS recommended in conjunction with program for the 1st eight weeks of air activity against NVN the collatoral action of landing one MEB at Da Nang for security of the air base. | | |
| 20 Feb | JCSM 121-65 | JCS reiterated CINCPAC recommendation to land MEB at Da Nang. Presence of the Marines would serve to deter VC/DRV action against the base and would enhance readiness posture for other contingencies. | | |
| 22 Feb | MACV 220743Z | Westmoreland recommended landing of 2/3 of MEB to secure base and installations at Da Nang. | | |
| 22 Feb | Embtel 2699 | Taylor concurred in MACV's request to the extent of 1/3 MEB for security but warned against further foreign troop deployments. | | |
| 23 Feb | MACV 231230Z | Westmoreland backed down to 1/3 MEB with proviso that more could follow after 1st battalion was in place. | | |

US/FW: U.S. and Free World Maneuver Battalions in SVN

MAF: Marine Amphibious Force

MEB: Marine Expeditionary Brigade

MEF: Marine Expeditionary Force

BLT: Battalion Landing Team

SLF: Special Landing Force

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|--------|--------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 24 Feb | CINCPAC 240315Z | <u>Sharp</u> recommended 2/3 MEB for security at Da Nang. | |
| 24 Feb | JCSM 130-65 | <u>JCS</u> recommended 2/3 MEB for security. | Appr. 25 Feb |
| 26 Feb | Deftel 1840 | <u>State</u> told <u>Ambassador</u> 2/3 MEB approved for landing contingent on GVN approval. <u>Dep SecDef</u> approval on 25 Feb. Remaining elements of MEB deferred. | |
| 28 Feb | Embtel 2789 | <u>Taylor</u> told <u>State</u> he'd get GVN approval for 2 BLTs to land at Da Nang. He said that should be all we send and that they would eventually be relieved by Viet forces. | |
| 2 Mar | Deftel 6166 | <u>McNaughton</u> told <u>Taylor</u> that it would be desirable to substitute 173d Airborne for the Marines at Da Nang. | |
| 2 Mar | Embtel 1954 | <u>Taylor</u> supported <u>Westmoreland</u> in opposing substitution of 173d. | |
| 3 Mar | CINCPAC 030230Z | <u>CINCPAC</u> opposed attempted substitution citing seven OPLANS calling for Marines into Da Nang. | |
| 4 Mar | JCSM 121-65 | <u>JCS</u> recommended deployment of entire MEB to Da Nang, one Army Bde to Thailand, reconstitution of MEB in WestPac, and alert of III MEF (-) and 25 Inf Div as insurance in support of deterrence deployments. | |
| 4 Mar | JCSM 144-65 | <u>JCS</u> urged <u>SecDef</u> to reconsider deferred funds for Chu Lai airstrip. Facility was needed to "prepare for a wide variety of courses of action." | Appr. by SecDef 18 Mar 65 |

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| 6 Mar | Press Release | <u>DOD</u> said U.S. at request of GVN will put 2 BLTs at Da Nang for security. | |
| 7 Mar | JCS 070001Z | <u>JCS</u> ordered <u>CINCPAC</u> to commence landing Marines and build up to two battalions ashore. | |
| 8 Mar | | 3500 Marines landed at Da Nang. | 2 US/FW |
| 14 Mar | CSA Memo for SecDef & JCS | <u>Gen Johnson</u> recommended 21 separate measures for increased support of the GVN. Measures merely were increases in the same vein as previous steps. He also proposed deployment of up to a full U.S. division for security of various bases with the concomitant release of Viet troops from security mission for combat. The U.S. Division could go either to coastal enclaves and Saigon or into the II Corps highlands. Finally, Johnson proposed a four-division force comprised of U.S. and SEATO troops along the DMZ and into Laos to contain NVN infiltration of men and supplies. | Pres. appr 21 pts. 15 Mar & again on 1 Apr; deferred the rest. |
| 15 Mar | JCS met w/Pres. | <u>President</u> urged the <u>JCS</u> to come up with measures to "kill more VC"; he approved most of Gen Johnson's recommendations. | |
| 17 Mar | "Strength of VC Military Forces in SVN" | Joint <u>CIA</u> , <u>DIA</u> , <u>State</u> Memo showing VC Order of Battle (confirmed) as follows: 37,000 Regular Forces 100,000 ± Irregulars and Militia Confirmed strength up 33% over 1964. 5 Regimental Hq 50 Battalions. 145 Separate Companies 35 Separate Platoons | |

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17 Mar MACV 170747Z Westmoreland recommended landing one Marine BLT at Phu Bai, near Hue, to secure airfield there and enable thereby movement of helicopters from congested area at Da Nang to Phu Bai. Recommended a 4th BLT within a month.

18 Mar Embtel 3003 Taylor supported Westmoreland's Phu Bai request above and went on to discuss pro's and con's of introduction of U.S. Division without offering a recommendation.

19 Mar CINCPAC 192207Z Sharp recommended to JCS that remainder of MEB be landed within a month and one BLT at Phu Bai be landed ASAP.

20 Mar JCSM 204-65 JCS proposed sending 2 US and 1 ROK division to SVN for active operations against VC. Marines to I CTZ could be had quickly in concert with US/SEATO contingency plans for DRV/Chicom aggression. (A portion of this proposal could have been construed as a deterrent measure to Chicom aggression.) All forces were to engage in offensive operations with or without centralized command structure. Location for ROK Div not specified, but Army Div was to go to II CTZ highlands to release ARVN battalions for operations along the coast. The JCS proposed resupplying it by air until Rte 19 could be opened. This recommendation considered by the JCS to be an essential component of the broader program to put pressure on the DRV/VC

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| 25 Mar | JCSM 216-65 | JCS reiterated <u>CINCPAC's</u> recommendation that 1 BLT and remaining MEB elements be landed at Da Nang and one BLT be landed at Phu Bai -- all to improve security situation. | Appr. by Pres. 1 Apr & in NSAM 328 6 Apr. |
| 26 Mar | "Commander's Estimate of The Situation in SVN" | <u>Westmoreland</u> predicted that air activity would not bear fruit in the next six months, and in the interim, RVNAF needed 3d country reinforcements to enable it to offset VC/DRV build-up and enjoy favorable force ratios while permitting an "orderly" build-up of its own forces. MACV wanted the equivalent of two divisions by June '65 and possibly more thereafter if bombing failed. <u>Westmoreland</u> proposed deploying Marines as described in JCSM 216-65, an Army brigade in Bien Hoa/Vung Tau, and an Army division to the II CTZ highlands with a couple of battalions to protect coastal bases. The mission of these forces was to be defense of vital installations and defeat of VC efforts to control Kontum, Pleiku, Binh Dinh region. | |
| 27 Mar | Embtel 3120 | <u>Taylor</u> told <u>State</u> that if U.S. forces were to come in for combat, he favored offensive enclave - mobile reaction concept of employment rather than territorial clear and hold in highlands or defensive enclave. | |
| 29 Mar | SecDef & JCS met with Amb Taylor | JCS three division plan presented to <u>Taylor</u> . The latter inclined to disfavor it because too many troops were involved, the need wasn't manifest, and the Viets would probably resent it. <u>SecDef</u> was inclined to favor the proposal but desired more information in reference to the Taylor qualifications. | |

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1-2 Apr NSC meetings
with Amb Taylor
present

President Johnson decided to send two more Marine battalions to Da Nang and Phu Bai and to alter the mission of U.S. combat forces "to permit their more active use" under conditions to be established by the Secy of State in consultation with SecDef. He also approved 18 to 20,000 man increase in U.S. forces to fill out existing units and provide needed logistic personnel. (All of these changes were to be contingent on GVN concurrence.) A slowly ascending tempo in response to rises in enemy rates of activity was approved for the Rolling Thunder program. The President agreed to overtures to GOA, GNZ, and to ROK, seeking combat support from them.

NSAM 328
6 Apr

2 Apr CIA Director
Memo to
SecDef &
others

McCone said present level of RT not hurting DRV enough to make them quit. He warned against putting more U.S. troops into SVN for combat operations, since that would merely encourage the USSR and China to support the DRV/VC at minimum risk. He predicted covert infiltration of PAVN and the U.S. getting mired down in a war it could not win.

2 Apr JCSM 238-65

JCS asked SecDef to clear the decks of "all administrative impediments that hamper us in the prosecution of this war." Specifically, they asked for: increases in funds, a separate MAP for SEA, improved communications systems, quicker response to CINCPAC's requests, exemption of SEA from balance of payments goals, authority to extend military terms of service and to consult with Congress on the use of Reserves, relaxation of civilian

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and military manpower ceilings, and a substantial increase in military air transport in and out of SVN.

4 Apr CINCPAC
042058Z
(For Taylor) Taylor told State that in absence of further guidance, he will tell GVN that Marine mission is now mobile counterinsurgency, plus reserve, in support of ARVN up to 50 miles of base.

5 Apr SecDef Memo
to CJCS McNamara told Wheeler that he understood the JCS to be planning for the earliest practicable introduction of 2-3 Div into SVN.

8 Apr JCSM 265-65 JCS recommended RVNAF build-up be accelerated through an additional 17,247 MAP-supported spaces plus 160 advisors. SecDef
appr.
12 Apr

9-10 Apr Planning
Conference
in Honolulu PACOM and JCS representatives recommended deployment of 173d Airborne Brigade to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau for security of the installations there and an Army brigade to Qui Nhon/Nha Trang to prepare for the later introduction of a division. They also recommended that the 173d be replaced by a CONUS brigade ASAP. They treated the two Marine BLTs of NSAM 328 as approved and described as "in planning" the remainder of the JCS's three-division force (III MEF (-), ROK Div, and U.S. Army Div). They recommended that I MEF be deployed to WEST-PAC to improve readiness posture.

11-14 Apr Two Marine BLTs land at Phu Bai and Da Nang. 4 US/FW

11 Apr MACV 110825Z Westmoreland told CINCPAC that he still wanted a U.S. division in the highlands, even though it was apparent Washington was

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not of a mind to approve it. He also reaffirmed the need for an Army brigade in the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area for security, to strengthen the eastern flank of the Hop Tac area, and to act as a mobile reserve in case needed in the highlands. To forestall political difficulty, Westmoreland said he'd like to see a joint staff with the RVNAF and an International Military Assistance Force under U.S. hegemony in the Da Nang area.

12 Apr Meeting,
SecDef &
JCS

McNamara agreed with JCS that Marines' "Enclave" build-up plan would be adopted. Concept was to initially provide base security and then phase into combat operations from logistically supportable base areas. The logistics base extant at that juncture was recognized to be inadequate.

12 Apr Embtel 3372

Taylor told State that with the 18 to 20,000 man increase in support forces authorized by NSAM 328, "some preliminary work in anticipation of the arrival of additional U.S. forces" could be accomplished but that for "significant progress toward the establishment of a logistic base to support additional forces," about 5000 more engineers would be required. He went on to say that despite studies dealing with ambitious plans for reinforcement, he hoped that "they do not interfere with essential work in preparation for less ambitious but more probable deployments." He indicated favorable disposition toward the establishment

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of brigade-sized enclaves at Qui Nhon and Bien Hoa/Vung Tau "if the Marines demonstrate effectiveness..."

13 Apr

McNamara approved deployment of 173d Airborne to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau subject to GVN concurrence (with Presidential sanction).

14 Apr JCS 140050Z

JCS asked CINCPAC to deploy the 173d to SVN as soon after GVN concurrence as possible. Their mission would be to initially secure Bien Hoa/Vung Tau and then phase into counterinsurgency operations.

14 Apr Embtel 3373

Taylor surprised at decision to deploy the 173d. He requested a hold.

Embtel 3374

Taylor & Westmoreland both embarrassed at amount of heavy equipment, not appropriate for counterinsurgency, brought ashore in Da Nang by Marines.

Embtel 3384

Taylor advised Washington to keep additional U.S. forces out of SVN, perhaps just offshore, until need for them is incontrovertible.

15 Apr JCSM 281-65

JCS replied to Taylor's traffic of the previous day. They said the 173d was needed for security of air operations and logistic bases and for subsequent phasing into counterinsurgency operations. They added that the security of existing or proposed bases at Chu Lai, Qui Nhon and Nha Trang required a battalion each. They added that to deploy the Marines without their full complement of equipment would be imprudent. They (the Marines) were now prepared to meet any contingency.

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15 Apr Deftel 9164

McNaughton told Saigon that "highest authority" felt situation in SVN was deteriorating, and proposed seven actions to help remedy the situation, including: (1) encadrement of U.S. troops in ARVN units either 50 U.S. to each of 10 ARVN battalions or combined operations of 3 U.S. and 3 ARVN battalions; (2) a brigade force into Bien Hoa/Vung Tau for security and subsequent combat operations; (3) battalions into coastal enclaves for further experimentation with U.S. forces in counterinsurgency role; (4) application of U.S. recruiting techniques in RVN; (5) expansion of MEDCAP; (6) pilot experimentation in 2 or 3 provinces with a team of U.S. civil affairs personnel integrated into gov't structure; and (7) provision of food directly to RVNAF troops.

17 Apr Embtel 3419
& 3421

Taylor told McGeorge Bundy that 7-point program plus all visiting firemen were rocking the boat and asked for respite.

17 Apr Embtel 3423

Taylor sent to Washington the kind of guidance he felt he should have received in order to carry out all that Washington had proposed in the past week.

17 Apr JCSM 288-65

JCS proposed sending one Marine BLT to Chu Lai to secure the CB's constructing the airstrip there.

17 Apr JCS 171847Z

JCS described to CINCPAC the concept for U.S. combat units deploying to SEA as assistance

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in arresting the deteriorating situation against the VC and as an assurance that the U.S. would be ready to counter overt DRV or Chicom action should such occur.

20 Apr Honolulu
Conference

McNamara, McNaughton, W. Bundy, Taylor, Wheeler, Sharp and Westmoreland reached consensus that: (1) the DRV was unlikely to quit in the next six months and probably would only give up because of VC "pain" in the South rather than bomb damage in the North; (2) RT was about right but wouldn't do the job alone; (3) best strategy would be to break the DRV/VC will by effectively denying them victory and bringing about negotiations through the enemy's impotence. They proposed establishing four brigade-sized enclaves, in addition to Da Nang - Hue/Phu Bai, at Bien Hoa/Vung Tau (3 Army battalions plus 1 GOA battalion); Chu Lai (3 BLTs plus 3 Marine TFS); Qui Nhon (3 Army battalions); and Quang Ngai (3 ROK battalions). Added on to the 4 USMC BLTs (33,000 U.S. troops) and 2000 ROK troops already in Vietnam, the total was to be 82,000 U.S. and 7250 3d country troops. Mentioned for possible later deployment were: a U.S. Airmobile Division, a Corps Hq, an ROK Div (-), and the remainder of the III MEF (2 battalions). It was agreed that ARVN and U.S. units would be "brigaded" for operations, that the U.S. would try single managers of U.S. effort in 3 provinces as an experiment, that MEDCAP would be expanded, and that a study of fringe benefits for RVNAF would be undertaken.

21 Apr SecDef Memo
for
The President

McNamara sent the Honolulu recommendations to the President essentially as described above.

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| 21 Apr | CIA Memo to SecDef & others | <u>McCone</u> said the communists still saw the tide going their way. They would see in the Honolulu expansions of U.S. involvement the acceptance by the U.S. of a greater commitment, but they would assume U.S. was reluctant to widen the war. The DRV and Chicoms might reinforce with men and equipment, but would not intervene. | |
| 21 Apr | CIA-DIA Memo "An Assessment of Present VC Military Capabilities" | The presence in Kontum Province since February 1965 of one regiment of the 325th PAVN Division confirmed. As of late 1964 the supply of repatriated southerners infiltrated back from NVN had dried up and NVN volunteers were coming down the trail. | |
| 22 Apr | Deptel 2397 | <u>Unger</u> told <u>Taylor</u> that if <u>Quat</u> agrees to the Honolulu program, the U.S. intention was not to announce the whole thing at once "but rather to announce individual deployments at appropriate times." | |
| 23 Apr | CINCPAC 230423Z | <u>Sharp</u> recommended replacing the 173d, if it deployed, with a CONUS brigade. | |
| 23 Apr | Embtel 2391 | <u>Taylor</u> told <u>State</u> that <u>Quat</u> was extremely reluctant to discuss foreign reinforcements. <u>Taylor</u> feared GVN reaction. | |
| 30 Apr | Deftel 1097 | Saigon informed by <u>McNaughton</u> that the 173d and 3 BLTs to Chu Lai approved for deployment at Ambassador's call. | |
| 30 Apr | JCSM 321-65 | <u>JCS</u> as a result of Honolulu and subsequent discussions recommended a detailed program to deploy 48,000 U.S. and 5250 Free World troops to SVN. The forces included two Army brigades, one MEB, an ROK Regt. Combat Team, and an ANZAC battalion. They were to bolster GVN forces during their continued build-up, secure bases and installations, conduct combat operations in | 173d & MEB appr. 30 Apr |

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coordination with the RVNAF, and prepare for the later introduction of an airmobile division to the central plateau, the remainder of III MEF to the Da Nang area, and the remainder of an ROK division to Quang Ngai.

5 May ISA Memo to
Dep SecDef

McNaughton informed Vance that a portion of the force package listed as "approved" by the JCS in JCSM 321-65 was in fact a part of the not-yet sanctioned three-division plan.

5 May

Main body of 173d Airborne Brigade arrived at Vung Tau.

6 US/FW

7 May

Marines began landing at Chu Lai

9 US/FW

7 May

CINCPAC
072130Z

Sharp reminded JCS that he wanted to reconstitute WESTPAC reserve after deployment of 173d and additional Marines.

Movement
of
I MAF
to
WESTPAC
appr.
by
SecDef
15 May.

8 May

MACV 15182

Westmoreland with Taylor concurrence forwarded concept of operations by U.S./allied ground combat forces in support of RVNAF:

Stage I - Security of base area (extended TAOR out to light artillery range).

Stage II - Deep patrolling and offensive operations (with RVNAF coordination and movement out of TAORs).

Stage III - Search and destroy plus reserve reaction operations. Westmoreland saw the U.S. role in the Vietnam war evolving through four phases:

Phase I - Securing and improving coastal enclaves

Phase II - Operations from the enclaves

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Phase III - Securing inland bases
and areas

Phase IV - Operations from inland bases
after occupying and im-
proving them.

Westmoreland recommended locations for
various forces then being discussed for
future deployment:

III MEF - Da Nang, Hue, Chu Lai
Airmobile Division - Qui Nhon, Nha Trang
ROK Division - Quang Ngai, Chu Lai (relieve USMC)
173d - Bien Hoa/Vung Tau (already landing)

| | | | |
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| 11 May | Embtel 3727 | <u>Taylor</u> described arrival of 173d and Marines; predicted boredom would be a problem. | |
| 14 May | JCS 142228Z | JCS told <u>CINCPAC</u> that <u>SecDef</u> approved combined coordinating staff with RVNAF and knew that MACV was planning a Joint General Staff. | |
| 15 May | MACV 150900Z | <u>Westmoreland</u> told <u>DA</u> he was preparing concept for employment of a division-sized force, possibly the airmobile division, and requested experts to help plan. | |
| 17 May | Embtel 3788 | <u>Taylor</u> told <u>State</u> <u>Quat</u> was agreeable to deployment of an Army brigade to Qui Nhon/ Nha Trang. If build-up of Cam Ranh Bay as a base were to be approved, he said, <u>Westmoreland</u> wanted to divert one battalion there for security. | |
| 19 May | Embtel 3808 | <u>Taylor</u> told <u>State</u> that RVN could absorb 80,000 US/3d country troops. He recommended a pause before considering further expansion and wanted to hold off logistics support for contingency follow-on until there was a case of clear and indisputable necessity. | |
| 21 May | JCSM 634-55 | JCS recommended to <u>SecDef</u> that Cam Ranh Bay be developed to either (1) enable further contingency deployments, or (2) to fully support troops already there. | Appr. by SecDef 8 Jun |

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| 24 May | Embtel 3855 | <u>Taylor</u> told <u>State</u> that joint command structure was repugnant to Viets and should not be raised at that time. Problem of command needed to be sorted out, however, prior to input of large numbers of U.S. forces. | |
| 24 May | MACV 17292 | <u>Westmoreland</u> told <u>CINCPAC</u> that despite SecDef approval of joint planning staff, the Viets were cool to the idea. | |
| 27 May | JCSM 417-65 | <u>JCS</u> recommended approval of 2369 MAP supported spaces for RVNAF to organize a tenth division using assets of three existing regiments. | Appr. by SecDef 4 Jun |
| June | | 1st battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, closed RVN in early June and joined the 173d at Vung Tau. | 10 US/FW |
| 5 June | Embtel 4074 | <u>Mission Intelligence Committee</u> with concurrence of <u>Taylor</u> , <u>Johnson</u> , and <u>Westmoreland</u> told <u>State</u> that a series of recent ARVN defeats raised the possibility of collapse. To meet a shortage of ARVN reserves, U.S. ground troops would probably have to be committed to action. | |
| 7 June | MACV 19118 070335Z | <u>Westmoreland</u> told <u>CINCPAC</u> that a summer offensive was under way to destroy GVN forces and isolate and attack district and province towns. The enemy had yet to realize his full potential, and RVNAF's capability to cope was in grave doubt. RVNAF build-up was halted because of recent losses. No choice but to reinforce with additional US/3d country forces as rapidly as possible. <u>Westmoreland</u> asked that all forces then in the planning stages be approved for deployment, plus he identified more forces (9 maneuver battalions in a division (-) and one MEB) | |

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which might be required later and for which planning should begin. He asked that the 173d be held in SVN until the Airmobile Division was operational.

7 June CINCPAC
072325Z

Sharp supported Westmoreland's request for more troops but added that he felt the airmobile division should go to Qui Nhon rather than inland and should operate in Binh Dinh instead of up in the highlands. He felt 600 to 800 tons of aerial resupply for the division if it went to the highlands was asking too much of air facilities. He also felt the ROK division should go to Quang Ngai rather than to Qui Nhon, where it would be unproductive, or to Cam Ranh as Westmoreland had suggested.

8 June Press
Conference

McCloskey, State Dept Press Officer, told the press that U.S. troops would be made available to fight alongside Viet forces when and if necessary.

9 June White House
Press
Release

Statement released which said that there had been no recent change in mission of U.S. combat units. They would help the Viets if help was requested and COMUSMACV felt U.S. troops were required.

11 June CINCPAC
112210Z

Sharp elaborated on his earlier objections to airmobile division going into highlands and clarified his views on employment of the ROKs in either Quang Ngai, Nha Trang, or the Delta.

11 June JCSM 457-65

JCS, after discussing MACV and CINCPAC requests with Taylor, recommended that the airmobile division go to Qui Nhon, and recommended everything else that Westmoreland had requested. Total strengths recommended were:
U.S. - 116,793; FW - 19,750.

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11 June JCS 112347Z JCS told Sharp that somewhat less than MACV's 19118 was close to being approved as an alternative. Force described amounted to one additional Army brigade instead of the airmobile division. JCS wanted to know where Westmoreland would put the brigade were it to be approved.

13 June MACV 131515Z Westmoreland objected to Taylor's questioning of the seriousness of the situation and pointed out that to date ARVN had lost 5 battalions and the end was not in sight. He justified his request for troops by Corps area and asked for a free hand in maneuvering units. He included his concept for the employment of ROK and ARVN troops.

15 June McNamara gave the green light for planning to deploy the airmobile division to SVN by 1 September.

16 June Press Conference McNamara announced deployments to SVN that would bring U.S. strength there to between 70,000 and 75,000 men. 20,000 of these would be combat troops and more would be sent if necessary. He said U.S. troops were needed because the RVNAF to VC force ratio of less than 4 to 1 was too low to enable the GVN to cope with the threat. Total U.S. Bns after deployments would be 15.

17 June Embtel 4220 Taylor confirmed to State the seriousness of the military situation in SVN. GVN had to either give up outlying outposts or face being ambushed trying to reinforce them.

18 June White House Memo to SecDef McGeorge Bundy passed on to McNamara the President's concern that "we find more dramatic and effective actions in SVN..."

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18 June JCSM 482-65 JCS further refined recommended troop list showing the airmobile division to deploy by 1 September 1965 along with its support and the brigade of the 101st airborne division to return to CONUS when the airmobile division was operational. Total strength recommended was:
U.S. - 120,839; FW - 19,750

22 June Unsigned Memo to SecDef McNamara told that the President could wait until 10 July to approve the deployment of the airmobile division if SecDef is immediately given the go-ahead for readiness preparation. The question of removal of the two Army brigades was to be reconsidered in August.

22 June JCS 2400 JCS told CINCPAC and Westmoreland that a force of 44 battalions was being considered for deployment to Vietnam. The Chairman wished to know if that would be enough to convince the DRV/VC they could not win.

23 June Deptels 3078 & 3079 Approval for landing of one Marine BLT at Qui Nhon for security and an additional BLT at Da Nang sent to Saigon.

24 June MACV 3320 Westmoreland told CINCPAC and the JCS that there was no assurance the DRV/VC would change their plans regardless of what the U.S. did in the next 6 months. The 44 battalions, however, should be enough to prevent collapse and establish a favorable balance of power by year's end.

26 June Memo, SecArmy to SecDef Resor told McNamara that Air Cav Div must have its movement directive by 8 July at the latest in order to meet its readiness deadlines. Security would be impossible after issuing the directive.

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- 26 June Deptel 3057 W. Bundy told Taylor that Westmoreland could commit U.S. troops to combat "in any situation in which the use of such troops is required by an appropriate GVN commander and when, in COMUSMACV's judgment, their use is necessary to strengthen the relative position of GVN forces."
- 26 June ISA Memo of Conversation w/Dep Amb. On 25 June Alexis Johnson told McNaughton that in many respects the situation in SVN was no worse than the previous year. Even if it were, large numbers of foreign troops could do no more than hold a few enclaves. The Vietnamese feared massive inputs of foreign troops would degrade their control over the country.
- 1 July Memo for The President Ball of State described the Vietnam war as one the U.S. cannot win regardless of effort. Rather than have the U.S. pour its resources down the drain in the wrong place, he recommended that U.S. force levels be held to 15 battalions and 72,000 men announced by SecDef in June. The combat role of the U.S. forces should be restricted to base security and reserve in support of ARVN. As rapidly as possible and in full realization of the diplomatic losses which might be incurred, the U.S. should exit from Vietnam and thereby cut its losses.
- 1 July Memo for The President W. Bundy of State proposed a "middle way" to the President which would avoid the ultimatum aspects of the 44 battalions request and also the Ball withdrawal proposal, both of which were undesirable. Bundy offered further experimentation with U.S. troops from coastal enclaves.

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The numbers would be held to planned deployments of 18 battalions and 85,000 men. The airmobile division and the 1st Infantry Division would be got ready but not deployed. Furious diplomatic activity concomitantly should find a gracious exit for the U.S.

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|---------|-------------|--|----------|
| 1 July | | One Marine BLT landed at Qui Nhon to strengthen security there. | 11 US/FW |
| 2 July | JCSM 515-65 | Pursuant to their meeting with SecDef on 28 June, the JCS forwarded a program for the deployment of "such additional forces at this time as are required to insure that the VC/DRV cannot win in SVN at their present level of commitment." Concurrently, the JCS recommended expansion of the air activity against NVN as an indispensable part of the overall program. Total U.S. strength at completion of these deployments was to be 175,000. | |
| 6 July | | One Marine BLT landed at Da Nang to strengthen the defenses there. | 12 US/FW |
| 7 July | Deftel 5319 | McNamara informed Westmoreland that the purpose of the forthcoming visit to Saigon scheduled for 16-20 July was to "get your recommendations for forces to year's end and beyond." | |
| 10 July | Deftel 5582 | McNaughton told Taylor that it had been decided to deploy 10,400 logistic and support troops by 15 August to support current force levels and to receive the airmobile division, if deployed. GVN concurrence sought. | |

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|------------|-------------------------------|--|----------|
| 11 July | Embtel 108 | Estimate of the situation prepared by the <u>Mission Intelligence Committee</u> reaffirmed the need for U.S./3d country forces to stem the tide then flowing against the RVNAF. | |
| 12 July | | 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division arrived in Vietnam | 15 US/FW |
| 16-20 July | Conference in Saigon | <u>McNamara</u> and <u>Wheeler</u> met with <u>Westmoreland</u> and <u>Taylor</u> , heard presentation of COMUSMACV's concept for operations in SVN. The 44 battalions were to be the Phase I of the build-up and were enough to prevent defeat. In order to move to Phase II and seize the initiative, Westmoreland told SecDef he'd require a further 24 battalions in 1966. | |
| 17 July | NMCC 172042Z | <u>Vance</u> told <u>McNamara</u> that the President had decided to go ahead with the plan to deploy 34 U.S. battalions and that he was favorably disposed to the call-up of reserves and extension of tours of active duty personnel. | |
| 28 July | Presidential Press Conference | The President told the press that he had ordered the airmobile division and other units to SVN. Strength after these deployments would be 125,000 and more would be sent if required. He also said he'd decided not to call up reserve at that juncture. | |
| 29 July | | 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division arrived in Vietnam. | 18 US/FW |
| 30 July | JCSM 590-65 | Annex showed 34 battalions and 193,587 men as planned for deployment to RVN. | |
| 14-15 Aug | | Marine BLTs landed at Chu Lai and Da Nang. Coupled with the SLF BLT, they brought USMC maneuver strength in RVN to 12 battalions, 9 from III MAF and 3 from I MAF. | 21 US/FW |

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| 28 Sept | | 1st Air Cavalry Division closed in RVN and assumed responsibility for its TAOR. | 29 US/FW |
| 7 Oct | | Remainder of the 1st Infantry Division closed in RVN. | 35 US/FW |
| 8 Nov | | A full division of ROK forces closed into RVN. | 44 US/FW |
| 10 Nov | JCSM 811-65 | After numerous adjustments in required support for Phase I deployments, the JCS proposed a final ceiling of 219,000 on that portion of the build-up and then addressed on-going Phase II proposals. | |
| 31 Dec | | Phase I U.S. strength in RVN at year's end was 184,314. | |

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IV.C.6. PHASE I IN THE BUILD-UP OF U. S. FORCES, THE DEBATE

MARCH - JULY 1965

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| 4. There were plenty of indications in the spring that something awful was going to happen. | |
| 5. The storm. | |
| a. Song Be cost both sides heavily. | |
| b. Ba Gia signaled to some the signs of imminent ARVN collapse. | |
| c. Westmoreland's 19118 of 7 June said the RVNAF had had it and were going under. | |

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| d. As though to confirm Westmoreland's dreary prediction, the ARVN wasted the elite of their force by committing it piecemeal against a clever and determined enemy at Dong Xoai. | |
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| 1. Westmoreland, CINCPAC and the JCS, with Taylor's concurrence, requested some more Marines for security. | |

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2. Taylor's resistance to further troop increases blunted the JCS proposal for three divisions of combat troops. Instead, the President approved two Marine BLT's, and an ill-defined, but more aggressive, mission for them.
3. NSAM 328
 - a. Faced with a "trilemma," the President elected to cautiously expand U.S. ground commitment rather than pull out of Vietnam or drastically increase air strikes on NVN.
 - b. The way to disprove allegations about "white-faced" troops in the Vietnam war was to experiment with small numbers of them. It looked as though the situation would permit it.
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 5. The whole issue was taken to Honolulu.
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3. The Embassy thought it was far too much force.
4. Ball clearly thought the U.S. was merely raising its ultimate losses.
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I. THE SITUATION, SPRING &
EARLY SUMMER, 1965

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PHASE I IN THE BUILD-UP OF U. S. FORCES, THE DEBATE

MARCH - JULY 1965

I. The Situation, Spring and Early Summer, 1965

Vietnam in February, 1965, saw a brief flurry of enemy activity and the departure of the volatile General Nguyen Khanh as a result of another coup. The installation of Phan Huy Quat as Prime Minister and Phan Khac Suu as Chief of State was followed by a period of ominous quiescence. The drop in intensity of the fighting coincided with the dry season in the southern parts of the country, with the beginning of the United States Rolling Thunder program of continuous air strikes against North Vietnam, and with the arrival of the first U.S. ground combat troops committed to Asian soil since Korea.

A. The Political Situation

Despite its rather inauspicious beginning in February, the government had by early April convinced the CIA that for the first time the progressive deterioration in the South Vietnamese political situation had come to a halt. 1/ All the disruptive elements in the Vietnamese body politic remained, but Quat displayed considerable talent in placating dissidents and was setting about in his own quiet manner to tidy up the chaotic Saigon government. Quat was no charismatic leader. If anything, he was the opposite with his self-effacing, mild manner. But he impressed Ambassador Taylor with his businesslike approach, and the latter had high hopes for Quat's success.

By mid-May, to the dismay of the U.S. Mission, Quat's government began to manifest considerable strain. The Buddhists, a not always consistent pressure group, felt that Quat was too busy trying to please everyone instead of initiating a strong action program. The Catholics, on the other hand, were fearful of a Buddhist-dominated government and Saigon was full of rumors of the formation of Catholic paramilitary units. 2/ Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, a familiar plotter, was said to have unsuccessfully attempted a coup on behalf of the Catholics around the 20th of May. 3/

An apparently routine cabinet shuffle proposed by Premier Quat at the end of May precipitated a crisis which led to the fall of his government. Quat had intended to replace three cabinet ministers with southerners; but the incumbents, with the support of Chief of State Suu, refused to resign. All the dissident elements on the Saigon political scene seized on the incident as an excuse to rain invectives on Quat and, finding Suu all too ready to listen to their complaints, used him to effectively paralyze the government. 4/ The crisis came to a head on 9 June when Quat asked the senior generals of the RVNAF to mediate the dispute between himself and Suu. Instead, the generals forced Quat to resign and took over the government themselves.

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Following the military takeover, a National Leadership Committee was formed. On 21 June, Major General Nguyen Van Thieu was installed as Chief of State with Air Vice Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky as the new Prime Minister. The accession of Thieu-Ky ended for the moment any hopes of Ambassador Taylor and others for the establishment of effective civilian government in Vietnam.

The sole bright spot in an otherwise very gloomy situation was the total absence of any violence associated with the military takeover. The new leaders came to office with an announced determination to maintain stability and to vigorously prosecute the war. 5/ Given the military situation at that time, little credence could be lent to their pronouncements.

B. The Military Situation

The Viet Cong were unusually inactive throughout March and April. There had been no major defeat of the enemy's forces and no signs of any major shift in strategy on his part. Hence it was assumed that he was merely pausing to regroup and to assess the effect of the changed American participation in the war embodied in air strikes and in the Marines. 6/

During the spring months an emboldened ARVN displayed a new offensive spirit and scored a few successes at the expense of an elusive enemy. Most of the standard statistical indicators used by MACV to measure ARVN effectiveness showed favorable trends. The rate of enemy to friendly killed inclined in the government's favor, and for a brief but encouraging spell the rate of weapons lost to the enemy compared with weapons captured from him approached parity. 7/ A major effort by the GVN forces in March to open highway 19 from Qui Nhon in Binh Dinh Province to Pleiku in the highlands met with surprisingly light enemy resistance. Despite reports of heavy enemy force concentration and an impending offensive in that area, the road remained open. 8/ Incremental gains all over the country contributed to an air of euphoria manifested in the occasional expression of cautious optimism which crept into weekly or monthly situation reports, such as Ambassador Taylor's NODIS to the President (Saigon to SecState 3359, 13 April 1965) quoted below:

"We have just completed another quite favorable week in terms of losses inflicted upon the Viet Cong, 643 of whom were killed in action to 135 on the government side. Binh Dinh Province which was considered to be in critical condition two months ago has now been restored to what might be called normalcy; that is to say, the fear of the loss of major towns appears to be past although a large part of the province remains under Viet Cong control. The success in Binh Dinh is attributable to three factors; a new and aggressive division commander, the commitment of five general reserve battalions to the province, and the improved morale generated by the air actions in the North.

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"We still have the feeling that the Viet Cong are regrouping in the provinces in the northern half of the country and are probably preparing some kind of offensive action. However, there are a few indications that suggest that Viet Cong morale may be dropping. They have given up four major arms caches during the month without a sustained fight and the number of defectors during the week (129 Viet Cong military personnel and 23 political cadre) is the highest defection figure since weekly statistics were initiated in January 1964.

"On the manpower side, unaudited figures indicate that government military and paramilitary forces increased by some 10,000 during the month of March of whom two-thirds were volunteers. This rate exceeds the target of 8,000 accessions per month which we had considered the best the government could do with a maximum effort.

"Quat continued his program of provincial visits, making a tour of the Delta area from which he returned full of new ideas and bubbling with enthusiasm. He was quite impressed with the senior officers whom he met in the IV Corps and, as always, enjoyed talking to the country people who assembled to greet him.

"His principal concern remains the unruly generals and the continued evidence of lack of unity in the senior officers corps. You have probably noted the case of insubordination in the Navy wherein several senior naval officers petitioned the removal of Admiral Cang, the Chief of Naval Operations. Quat is handling this matter routinely by a board of inquiry but is disturbed by this new evidence of lack of discipline in the armed forces. In his campaign to bring the generals under some kind of control, he is about to take the step of abolishing the position of Commander-in-Chief, while increasing the functions of the Minister of National Defense. This is a move in the right direction but his troubles will not end as long as the military command structure is clouded by the presence of the Armed Forces Council. Quat is fully aware of this problem and intends to resolve it, but slowly and cautiously.

"Your John Hopkins speech and the reply to the 17-nation overture attracted much attention in Saigon where the reaction was generally very favorable. As one might expect, the phrase "unconditional discussion" brought forth considerable editorial comment, but the conclusion was that the term suggested no real difference in aims between the Vietnamese and the United States Government. On two occasions, I have urged Quat to sit down with Alex Johnson and me to discuss various alternative courses of international political action which may require consideration

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during the coming weeks and months. He has not responded affirmatively to this suggestion apparently because his own thoughts are not yet in order.

"The mission has been very busy since my return with all agencies reviewing their programs to see that they are aligned with the recent decisions taken in Washington. USOM Director Killen has discussed the 41 point non-military program with Quat who has expressed particular interest in such projects as rural electrification, agricultural development, water supply and school construction. The Acting CAS Chief, Mr. Jorgensen, is giving priority attention to the 12 outline projects which Mr. McCone tabled during our Washington discussions and will soon have specific proposals for the Mission Council."

and the following excerpts from COMUSMACV's Monthly Evaluations for March and April 1965:

"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, probably in the II Corps area...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 offenses 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." [Emphasis added]

In view of the fact that nothing had basically changed in the South, it seems inconceivable that anyone was really fooled by the dramatic drop in enemy-initiated activity. Most official observers were hardheaded and realistic following the landing of the two Marine BIT's in March. COMUSMACV certainly was in the long and detailed Commander's Estimate of the Situation which he completed on 26 March and which will be analyzed at length later in this paper. In summary, General Westmoreland said in

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the Estimate 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 RVNAF, although at the moment performing fairly well, would not be able in the face of a VC summer offensive to hold in the South long enough for the bombing to become effective. 9/

Realistic assessments of the situation in March notwithstanding, some of the parlance in cables and messages between Washington and Saigon expressed conviction that the situation in Vietnam was well in hand, and resisted radical changes or even urgent revision of ongoing U.S. programs. Ambassador Taylor, for example, reacted strongly to proposals that U.S. military-civil affairs personnel be introduced into the aid effort, and told McGeorge Bundy that the GVN was winning the war without such help. Taylor said:

"I am greatly troubled by DOD 152339Z April 15 [a cable from McNaughton to Saigon containing a seven point program with 'highest authority' sanction.] First, it shows no consideration for the fact that, as a result of decisions taken in Washington during my visit, this mission is charged with securing implementation by the two month old Quat government of a 21 point military program, a 41 point non-military program, a 16 point Rowan USIS program and a 12 point CIA program. Now this new cable opens up new vistas of further points as if we can win here somehow on a point score. We are going to stall the machine of government if we do not declare a moratorium on new programs for at least six months.

"Next, it shows a far greater willingness to get into the ground war than I had discerned in Washington during my recent trip. Although some additional U.S. forces should probably be introduced after we see how the Marines do in counterinsurgency operations, my own attitude is reflected in EMBTEL 3384, which I hope was called to the attention of the President.

"My greatest concern arises over para 6 reftel which frankly bewilders me. What do the authors of this cable think the mission has been doing over the months and years? We have presumably the best qualified personnel the Washington agencies (State, AID, DOD, USIA, and CIA) can find working in the provinces seven days a week at precisely the tasks described in para 6. Is it proposed to withdraw these people and replace them by Army civil affairs types operating on the pattern of military occupation? If this is the thought, I would regard such a change in policy which will gain wide publicity, as disastrous in its likely efforts upon pacification in general and on US/GVN relations in particular.

"Mac, can't we be better protected from our friends? I know that everyone wants to help, but there's such a thing as killing with kindness. In particular, we want to stay alive here because

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we think we're winning -- and will continue to win unless helped to death." /Emphasis added/

The conferees who met in Honolulu three days later reached a joint agreement which was somewhat less optimistic than the Ambassador's pronouncement. Present in Honolulu were Secretary McNamara, Assistant Secretaries William Bundy of State and John McNaughton of Defense, Ambassador Taylor, Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland, and Admiral Sharp. Some of these men had helped produce the current optimism in situation reports and cables, and yet the concensus of their meeting was that the then present level of Viet Cong activity was nothing but the lull before the storm.

The situation which presented itself to the Honolulu conferees was in many ways the whole Vietnam problem in microcosm. What was needed to galvanize everyone into action was some sort of dramatic event within South Vietnam itself. Unfortunately, the very nature of the war precluded the abrupt collapse of a front or the loss of large chunks of territory in lightning strokes by the enemy. The enemy in this war was spreading his control and influence slowly and inexorably but without drama. The political infrastructure from which he derived his strength took years to create, and in most areas the expansion of control was hardly felt until it was a fait accompli. Only when he organized into units of battalion and regiment size, did the enemy voluntarily lend some dramatic elements to the war. Whenever these units appeared and engaged the RVNAF, the government and its U.S. helpers had something they could handle. Unfortunately at the time of the April 1965 Honolulu Conference the Viet Cong Main Force units were underground and the conferees had little or no tangible threat to which to react.

There were, however, plenty of indications in the early spring of 1965 of what was to come. There had been no major degradations in the Viet Cong strength nor in their order of battle. On the contrary, the enemy was recruiting apace and more than offsetting his losses. 10/ From throughout the country came reports that Viet Cong troops and cadre were moving into Central Vietnam and into areas adjacent to the ring of provinces comprising the "Hop Tac" area around Saigon. 11/

Constant political turmoil involving many of the senior RVNAF officers and few significant victories combined to have a deleterious effect on the effectiveness of the GVN armed forces. The JCS on 20 March identified the degradation of RVNAF as a new phenomenon after months of political instability. They used the decline as justification to argue for the deployment of three divisions of reinforcements from the U.S. and Korea. 12/

Finally and most ominous of all, a CIA-DIA memorandum dated 21 April 1965 reflected the acceptance into the enemy order of battle of one regiment of the 325th PAVN Division said to be located in Kontum Province. 13/

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The presence of this regular North Vietnamese unit, which had been first reported as early as February, was a sobering harbinger of things to come.

The storm broke in earnest on 11 May when the Viet Cong attacked the capital of Phuoc Long Province, Song Be, using more than a regiment of troops. The enemy overran the town and its MACV advisory compound, causing heavy casualties among the U.S. and Vietnamese defenders. After holding the town for a day, the Viet Cong withdrew. Subsequent ARVN operations revealed that the enemy also had suffered heavily in the battle.

Significantly, while the Viet Cong were preparing their attack on Song Be, the GVN was pushing to completion a new Special Forces camp at Dong Xoai not far away on the NW corner of War Zone C. 14/ That camp was opened in May, and in less than a month the enemy was to reveal his interest in it.

Before May was over, however, the Viet Cong appeared again in strength, this time in Quang Ngai Province in the northern I Corps. Near the small outpost of Ba Gia a few kilometers west of Quang Ngai City, a battalion of the ARVN 51st Regiment was ambushed and overrun. Although the size of the enemy force was unknown, the ARVN commanders in the area rushed reinforcements out to the scene only to have them ambushed in turn. The battle dragged on for several days and ended in total defeat for the ARVN. Two battalions were completely decimated and, what was worse, the ARVN senior commanders on the scene had displayed tactical stupidity and cowardice in the face of large enemy forces. From Ba Gia came a sense of urgency, at least among some of the senior U.S. officers who had been witness to the battle. 15/ The very real possibility of ARVN collapse had been made manifest.

On the 7th of June, shortly after Ba Gia, General Westmoreland sent to CINCPAC this message (LIMDIS 19118, 070335Z Jun 65):

"As indicated Ref A [COMUSMACV 041133Z NOTAL], a broad review of force requirements has been conducted in light of the changing situation in Southeast Asia and within RVN.

"There are indications that the conflict in Southeast Asia is in the process of moving to a higher level. Some PAVN forces have entered SVN and more may well be on the way. Additional jet fighters and some jet light bombers have been deployed in the DRV.

"Specifically, elements of the 325th PAVN Division are in the northern zone of II Corps. It is quite possible that the major portion, if not all, of the Division is now deployed in the Kontum, Pleiku, Phu Bon area. Elements of the 304th PAVN Division are suspected to be in the panhandle and, therefore,

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capable of following the 325th. The recent heavy actions in Phuoc Long and Quang Ngai, and VC initiatives in Pleiku, Kontum, Phu Bon and Thua Thien are demonstrations of VC strength and their apparent determination to employ their forces aggressively. Recent events as well as captured VC prisoners and documents suggest that a summer campaign is now underway to destroy government forces and, concurrently, to first isolate and then attack district and province towns.

"So far, the VC have not employed their full capabilities in this campaign. Only two of the nine Viet Cong regiments have been heavily engaged (one in Phuoc Long and one in Quang Ngai), and probably only a similar proportion of their separate battalions has been committed. In most engagements, VC Main Force units have displayed improved training and discipline, heavier firepower from the new family of weapons with which most Main Force units have been equipped, and a willingness to take heavy losses in order to achieve objectives.

"In pressing their campaign, the Viet Cong are capable of mounting regimental-size operations in all four ARVN Corps areas, and at least battalion-sized attacks in virtually all provinces. Known dispositions indicate major actions are likely in the near future in the Binh Duong-Phuoc Thanh-Phuoc Long area north of Saigon, in the Quang Ngai-Quang Tin area in Central Vietnam, and in Kontum, Pleiku, Phu Bon and Binh Dinh Provinces. Major attacks could occur also in other areas; the Viet Cong have shown that they are capable of concentrating in regimental strength with little or no warning. Whether or not the 304th Div is in, or moving toward SVN, the DRV has a 'doorstep' capability to reinforce the VC with sizable forces.

"ARVN forces on the other hand are already experiencing difficulty in coping with this increased VC capability. Desertion rates are inordinately high. Battle losses have been higher than expected; in fact, four ARVN battalions have been rendered ineffective by VC action in the I and II Corps zones. Therefore, effective fighting strength of many infantry and ranger battalions is unacceptably low. As a result, ARVN troops are beginning to show signs of reluctance to assume the offensive and in some cases their steadfastness under fire is coming into doubt. In order to bring existing battalions up to acceptable battlefield strength, it will be necessary to declare at least a temporary moratorium on the activation of new battalions. Thus, the GVN/VC force ratios upon which we based our estimate of the situation in March have taken an adverse trend. You will recall that I recommended the deployment of a U.S. division in II Corps to cover

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the period of the RVNAF buildup and to weight the force ratios in that important area. We assumed at that time that the ARVN battalions would be brought to full strength by now and that the force buildup would proceed on schedule. Neither of these assumptions has materialized.

"The problem of low battlefield strength in ARVN has forced us to plan the use of personnel now training in 11 new battalions as fillers for old battalions. In effect, these 11 battalions will be deferred and during the period from mid-July to early November no new ARVN battalions will become available. Thus the gap to be filled is both deeper and wider.

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

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

There were some who thought COMUSMACV's assessment of the situation was a bit precipitous, 16/ but the dissenters were effectively silenced the following week as the Viet Cong attacked the aforementioned Special Forces camp and the adjoining district headquarters at Dong Xoai. ARVN reinforcements were committed piecemeal to the fray and were devoured by the enemy, who was on the scene with better than two regiments of troops. The battle, which lasted for five days and nearly saw the commitment of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade to bail the ARVN out, marked the bitterest fighting of the war to date.

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The GVN casualties of the second week in June were twice as high as any previous week of the war. The VC casualties, which were reported to exceed the ARVN total of 1,672, were a mute testimony to the enemy's regenerative capability and to his willingness to pay a heavy price in order to destroy the GVN's fighting power. 17/ The success of his efforts so far was made explicit on the 26th of June when COMUSMACV rated 5 ARVN regiments and 9 separate battalions combat ineffective. At the end of May the figure had been 2 regiments and 3 battalions. 18/

By mid-June 1965, the Viet Cong summer offensive was in full stride. Shifting the emphasis away from the areas of their early successes on the periphery of "Hop Tac" and in the southern portion of I Corps, they began the long-expected offensive in the highlands of II Corps. On the 25th of June the district headquarters at Tou Morong in Kontum Province was invested and then taken by an enemy force said to be a PAVN regiment reinforced with some Viet Cong troops. 19/ Other remote district headquarters came under enemy pressure in the ensuing weeks until by 7 July a total of six of them had been abandoned or overrun. The Viet Cong were systematically forcing the GVN to yield what little control it still exercised in rural areas outside the Mekong Delta.

Summing up the situation at the end of the week of 14 July, the CIA said: "The initiative and momentum of military operations continue in favor of the Viet Cong. The impact of Viet Cong operations is being felt not only by the RVNAF but by the nation's internal economy as well. Nothing this week points to the RVN wresting the initiative from the VC." 20/

A major part of counterinsurgency thinking and planning in early 1965 was based on the concept of force ratios. In order to defeat the insurgent, it was thought necessary to have a preponderance of force in favor of the GVN of somewhere around 10 to 1. 21/ The actual ratio for that time period was considerably less than 10 to 1 and was inclining in favor of the insurgents. In order to redress the situation, General Westmoreland advocated accelerating the build-up of the RVNAF. 22/ To accomplish this, he said, measures to increase induction and to curtail the shocking rates of desertion would have to be found. Unfortunately, any build-up strategy was obviated by the events of late May-early June. General Westmoreland informed CINCPAC on 7 June that the RVNAF build-up was to be suspended until November and that trainees would be used as fillers in heavily attrited units. 23/ If force ratios still were of paramount importance, then reinforcements for the GVN side would have to come from other than domestic Vietnamese sources.

The enemy side of the force ratio was open to question since historically Viet Cong strength tended to be understated. The enemy order of battle as reported on 17 March 1965 was as follows: 24/

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Confirmed strength -- 37,000 Regular Troops
100,000 Irregulars and Guerrillas (approx)

5 Regimental Headquarters
50 Battalions
145 Separate Companies
35 Separate Platoons

All of these figures reflected substantial increases over the previous year. In fact, the confirmed strength had risen no less than 33% since 1964. After the Viet Cong had demonstrated rather bluntly that the March 1965 statistics were a trifle conservative, the order of battle was revised and on 21 July appeared as follows: 25/

Confirmed strength -- 53,000 Regular Troops
100,000 Irregulars and Guerrillas (no change
from previous figure which was itself
an estimate)

10 Regional Headquarters
72 Battalions
192 Separate Companies
101 Separate Platoons

In light of subsequent information, even the above estimate, gloomy as it was, understated the enemy strength. Opposing the Viet Cong forces were the RVNAF Regular, Regional, and Popular Forces totaling some 570,000 men and boasting at best 133 infantry-type battalions. 26/ At a quick glance, the force ratios in July were seen to be about 3.8 to 1 in favor of the GVN in manpower (with the RVN Police and some paramilitary forces such as the Armed Combat Youth not being counted and about 1.9 to 1 in favor of the GVN in maneuver battalions. Undoubtedly the force ratios as seen in mid-1965 were far from optimum for theoretical counterinsurgency operations.

C. Pacification

The program to pacify, or extend government control over, the countryside never really recovered from the political turmoil of 1964 and early 1965. The 1965 master plan for "Rural Reconstruction" (one of many such euphemisms) was not approved by the RVNAF High Command until after the first quarter of the year. 27/ Situation reports, both MACV and CIA, described incremental plusses and minuses in what was obviously overall a stalled program.

On 6 April, a MACV military spokesman gave the following answers to questions from the press after a presentation summing up the month of March 1965: 28/

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"Q. Have the figures on VC control of territory and population changed appreciably? A. The statistic that counts is people, and in the month of March the statistics that are here do not have percentiles.

"Q. Can you give us figures on the number of people brought under government control in January and in March -- or to the closest month? A. It's not significant. I'd say it was a slow gain basically in the Hop Tac area. Any place else, you've had a trade-off.

"Q. Would it be a fair assumption to say that, outside of Hop Tac the government held its own? A. In the overall, held its own.

"Q. There was no significant progress, then. The government held its own? A. That's correct.

"Q. It was a stalemate, then? A. No, I wouldn't call it a stalemate. I don't consider the fact that you pacified, or asserted control over 20 additional hamlets which might house as many as six or seven thousand people a stalemate.

"Q. At the same time we lost... A. No, you misunderstand me...the losses and the gains were counter balanced outside the Hop Tac area. In the Hop Tac area, there were gains."

CIA and MACV Situation Reports contained the following observations on pacification:

CIA Monthly Report, 21 January 1965:

"Pacification on a nationwide basis, has generally been stalled for the past month. Although there are pacification plans in effect in all provinces (except Con Son Island), there has been little significant progress; in some areas there has been an appreciable deterioration of governmental control. Even though South Vietnamese officials report continuing progress in the high priority Hop Tac effort around Saigon, it remains to be seen whether these are more than paper achievements. To date there has been no major effort by the Viet Cong to strike at areas which are now claimed as "secure," and therefore the validity of government claims remains untested. The Viet Cong have increased their numbers and the tempo of their operations in areas adjacent to Hop Tac and what is apparently an attempt to draw off government forces committed to this major pacification effort."

CIA Monthly Report, 17 February 1965:

"Nationwide, the pacification effort has barely moved ahead since 1 January; there has been a serious deterioration in some areas, mainly

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the I and II Corps. The slowdown in the pace of pacification is due to several factors which include: the preoccupation of some senior commanders with Saigon politics, the Tet holiday period, and VC strength, which in some areas has forced the GVN military forces into static or defensive roles."

MACV Monthly Evaluation Report for February 1965:

"The only pacification progress during February was registered in Hop Tac and other areas of III Corps, while other sections of the country either held earlier gains or showed deterioration. Contributing factors were increased VC activity, especially in the I and II Corps and the administrative confusion associated with the attempted coup of 19 February. At month's end, the 1965 pacification plans were still undergoing a review, with the result that pacification funds had not yet been released to the provinces. A stopgap allocation of 3 million \$VN per province was made by the New Rural Life Directorate to permit programs to continue pending release of regular funds. Even so, many province chiefs are reluctant to push forward without more specific authorization and direction from higher authorities."

MACV Monthly Evaluation Report for March 1965:

"Although there was a lull in VC activity during the last half of the month, field commanders failed to capitalize on the situation and pursue pacification goals vigorously. During the month the pacification generally experienced regression in I and II CTZ while parts of III and IV Corps recorded slow but steady progress. In the Hop Tac area consistent gains were recorded throughout the month."

CIA Weekly Report, 24 March 1965:

"Pacification efforts during the past week remained stalled throughout most of the country. Some progress was seen in II Corps in pacification efforts."

MACV Monthly Evaluation for April 1965:

"Despite improved psychological conditions and the continued lull in VC activity, there was little tangible evidence of progress in rural reconstruction during the month...Overall, the slow but steady progress in III and IV Corps was offset by losses in I and II Corps. Contributing factors to this standstill were the GVN delay in approving provincial budgets and a continued lack of aggressiveness in operations directly supporting rural reconstruction. There was no appreciable increase in the number of refugees this month and relief measures taken by the Minister of Social Welfare and the province chiefs appear to be progressing satisfactorily, particularly in Binh Dinh and Quang Ngai provinces."

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The sole bright spot in all of this was the highly touted "Hop Tac" program which concentrated resources, human and material, on a few key provinces around the capital of Saigon. A lot of favorable things were being said about Hop Tac. McGeorge Bundy told the President in an apparently pivotal memorandum dated 7 February 1965 that although American air power would have to be used to buy time for us to break the Viet Cong hold on the countryside, the Hop Tac program offered hope for the future. 29/ (See Section I.A. in the Study on The Re-emphasis of Pacification.) During that 6th of April press conference, the MACV spokesman told the press that "Hop Tac continues to move along a plus curve..." 30/

Even without the dogged optimism, it is difficult in the absence of hard data to accurately assess the real situation in the countryside in early 1965, or to tell how much of the Hop Tac program was merely bluster and bravado. In regard to the latter, the Secretary of Defense sent to the Chairman of the JCS on 4 June 1965 the following query: "How did the Viet Cong mobilize a battalion to attack Binh Chanh district town only 10 miles from Saigon in the center of the Hop Tac area?" 31/ Whatever the case, the pacification program was overtaken by events of May and June. Prior to this, the II Corps, including the coastal provinces of Phu Yen and Binh Dinh and all of the highland provinces, was already in trouble. 32/

D. Economic Situation

The staple food of the Vietnamese is rice, and Vietnam has in time of peace traditionally been an exporter of that commodity. The Viet Cong campaigned to control the countryside where the rice is grown and the routes of communication, land and water, over which it is moved to market. They were so successful that by 1965 the GVN was forced to contemplate massive imports of rice in order to feed the population and help stabilize prices. To illustrate the scope of the problem, the following statistics show rice exports from the district of Thanh Phu to the capital of its province Kien Hoa, one of the richest of the provinces in the Mekong Delta: 33/

Metric tons of paddy rice exported from Thanh Phu to Kien Hoa
1960-1965:

| | |
|------|------------|
| 1960 | 1,815 tons |
| 1961 | 2,609 tons |
| 1962 | 2,491 tons |
| 1963 | 2,451 tons |
| 1964 | 1,033 tons |
| 1965 | 745 tons |

By early 1965 the current crop of Delta rice had already been harvested, and it was obvious that the Viet Cong were not going to allow

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it to reach the urban markets. By the end of 1965 the retail price indices showed that for middle and working class families in Saigon the cost of food was 41% higher than a year earlier. The general price index, not including rent, for working class families was 33% higher and for the middle class, 30% higher. 34/ The upsurge in overt enemy military activity in May and June was accompanied by a major campaign to interfere with GVN lines of communication. Highway One and the railway which parallel one another through the coastal provinces in I and II Corps were both cut in numerous places. The road from Saigon to Da Lat, over which moved much vegetable produce, was constantly harassed. By the end of May, the town of Ben Cat in Binh Duong Province NW of Saigon was isolated. 35/ In May the Viet Cong cut the Danhiem-to-Saigon powerline and effectively prevented its repair. 36/

Through increased control in the agricultural producing areas, very effective harassment of the primary means of communication within the GVN, and selective application of military pressure, the Viet Cong were waging a very successful campaign aimed at grinding the economy of the GVN to a halt.

There wasn't much the GVN could do about it. The 11 battalions of the RVNAF General Reserve were being "whipsawed" back and forth reacting to enemy military activity. By June the Reserve was already so heavily committed that there was little additional combat power available to the GVN with which to influence a rapidly deteriorating situation, military and economic. 37/

II. The Brief Tenure of the Strategy of Security

A. Security as a Rationale

The rationale that got two Marine BLT's into Da Nang in March 1965, which was publicly announced and which caused surprisingly little outcry, was plausibly advanced on several subsequent occasions as additional troops were deployed to various locations in Vietnam. Whether or not it was publicly offered as a rationale, the strategy of deploying troops for the security of bases was short-lived. The Marines hardly had their feet dry when several proposals were brought forward to get U.S. troops actively engaged in the ground war. These proposals, the first of which followed close on General Johnson's return from his Vietnam inspection trip of 5-12 March, 38/ were the center of much private debate in the spring and early summer of 1965. That debate went on largely behind the scene while the American public was in ignorance of the proceedings. The strategy of security effectively became a dead letter on the first of April, but the change in strategy was not revealed publicly until the 8th and 9th of June.

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B. NSC Meetings of 1-2 April 1965

On the 17th of March, General Westmoreland sought Ambassador Taylor's concurrence in a proposal to deploy an additional USMC BLT to Phu Bai near Hue on the northern coast in I Corps. Westmoreland wanted to cut down some of the density of aircraft at Da Nang by moving helicopters to the strip at Phu Bai. The Marine BLT was needed to protect that strip. 39/ Taylor cabled to Washington: (EMBTTEL 3003, 18 Mar 65).

"General Westmoreland has just sought my concurrence in his recommendation for the landing of the Third BLT of the 9th MEB at Phu Bai for the purpose of protecting the 8th RRU and the air strip there. He intends to move helicopters from Da Nang to the strip and thereby reduce field congestion at Da Nang. Because of the military advantages of thus rounding out the MEB, I have no reluctance in agreeing to the merit of his recommendation which, of course, should receive the concurrence of the GVN after that of Washington.

"This proposal for introducing the BLT is a reminder of the strong likelihood of additional requests for increases in U.S. ground combat forces in SVN. Such requests may come from the U.S. side, from the GVN side or from both. All of us here are keenly aware of the GVN trained military manpower shortage which will exist throughout 1965 and which probably can be rectified only in part by an accelerated mobilization. We will soon have to decide whether to try to get by with inadequate indigenous forces or to supplement them with Third Country troops, largely if not exclusively U.S. This matter was discussed with General Johnson during his recent visit who no doubt has raised it following his return to Washington. This message examines the pros and cons of such an action -- specifically defined as the introduction of a U.S. division (appropriately modified) into SVN.

"The purpose of introducing of a division would be primarily to relieve the present shortage of ARVN units either by replacing ARVN in the defense of key installations or by engaging in active operations against the VC in conjunction with ARVN. Such a reinforcement would allow a strengthening of military efforts in the I and II Corps areas where the situation is deteriorating and would give a boost to GVN morale, military and civilian. Likewise, it should end any talk of a possible U.S. withdrawal and convince Hanoi of the depth of our resolve to see this thing through to a successful conclusion.

"This statement of the purpose of introducing a U.S. division is, in effect, a tabulation of the arguments in favor of so doing. However, there are counter arguments

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on the other side of the case. The introduction of a U.S. division obviously increases U.S. involvement in the counter-insurgency, exposes greater forces and invites greater losses. It will raise sensitive command questions with our GVN allies and may encourage them to an attitude of "let the United States do it." It will increase our vulnerability to Communist propaganda and Third Country criticism as we appear to assume the old French role of alien colonizer and conqueror. Finally, there is considerable doubt that the number of GVN forces which our action would relieve would have any great significance in reducing the manpower gap.

"It is possible to reach a conclusion with regard to the overall merit of this action without first examining in some detail the possible missions which could be assigned a U.S. division. There are two obvious possibilities; the first, the assignment of the division to one or more of the provinces of the high plateau where the climate is good, the terrain relatively open, and the Montagnard population more readily distinguishable from the alien Viet Cong. Here, our forces could utilize their mobility and firepower effectively and make an important contribution in cutting off the growing infiltration into and through this area. For the most part, the Montagnards are friendly to the U.S. and our forces would thus be operating in a relatively friendly environment.

"On the other hand, such a mission in the highlands would place our forces in an area with highly exposed lines of communication leading to the coast. Their location in this area would create serious logistic problems because of the difficulty of the movement of land transport through areas infested by the Viet Cong. There would be problems both of reinforcement and of withdrawal because of this precariousness of land communications. Finally, the GVN may question the introduction of sizeable U.S. forces into the Montagnard area where we have often been accused of favoring the Montagnards over the Vietnamese and of encouraging Montagnards separatism.

"The other role which has been suggested for U.S. ground forces is the occupation and defense of key enclaves along the coast such as Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon, Tuy Hoa and Nha Trang. Such a disposition would have the advantage of placing our forces in areas of easy access and egress with minimum logistic problems associated with supply and maintenance. The presence of our troops would assure the defense of these important key areas and would relieve some GVN forces for employment elsewhere. The troops would not be called upon to engage in counterinsurgency operations except in their own local defense and hence would be exposed to minimum losses.

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"On the other hand, they would be engaged in a rather inglorious static defensive mission unappealing to them and unimpressive in the eyes of the Vietnamese. Operating in major population areas would maximize the points of contact with Vietnamese and hence maximize the possible points of friction. The division would be badly fragmented to the extent that its command, control and supervision would be awkward.

"The foregoing analysis leads me to the following tentative conclusions. First, it is not desirable to introduce a U.S. division into South Vietnam unless there are clear and tangible advantages outweighing the numerous disadvantages, many of which have been noted above. One must make a definite determination of the numbers and types of GVN forces relieved by the introduction of the U.S. unit and thus the effect of the increased U.S. presence in closing the manpower gap of 1965. Obviously, our division would make some contribution but it remains to be proved that it will be sufficient to reverse the downward trend and give such a lift to the GVN forces that they would perform better by the stimulation of the U.S. presence rather than worse in a mood of relaxation at passing the Viet Cong burden to the U.S.

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

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

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CINCPAC forwarded General Westmoreland's Phu Bai proposal to the JCS on 19 March and further recommended that the remainder of the 9th MEB, one BLT plus headquarters elements, be landed at Da Nang within a month in order to consolidate command and control and build up the defense of that base. 40/ The JCS recommended both measures to the Secretary of Defense on 25 March, 41/ and they were discussed by the National Security Council and Ambassador Taylor during the latter's visit to the United States in late March-early April 1965. The President himself, in National Security Action Memorandum 328, approved the deployment of those two BLT's and at the same time, by changing the Marines' mission to include offensive operations, he ended the strategy of security. 42/ (For full text of NSAM 328, see page 124.)

NSAM 328 is a pivotal document. It marks the acceptance by the President of the United States of the concept that U.S. troops would engage in offensive ground operations against Asian insurgents. It indicates as well the anxiety of the President -- his decision to proceed very slowly and carefully so that U.S. policy should appear to be wholly consistent. Thus the President only approved the deployment of two Marine BLT's, although he was doubtless aware of a JCS proposal favored by the Secretary of Defense and forwarded by the Chiefs on 20 March, which called for the deployment of a three division force, two U.S. and one Korean. 43/ At the President's request, all NSC members were admonished in NSAM 328 not to allow the release of any premature publicity for the actions dealing with the Marines and their mission. As a result, the change of mission was not publicized until it crept out almost by accident in a State Department release on 8 June. 44/

Nor was the change of mission clearly defined in NSAM 328. The Marine BLT's were to be permitted more active use "under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State" 45/ and, of course, their new mission was subject to the approval of the GVN. During his return trip to Saigon, Ambassador Taylor sent the following cable to the State Department: 46/

"In Washington discussions of new Marine mission in Da Nang-Phu Bai area, it was my understanding that SecDef would provide text of revised mission. If no guidance beyond language of reftel Deptel 2184 containing the summarized guidance is to be provided by Washington, I propose to describe the new mission to Quat as the use of Marines in a mobile counterinsurgency role in the vicinity of Da Nang for the improved protection of that base and also in a strike role as a reserve in support of ARVN operations anywhere within fifty miles of the base. This latter employment would follow acquisition of experience on local counterinsurgency missions."

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It is pretty clear, then, that the President intended, after the early April NSC meetings, to cautiously and carefully experiment with U.S. forces in offensive roles. There was sober awareness that the North Vietnamese were not going to quit and that the U.S. was well on its way to being committed on the ground. The Rolling Thunder program, if it was going to bear any fruit at all, certainly was not going to do so in the next few months.

The U.S. decision-makers really were on what Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton described as "the horns of a trilemma." While addressing General Johnson's proposals for action in South Vietnam, McNaughton jotted down some notes on 24 March which accurately described the predicament facing the U.S. Government. The question, according to McNaughton, was: "Can the situation inside South Vietnam be bottomed out (a) without extreme measures against the DRV and (b) without deployment of large numbers of U.S. (and 3rd Country) combat troops inside SVN?" McNaughton's answer was "perhaps, but probably no." Because that was the case, he went on, the U.S. was faced with the "trilemma." Policy appeared to be drifting even though there was consensus that present action probably would not prevent collapse of the GVN. All three choices for remedial action so far presented had been rejected. These choices were (1) will-breaking strikes against the DRV which risked escalation flash and were thus too risky, (2) large U.S. troop input which raised the old spectre of an Asian land war and recalled memories of the French defeat, and (3) exit from the scene through negotiation which insured, because of the current situation, humiliation of the U.S. 47/ The alternatives, as described above by Mr. McNaughton, went into the National Security Council discussions which took place during the Ambassador's visit. What came out of those discussions was NSAM 328 and the decision to proceed ahead very slowly with ground force involvement.

Missing from NSAM 328 was the elucidation of a unified, coherent strategy. Ambassador Taylor, among others, had raised the question as to whether or not Western troops could fight effectively in Vietnam. No one could forget the French failure, and the Ambassador's reservations received due attention. Before devising a strategy for the use of U.S. ground forces, however, it was deemed necessary to experiment with small numbers of them to see how they would do. There was time to indulge the luxury of a leisurely build-up. The situation was bad, but currently the GVN was doing a bit better, and nothing pointed to immediate collapse.

The early April NSC meetings signalled the beginning of an enclave strategy. U.S. forces would operate within strictly limited boundaries (originally not to exceed 50 miles from base) and would have their backs to the sea. No Dien Bien Phu's would be presented for the enemy to exploit as supplies and reinforcements could be brought in with ease over sea LOC's controlled entirely by the U.S. Navy. As a corollary, the U.S. forces could be withdrawn with equal ease should the situation so dictate.

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Although NSAM 328 only approved 2 Marine BCT's for deployment to Vietnam, there was also included an 18-20,000 man increase in U.S. forces in order to "fill out existing units and supply needed logistic personnel." 48/ Just what the President's intent was in approving that number of personnel became the subject of some debate. The Secretary of Defense on 21 April told the President that 11,000 of the approved increase was to augment various existing forces while a further 7,000 were logistic troops to support "previously approved forces." 49/ According to a memorandum from McNaughton to Vance dated 5 May, the JCS misconstrued the add-ons to mean logistic build-up for coastal enclaves and the possible later introduction of two to three divisions. 50/ It isn't entirely clear from the documents exactly what the President did have in mind for the support troop add-ons. What is clear, however, and was made explicit in a memorandum from the Secretary of Defense to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 5 April was that the JCS were continuing to plan for the earliest possible introduction of two to three divisions into RVN. 51/ The Ambassador indicated to the State Department in a cable on 12 April that he too thought the 18-20,000 man increase was for something more than those forces already approved. Taylor said:

"I have been following with interest the logistic studies which are going on at PACOM and MACV in anticipation of the possible introduction of several divisions into SVN. Several comments occur to me which are passed on for what they are worth. There appears to be no question about the need for the 18,000-20,000 logistic build-up (the Category A force) recommended by General Westmoreland. The introduction of this force has been approved and should be implemented as rapidly as the elements can be moved and MACV can accept them. I am surprised to learn from MACV that May 1 is the earliest date for the arrival of the engineer element which paces the rate of arrival of the other components. If possible, this date should be advanced.

"The Category A package will provide support for about 50,000 U.S. personnel in-country, i.e., the present strength plus the additional Marines now landing in the Da Nang-Hue area and will permit some preliminary work in anticipation of the arrival of additional U.S. forces. To make any significant progress toward the establishment of a logistic base to support additional forces, it will be necessary to bring in rapidly about 5,000 more engineers (above those in Category A). MACV estimates they could arrive about August 1 (if the Category A engineers arrive on May 1). I would concur in the desirability of this reinforcement, feeling that these engineers can be very useful in SVN whether or not we ever introduce additional divisions."

Taylor went on in the same cable (as though he were summing up the results of the meetings which led to the NSAM):

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"With regard to the imminence of the need for those divisions, I do not share the fear that the I and II Corps areas are about to fall apart which is expressed in some of the traffic bearing on the logistic build-up. In any case, if a debacle is going to take place in the next few months, the time factors developed in the logistic studies indicate that very little advance logistic preparation can be made in time. In such an unlikely contingency, U.S. combat reinforcements will have to deploy concurrently with their logistic units and build their base as they go.

"While recognizing the importance of the current studies in developing the logistic facts of life as they bear on the reinforcement of SVN, I hope that they do not interfere with essential work in preparation for less ambitious but more probable developments. It was my understanding in Washington that, if the Marines demonstrate effectiveness in operating out of Da Nang in an offensive counterinsurgency role, other offensive enclaves may be established along the coast and garrisoned with brigade-sized contingents for employment similar to the Marines. General Westmoreland is very anxious to establish such a force as soon as possible in the Bien Hoa-Vung Tau area. Qui Nhon is also well situated for similar purposes. I would recommend that logistic preparations be initiated at once to permit each of these two areas to receive a U.S. brigade. Whatever is done for this purpose will assist in accommodating any larger forces which may be subsequently introduced. It is important that this lesser program be carried out rapidly enough to make a contribution to the situation which is now unfolding. This requires rapid action." 52/

C. The Additional Marines Land

From the 11th through the 14th of April the two Marine BLT's approved by the President in NSAM 328 were deployed to Hue/Phu Bai and Da Nang. Their landing brought the total number of U.S. maneuver battalions in South Vietnam to four, all Marines. Although security was no longer the only authorized mission for these units, it certainly was their primary mission. The Marines set about consolidating and developing their two coastal base areas, and, although they pushed their patrol perimeters out beyond their tactical wire and thereby conducted active rather than passive defense, they did not engage in any offensive operations in support of ARVN for the next few months. (Major General "Rip" Collins, CG III MAF, was on the scene while ARVN was being beaten at Ba Gia at the end of May, and his Marine troops were almost committed to that fight). 53/

D. Westmoreland Tried to Slide the 173rd in for Security

As a kind of postscript to the strategy of security, it was used by General Westmoreland as justification for an attempt to get some Army

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ground troops on the stage in early April. Westmoreland had recommended in March that a separate Army Brigade (possibly the 173rd) be deployed to the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau areas "in order to secure vital U.S. installations." That recommendation accompanied Westmoreland's request for up to two divisions of forces and was contained in his "Commander's Estimate of the Situation," which will be considered later in some detail. 54/ On the 11th of April, Westmoreland cabled CINCPAC that he understood from news of the Taylor meetings in Washington that the requested divisions of forces were not immediately in the offing. Nevertheless, Westmoreland wanted a brigade in the Bien Hoa-Vung Tau area because "it was as necessary from a purely military standpoint as the deployments in the Da Nang-Phu Bai area which have already won acceptance." (Security of Bien Hoa/Vung Tau was not all COMUSMACV had in mind, however, for the same message mentioned the need to offset a Viet Cong threat embodied in two regiments and two separate battalions perched on the eastern flank of III Corps. He also wanted a light reserve force which could be airlifted to the Central Highlands in case of emergency.) 55/

The 173rd, a two-battalion airborne brigade, was then located in Okinawa. It constituted CINCPAC's airmobile reserve. When an earlier attempt had been made to deploy the 173rd to Da Nang in place of the Marines, CINCPAC had stringently opposed the removal of his only quick-reaction force. 56/

What followed General Westmoreland's request of 11 April, a request that Ambassador Taylor "had noted," was a rapid-fire series of cables, proposals, and false starts which, if nothing else, indicated that Washington was well ahead of Saigon in its planning and in its anxiety. The first event in the chain was a planning conference held in Honolulu 8-10 April and attended by representatives of PACOM and the Joint Staff. The conferees recommended the deployment of the 173rd and, in deference to CINCPAC's concern for his airmobile reserve, they also recommended that the 173rd be replaced by another brigade from CONUS as soon as practicable. 57/ The JCS ordered on 14 April that the 173rd be deployed temporarily to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau for security of air operations and logistical bases and at the same time tasked CINCSTRIKE to provide a brigade to replace the 173rd. 58/

The decision to deploy the 173rd apparently caught the Ambassador flatfooted, for he had quite obviously not been privy to it. He cabled the State Department on the 14th and said: 59/

"I have just learned by the reference JCS message to CINCPAC that the immediate deployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade to Bien Hoa-Vung Tau has apparently been approved. This comes as a complete surprise in view of the understanding reached in Washington that we would experiment with the Marines in a counterinsurgency role before bringing in other U.S. contingents.....

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This decision seemed sound to me at the time and continues to appear so. I recommend that this deployment be held up until we can sort out all matters relating to it."

Whatever was motivating those in Washington who had decided to make this deployment, the Ambassador held the trump card as he had to clear the move with the GVN before the troops could come in. The Prime Minister had not been told at this juncture about the proposed landing of more U.S. troops, and Taylor informed his superiors on 17 April that he did not intend to tell Quat without clearer guidance explaining Washington's intentions. 60/

That Washington was determined, with the President's sanction, to go beyond what had been agreed to and formalized in NSAM 328 was manifested unmistakably in a cable sent under joint Defense/State auspices by Mr. McNaughton to the Ambassador on 15 April. 61/ That message, which will be treated in detail in a later section, contained the following preamble: "Highest authority believes the situation in South Vietnam has been deteriorating and that, in addition to actions against the North, something new must be added in the South to achieve victory. As steps to that end, we believe the following actions should be undertaken..." The message goes on to list seven specific actions including the deployment of "a brigade force" to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau "to act as a security force for our installations and also to participate in counterinsurgency combat operations" according to plans to be prepared by General Westmoreland.

The documents do not reveal just exactly when Presidential sanction was obtained for the expanded scope of the above proposals. It is possible that the Ambassador may have caught the Defense Department and the JCS in a little cart-before-the-horsemanship. The day following the order from the JCS to deploy the 173rd and the Ambassador's reclama thereto, the JCS submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense in which they addressed the Ambassador's objection to the deployment and offered their own position, which was that "the U.S. had need of the 173rd in Bien Hoa/Vung Tau to insure the security of air operations and logistics bases as had been recommended by COMUSMACV and by CINCPAC in CINCPAC to JCS DTG 132235Z April 1965." The 173rd was also needed, they said, for subsequent phasing into counterinsurgency operations. 62/ Whether or not the JCS wrote that memorandum with red faces, the Secretary of Defense dates approval for final deployment of the 173rd as of the 30th of April, which is considerably later. 63/ Even when the 173rd was finally ordered to deploy, it went on a temporary duty basis. It remained in that anomalous status well into the summer of 1965, expecting any day to be recalled to Okinawa and replaced by another unit. The troops continued to draw TDY pay, and their dependents remained at the permanent base on Okinawa instead of returning to the U.S. 64/

With the 173rd successfully held in abeyance, the principals took that issue, along with the seven points of the 15 April cable, to Honolulu, where a conference convened on 20 April and structured the outlines of the ever popular enclave strategy. .

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E. Security was the Primary Mission for Most of the Phase I Units

The security of U.S. bases in mainland Southeast Asia may well have been dead as a basis for a strategy, but the bases nonetheless needed to be secured. The security rationale was consistently offered, along with other reasons, to justify the further deployment of ground combat units. In fact, looking back on the force deployments which were the main subject of this paper, the JCS in November 1965 stated that 21 of the original 44 "Phase I" U.S./3rd Country battalions, whose deployment to Vietnam was accomplished in the latter half of 1965, were committed to base and installation security. 65/

III. STRATEGY OF EXPERIMENTATION
ENCLAVE STRATEGY

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III. The Strategy of Experimentation -- Enclave Strategy

A. Geography

The geography of Vietnam lends itself to enclave thinking -- that is, to operations based on coastal cities and with restricted extension of lines of communication inland. The central portion of Vietnam, encompassing the I and II Corps Tactical Zones and a portion of the III Corps, is long and narrow. The area near the coast is for the most part fairly flat and hospitable and contains the bulk of the population. The interior is mountainous and is sparsely populated throughout. In some places the mountains come right down to the coast, but the coastal plain is well defined for most of the length of Central Vietnam. Scattered along this coast are the mouths of numerous streams, each with a small delta which serves as an area for rice production and concentration of population, and as a focus for commercial activity.

Several cities, such as Da Nang, Qui Nhon, and Nha Trang, are located contiguous with the coastal population and have good deep water anchorages for ocean-going maritime activity. All three of these cities were, in early 1965, likely candidates for bases in an enclave strategy. There were other areas along the coast which did not have deep water anchorages but which were, nevertheless, readily accessible for amphibious resupply from the sea. Chu Lai, little more than a sandy hamlet, and Phu Bai fell into this category and were very much a part of enclave thinking.

In between the central coast and the Mekong Delta -- which itself offered no good coastal access and egress and hence was never a part of any enclave strategy -- was the port of Vung Tau. Located at the end of the Cap St. Jacques peninsula and easily defended, Vung Tau was the logical alternative to the port of Saigon, access to which required a risky trip up the Saigon River from a point not far from Vung Tau. Vung Tau could be called the southern limit of a chain of coastal enclaves beginning with Hue/Phu Bai in I Corps.

B. Development of the Strategy

General Johnson, Chief of Staff of the Army, brought back from his March 1965 inspection trip to Vietnam the germ of an idea to establish U.S. ground forces in coastal enclaves. The idea is included in one of two alternatives proposed by Johnson for the deployment of a U.S. division to Vietnam to supplant ARVN units in security missions and free them for offensive operations against the Viet Cong. One alternative proposed sending the division to secure bases at Bien Hoa/Ton Son Nhut (near Saigon), Qui Nhon and Nha Trang (both coastal cities), and

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Pleiku (in the highlands). The other alternative proposed the deployment of a division to the highland provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac. 66/ Significantly, the coastal city deployment and the second alternative were the two principal contenders for the location of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) debated later in the year. The second alternative was the one favored by both Johnson and JCS Chairman Wheeler. 67/

By far the most dogged protagonist of the enclave strategy was Ambassador Taylor. He was consistent in his opposition to the initial involvement of U.S. forces in ground combat. As he saw his position being eroded on that question, it would seem natural for him to have fallen back in an only slightly less conservative posture. On 18 March 1965, in a cable already quoted in its entirety in Section II, Taylor brought up the question of the deployment of a U.S. division and presented the highland and coastal enclave alternatives. While not backing either alternative at that juncture, he did say that "the coastal enclave mission is safer, simpler but less productive than the inland mission." In regard to the latter, he said: "The inland mission in the highlands is clearly the more ambitious and, if well done, will make a greater contribution during the present critical period. On the other hand, it is the more exposed and even permits one to entertain the possibility of a kind of Dien Bien Phu if the coastal provinces should collapse and our forces were cut off from the coast except by air." 68/

The Ambassador received no response from Washington to the cable quoted above. He sent another one on the 27th of March in which he reminded Washington that it was high time to make some decisions concerning U.S. strategy in Vietnam. According to Taylor, there were three choices: (1) to carry on with the present level of commitment and hope that Rolling Thunder would cause the DRV to cease its support, (2) to try and reverse the trend at least in a few key areas, and (3) to try and win as quickly as possible. If U.S. forces were to come, Taylor offered three alternatives for their mission: (1) defensive or offensive enclave, (2) territorial clear and hold, and (3) general reserve. For himself, Taylor preferred a combination of the offensive enclave plus reserve in case of an emergency. 69/ This was essentially the position that he carried into the NSC meetings in Washington of 1-2 April 1965.

Ambassador Taylor met with Secretary McNamara and the JCS in Washington just prior to the NSC meetings. He was shown the JCS's plan to introduce three divisions of U.S. and Korean troops into Vietnam for combat operations against the Viet Cong. That plan, which Taylor was inclined to oppose but which had the qualified support of McNamara, was undoubtedly also a focus of discussion within the NSC. 70/

NSAM 328, the product of the NSC meetings of 1-2 April 1965, had its primary focus on air action against the DRV and Laos. In

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regard to that air activity the text of the NSAM said this:

"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 slacked off sharply for what appeared to be more than a temporary operational lull.

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

And, also:

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

In regard to action on the ground, NSAM 328 said in relation to force level increases:

"The President approved an 18-20,000 man increase in U.S. military support forces to fill out existing units and supply needed logistic personnel.

"The President approved the deployment of two additional Marine Battalions and one Marine Air Squadron and associated headquarters and support elements."

And, also:

"The President approved the urgent exploration, with the Korean, Australian, and New Zealand Governments, of the possibility of rapid deployment of significant combat elements from their armed forces in parallel with the additional Marine deployment approved...."

NSAM 328 sanctioned a change in mission for U.S. ground forces in Vietnam, but it did so in very cautious language:

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"The President approved a change of mission for all Marine battalions deployed to Vietnam to permit their more active use under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State." 71/

This language may indicate that the President wanted to experiment very carefully with a small amount of force before deciding whether or not to accept any kind of ground war commitment. Implicit in the size of that force and in its location was the option to quickly evacuate it, should the U.S. so desire.

It appears that the Ambassador interpreted the NSAM change of mission as approval of his 27 March recommendation. He cabled Washington on the 4th of April that he would approach Quat with a proposal that the Marines be permitted to conduct mobile operations within their TAOR's and that they be used by the RVNAF as a reserve for operations up to 50 miles from their bases. 72/ The Vietnamese Prime Minister acquiesced in the deployment of the two Marine BLT's plus one Tactical Fighter Squadron (F4) on the 6th of April and in the change in mission on the 8th. 73/

Taylor was at this juncture quite prepared to settle into a period of careful experimentation with the level of combat power fixed at four battalions. He said in a message dated 17 April that he had about 60 days in mind as the appropriate period for the experiment, 74/ and he indicated he was chagrined by some apparent anxiety in Washington to move considerably faster. In a message also dated 17 April he questioned the Washington panic manifested in a whole panoply of "hasty and ill-conceived" proposals for the deployment of more forces. In another message he again cautioned against precipitous action and offered the palliative that "things weren't going so badly" out there. 75/

Four Marine battalions were enough for experimentation, but not so large as to alarm the xenophobic Vietnamese. In fact, the Ambassador's sensitivity to the proclivities of the Vietnamese Prime Minister on the question of foreign troops helps explain the Embassy's footdragging during this critical period of U.S. build-up debate. Thus, the Ambassador was surprised to discover that the Marines had come ashore with tanks, self-propelled artillery, and various other items of weighty equipment not "appropriate for counterinsurgency operations." 76/ That equipment, bland JCS explanations mentioning contingency plans and full TOE prudence notwithstanding, 77/ implied a permanence not communicated to Quat when clearance for their entry had been sought. Similarly, the decision to deploy the 173rd, had it been executed, would have placed Taylor in an exceedingly embarrassing position as he had not mentioned it to the GVN.

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From analysis of the cable traffic of early April, it appears that Taylor was the only major figure opposed to further expansion of the U.S. combat role beyond what was agreed at the NSC meetings in Washington. His defense was tenacious, but as proposals from Washington got progressively more radical, his patience began to wear thin. Then Taylor communicated his ire to McGeorge Bundy in a message quoted in full in Section I of this paper and in which he maintained that Quat's government had quite enough to do without the addition of more U.S. programs or more U.S. forces. 78/ The chorus of suggestions and programs from Washington reached a crescendo with the joint State/Defense message of 18 April which, with the blessing of "highest authority" in Washington, proposed the following measures be considered to add "something new" to the equation: 79/

(1) Experimental encadrement of U.S. troops into RVNAF either through the assignment of 50 U.S. soldiers to each of 10 ARVN battalions or through the "brigading" of ARVN and US battalions for operations;

(2) The introduction of a brigade force into Bien Hoa/Vung Tau for security of installations and later expansion into counter-insurgency operations under conditions to be spelled out by General Westmoreland;

(3) The introduction of several battalions into coastal enclaves such as Qui Nhon in accordance with proposals to be submitted by the Ambassador and COMUSMACV. The purpose was "to further experiment with US forces in the counterinsurgency role"; (Sic! The phrase "to further experiment" is misleading since up to the date of this cable, there had been no U.S. counterinsurgency operations worthy of the name.)

(4) Expansion of Vietnamese recruiting, using proven U.S. techniques;

(5) Expansion of the MEDCAP program using mobile dispensaries under guidelines to be worked out between COMUSMACV and the Surgeon General, U.S. Army;

(6) Experimentation in two or three provinces with a team of U.S. civil affairs personnel introduced into provincial government structure under conditions to be worked out between MG Peers and General Westmoreland;

(7) The supplement of low RVNAF pay through a program to provide some of the troops with a food ration. General Timmes would be seeing COMUSMACV to work out the details.

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Although this cable was well-meaning in its intent, the Ambassador was amazed by its naivete and justifiably chagrined by its impertinence. The following cable [reproduced at pages 72 through 76] one of many Taylor sent to Washington during the tumultuous days just prior to the April Honolulu Conference, is worth quoting in its entirety as it contains the kind of guidance the Ambassador felt he should have been receiving from Washington. 80/

Thus was the Ambassador propelled into the conference of 20 April 1965, only one step ahead of the Washington juggernaut, which was itself fueled by encouragement from Westmoreland in Saigon. Taylor was not opposed to the U.S. build-up per se, but rather was concerned to move slowly with combat troop deployments, which tended to cause alarm in an already delicate situation, while proceeding quietly with the prerequisite development of logistic bases to support later troop introduction. He was overtaken at Honolulu.

Honolulu brought the Saigon and Washington decision makers together to sanctify an expanded enclave strategy. In the preliminary discussions they agreed that: 81/

(1) The DRV was not likely to quit within the next six months; and in any case, they were more likely to give up because of VC failure in the South than because of bomb-induced "pain" in the North. It could take up to two years to demonstrate VC failure.

(2) The level of air activity through Rolling Thunder was about right. The U.S. did not, in Ambassador Taylor's words, want "to kill the hostage." Therefore, Hanoi and environs remained on the restricted list. It was recognized that air activity would not do the job alone.

(3) Progress in the South would be slow, and great care should be taken to avoid dramatic defeat. The current lull in Viet Cong activity was merely the quiet before a storm.

(4) The victory strategy was to "break the will of the DRV/VC by denying them victory." Impotence would lead eventually to a political solution.

Going into the Honolulu Conference the level of approved U.S. forces for Vietnam was 40,200. In-country strength of 33,500 showed that not all the approved forces had closed. To accomplish the "victory strategy" described above, the conferees agreed that the following additional U.S. deployments should be made:

A. United States

- (1) An Army Brigade (3 Bns) to Bien Hoa - Vung Tau to close by 1 May

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SECTION 1 OF 19494

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THIS MESSAGE UNDERTAKES TO SUMMARIZE INSTRUCTIONS WHICH I HAVE RECEIVED OVER THE LAST TEN DAYS WITH REGARD TO THE INTRODUCTION OF THIRD COUNTRY COMBAT FORCES AND TO DISCUSS THE PREFERRED WAY OF PRESENTING THE SUBJECT TO THE GVN.

AS THE RESULT OF THE MEETING OF THE PRESIDENT AND HIS ADVISORS ON APRIL 1 AND THE NSC MEETING ON THE FOLLOWING DAY, I LEFT WASHINGTON AND RETURNED TO SAIGON WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE REINFORCEMENT OF THE MARINES ALREADY ASHORE BY TWO ADDITIONAL BLT'S AND A F-4 SQUADRON AND THE PROGRESSIVE INTRODUCTION OF 1IAWPNPPP SUPPORT FORCES WERE APPROVED BY THAT DECISION ON THE SEVERAL PROPOSALS FOR BRINGING IN MORE US COMBAT FORCES AND THEIR POSSIBLE MODES OF EMPLOYMENT WAS WITHHELD IN AN OFFENSIVE COUNTERINSURGENCY ROLE. STATE WAS TO EXPLORE WITH THE KOREAN, AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND GOVTS THE POSSIBILITY OF RAPID DEPLOYMENT OF SIGNIFICANT COMBAT ELEMENTS IN PARAL-

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LEL WITH THE MARINE REINFORCEMENT.

SINCE ARRIVING HOME, I HAVE RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS AND HAVE TAKEN THE INDICATED ACTIONS WITH RESPECT TO THIRD COUNTRY COMBAT FORCES.

APRIL 6 AND 8. RECEIVED GVN CONCURRENCE TO INTRODUCTION OF THE MARINE REINFORCEMENTS AND TO AN EXPANDED MISSION FOR ALL MARINES IN DANANG-PHU BAI AREA.

APRIL 8. RECEIVED DEPTTEL 2229 ^{-ATCND} DIRECTING APPROACH TO GVN, SUGGESTING REQUEST TO AUSTRALIAN GOVT FOR AN INFANTRY BATTALION FOR USE IN SVN. WHILE AWAITING A PROPITIOUS MOMENT TO RAISE THE MATTER, I RECEIVED DEPTTEL 2287 DIRECTING APPROACH BE DELAYED UNTIL FURTHER ORDERS. NOTHING FURTHER HAS BEEN RECEIVED SINCE.

APRIL 14. I LEARNED BY JCS 009012 ^{-ATCND} TO CINCPAC OF APPARENT DECISION TO DEPLOY 173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE IMMEDIATELY TO BIEN HOA-VUNG TAU. BY EMBTEL 3373, DELAY IN THIS DEPLOYMENT WAS URGENTLY RECOMMENDED BUT NO REPLY HAS BEEN RECEIVED. HOWEVER, PARA 2 OF DOC 152339 APPARENTLY MAKES REFERENCE TO THIS PROJECT IN TERMS WHICH SUGGEST THAT IS SOMETHING LESS THAN AS AN APPROVED IMMEDIATE ACTION. IN VIEW OF THE UNCERTAINTY OF ITS STATUS, I HAVE NOT TOUCHED THE MATTER WITH QUAT.

APRIL 15. RECEIVED DEPTTEL 2314 DIRECTING THAT EMBASSY SAIGON DISCUSS WITH GVN INTRODUCTION OF ROK REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM AND SUGGEST GVN REQUEST SUCH A FORCE ASAP. BECAUSE OF QUAT'S ABSENCE FROM SAIGON, I HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO RAISE MATTER. AS MATTER OF FACT, IT SHOULD NOT BE RAISED UNTIL WE HAVE A CLEAR CONCEPT OF EMPLOYMENT.

APRIL 16. I HAVE JUST SEEN STATE-DEFENSE MESSAGE DOD 152339 ^{-ATCND} CITED ABOVE WHICH INDICATES A FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD SEVERAL POSSIBLE USES OF US COMBAT FORCES BEYOND THE NSC DECISIONS OF APRIL 2. I AM TOLD TO DISCUSS THESE AND CERTAIN OTHER NON-MILITARY MATTERS URGENTLY WITH QUAT. THE SUBSTANCE OF THIS CALBE WILL BE ADDRESSED IN A SEPARATE MESSAGE. I CAN NOT RAISE THESE MATTERS WITH QUAT WITHOUT FURTHER GUIDANCE.

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FACED WITH THIS RAPIDLY CHANGING PICTURE OF WASHINGTON DESIRES AND INTENTIONS WITH REGARD TO THE INTRODUCTION OF THIRD COUNTRY (AS WELL AS US) COMBAT FORCES, I BADLY NEED A CLARIFICATION OF OUR PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES. BEFORE I CAN PRESENT OUR CASE TO GVN, I HAVE TO KNOW WHAT THAT CASE IS AND WHY. IT IS NOT GOING TO BE EASY TO GET READY CONCURRENCE FOR THE LARGE SCALE INTRODUCTION OF FOREIGN TROOPS UNLESS THE NEED IS CLEAR AND EXPLICIT.

LET ME SUGGEST THE KIND OF INSTRUCTION TO THE AMB WHICH IT WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL TO RECEIVE FOR USE IN PRESENTING TO GVN WHAT I TAKE TO BE A NEW POLICY OF THIRD COUNTRY PARTICIPATION IN GROUND COMBAT.

QUOTE THE USG HAS COMPLETED A THOROUGH REVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN SVN BOTH IN ITS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS AND HAS REACHED CERTAIN IMPORTANT CONCLUSIONS. IT FEELS THAT IN RECENT WEEKS THERE HAS BEEN A SOMEWHAT FAVORABLE CHANGE IN THE OVERALL SITUATION AS THE RESULT OF THE AIR ATTACKS ON DRV, THE RELATIVELY SMALL BUT NUMEROUS SUCCESSES IN THE FIELD AGAINST THE VC AND THE ENCOURAGING PROGRESS OF THE QUAT GOVT. HOWEVER, IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT, IN ALL PROBABILITY, THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF THE GVN AND THE USG OF CHANGING THE WILL OF THE DRV TO SUPPORT THE VC SURGENCY CAN NOT BE ATTAINED IN AN ACCEPTABLE TIME FRAME BY THE METHODS PRESENTLY EMPLOYED. THE AIR CAMPAIGN IN THE NORTH MUST BE SUPPLEMENTED BY SIGNAL SUCCESSES AGAINST THE VC IN THE SOUGH BEFORE WE CAN HOPE TO CREATE THAT FRAME OF MIND IN HANOI WHICH WILL LEAD TO THE DYCISIONS WE SEEK. TAYLOR.

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QUOTE THE JCS HAVE REVIEWED THE MILITARY RESOURCES WHICH WILL BE AVAILABLE IN SVN BY THE END OF 1965 AND HAVE CONCLUDED THAT EVEN WITH AN ATTAINMENT OF THE HIGHEST FEASIBLE MOBILIZATION GOALS, ARVN WILL HAVE INSUFFICIENT FORCES TO CARRY OUT THE KIND OF SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE VC WHICH IS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL FOR THE PURPOSES DISCUSSED ABOVE. IF THE GROUND WAR IS NOT TO DRAG INTO 1966 AND EVEN BEYOND, THEY CONSIDER IT NECESSARY TO REINFORCE GVN GROUND FORCES WITH ABOUT 20 BATTALION EQUIVALENTS IN ADDITION TO THE

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FORCES NOW BEING RECRUITED IN SVN. SINCE THESE REINFORCEMENTS CAN NOT BE RAISED BY THE GVN, THEY MUST IMEVITABLY COME FROM THIRD COUNTRY SOURCES.

QUOTE THE USG ACCEPTS THE VALIDITY OF THIS REASONING OF THE JCS AND OFFERS ITS ASSISTANCE TO THE GVN TO RAISE THESE ADDITIONAL FORCES FOR THE PURPOSE OF BRINGING THE VC INSURGENCY T AN END IN THE SHORTEST POSSIBLE TIME. WE ARE PREPARED TO BRING IN ADDITIONAL US GROUND FORCES PROVIDED WE CAN GET A REASONABLE DEGREE OF PARTICI-PATION FROM OTHER THIRD COUNTRIES. IF THE GVN WILL MAKE URGENT REPRESENTATIONS TO THEM, WE BELIEVE IT ENTIRELY POSSIBLE TO OBTAIN THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTIONS; KOREA, ONE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM; AUS-TRALIA, ONE INFANTRY BATTALION; NEW ZEALAND, ONE BATTERY AND ONE COMPANY OF TANKS; PI, ONE BATTALION. IF FORCES OF THE FOREGOING MAGNITUDE ARE FORTHCOMING, THE USG IS PREPARED TO PROVIDE THE REMAINDER OF THE COMBAT REINFORCEMENTS AS WELL AS THE NECESSARY LOGISTIC PERSONNEL TO SUPPORT THE THIRD COUNTRY CONTINGENTS. ALSO IT WILL USE ITS GOOD OFFICES AS DESIRED IN ASSISTING THE GVN APPROACH TO THESE GOVTS.

NOTE YOU (THE AMBASSADOR) WILL SEEK THE CONCURRENCE OF THE GVN TO THE FOREGOING PROGRAM, RECOGNIZING THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF QUESTIONS SUCH AS COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS, CONCEPTS OF EMPLOYMENT AND DISPOSITION OF FORCES MUST BE WORKED OUT SUBSEQUENTLY. UNQUOTE. ARMED WITH AN INSTRUCTION SUCH AS THE FOREGOING, I WOULD FEEL ADEQUATELY EQUIPPED TO INITIATE WHAT MAY BE A SHARP DEBATE WITH THE GVN. I NEED SOMETHING LIKE THIS BEFORE TAKING UP THE PENDING TROOP MATTERS WITH QUAT. TAYLOR.
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- (2) 3 USMC BLT's and 3 Tactical Fighter Squadrons to Chu Lai by 5 May
- (3) An Army Brigade (3 Bns) to Qui Nhon-Nha Trang to close by 15 June
- (4) Augmentations of existing forces and added logistical support

If approved, these recommended forces would have brought U.S. strength to a grand total of 13 maneuver battalions and 82,000 men.

The U.S. Government also should approach the respective foreign governments and request:

B. Third Country

- (1) An Australian Army Battalion to Vung Tau to close by 21 May
- (2) A Korean Regimental Combat Team to Quang Ngai by 15 June

If approved, these recommended forces would bring Third Country strength to a grand total of 4 maneuver battalions and 7,250 men.

As an adjunct to the units above, the conferees mentioned, but did not recommend, the possible later deployment of:

C. United States

- (1) An Army Airmobile Division (9 Bns)
- (2) The remainder of the III MEF (2 Bns)
- (3) An Army Corps Headquarters

D. Third Country

An ROK Division (-) consisting of 6 Battalions

The posited future add-ons comprised a further 17 maneuver battalions, which, if added to the approved totals, would have brought US/Third Country combat capability in South Vietnam to 34 battalions.

After they had dealt with the questions of troop deployments, the conferees then turned to the remaining points contained in the joint State/Defense 7-point program. It was decided to drop the idea of encadrement of U.S. forces in ARVN in favor of emphasis on combined

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operations. Recruiting, it was agreed, was less a problem of organization and method than it was a product of the limited manpower base and competing agencies (including the Viet Cong). The plan to improve MEDCAP was endorsed with enthusiasm, and it was agreed to experiment with a "single manager" concept in three pilot provinces. Finally, the proposed plan to distribute food to some RVNAF troops, an earlier version of which had merely encouraged greater corruption, was quietly deferred pending further study.

As a final note, the conferees considered the guidance which the Ambassador had prepared for himself in the event that more U.S. and Third Country forces were to be committed in Vietnam. The text remained essentially as Taylor had written it in his cable of 17 April. A few changes were made to reflect that the commitment was not limited to the current proposed deployments and that the U.S. was anxious to seize the initiative from the enemy. Taylor had said, "if the ground war is not to drag into 1966 and even beyond." That phrase was changed to read, "if the ground war is not to drag on indefinitely." 82/ Emphasis added The conferees appear to have realized not only that the forces they had recommended be deployed to Vietnam might not be enough, but also that it would be unwise to attempt to affix any time limit to the war.

The President received the Honolulu recommendations in a memorandum from Secretary McNamara on the 21st of April. Noted therein, but not recommended, were possible deployments of an Army Airmobile Division and the remainder of the III MEF. 83/

The Honolulu Conference omitted to provide for reconstitution of CINCPAC's airborne reserve after the deployment of the 173rd to Bien Hoa-Vung Tau, largely because the designation and type of brigade which was to go to that location had not been specified. That the 173rd would go, however, was common knowledge and, indeed, had been recommended by the PACOM-JCS planning conference on 10 April and abortively approved by the JCS on the 14th. CINCPAC cabled the JCS on the 23rd to remind them that the 173rd should be replaced by a CONUS brigade as soon as possible. 84/

Discussion and refinement of the Honolulu proposals continued on after the Conference. On 30 April, a JCSM summarized the planning as the Chiefs saw it and presented a detailed program for the deployment to Vietnam of some 48,000 U.S. and 5,250 Third Country forces, all of which were listed as approved. Included were all the units mentioned in the Honolulu recommendation plus a healthy support package. These forces were, according to the JCS, to "bolster GVN forces during their continued build-up, secure bases and installations, conduct counterinsurgency combat operations in coordination with the RVNAF, and prepare for the later introduction of an airmobile division to the central plateau, the remainder of the III MEF to the Da Nang area, and the remainder of a ROK division to Quang Ngai." Emphasis added Logistic forces of all services were "to strengthen support of in-country forces,

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provide support for the new forces, prepare bases and installations for possible future deployments, and be prepared to support those additional forces." 85/ From the thrust of this JCSM it is apparent that the enclave strategy was no stopping place as far as the Chiefs were concerned. They continued to push hard for the earliest possible input of three full divisions of troops. They were still well ahead of the pack in that regard.

None of the Honolulu recommendations had been approved at the time the 30 April JCSM was forwarded, although the 173rd was approved for Bien Hoa-Vung Tau and three Marine battalions for Chu Lai on the same day. 86/ Included in the logistics package listed by the JCS as "approved" were some 4,700 troops later identified by Mr. McNaughton as belonging to the three division program and definitely not approved. 87/ Secretary McNamara replied to the JCSM on the 15th of May, after the landing of the 173rd on the 5th and the Marines at Chu Lai on the 7th. The Secretary said that he considered as approved only so much of the remainder of the Honolulu recommendations as applied to the Australian Battalion, the ROK Regimental Combat Team and some MACV augmentations. He went on to approve: (1) movement of the I MEF from California to WESTPAC to reconstitute CINCPAC's floating reserve, and (2) preparation for the deployment of an Army brigade to Qui Nhon-Nha Trang with final decision on 21 May and closure on 27 June. This latter move, when approved, together with individual add-ons was to bring total permanent in-country strength to 69,143 (the 173rd having been deployed on a temporary basis). Secretary McNamara deferred decision on all JCS proposals dealing with the three division plan, 88/ thereby giving the enclave strategy temporary respite.

C. Difficulties in Experimentation

As of the landings of the Marines at Chu Lai and the Airborne at Bien Hoa-Vung Tau, the U.S. forces in Vietnam with some nine maneuver battalions had yet to conduct a major offensive operation, with or without the RVNAF. The experimentation with U.S. forces in an offensive role, a large factor in the decision to accept the enclave concept, was delayed because some knotty problems involving command and control remained to be ironed out with the Vietnamese.

In the early days when the Marines arrived to secure bases and installations, the control measure devised for their employment was the Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR). Under the overall suzerainty of the Vietnamese Corps Commander, the Marines were given a well-defined geographical area in which the U.S. exercised command authority over military forces and for which the U.S. accepted defensive responsibility. The original Marine TAOR consisted literally of their half of the Da Nang airfield and a portion of a couple of hills on which the Marines were entrenched and which they covered by the fields of fire of their small arms. Assured by this conservative assignation was minimum contact between U.S. troops and the Vietnamese population. In fact, there were only some 1,930 people living within the original Marine TAOR. 89/

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From this humble beginning there followed a period of gradual expansion altogether compatible with the security mission until by the end of March the Da Nang TAOR was 12 square miles in size and incorporated some 11,141 Vietnamese souls. 90/

Accompanying the NSAM 328 change of mission of U.S. forces to permit limited offensive operations was a dilemma. Mere expansion of the TAOR's would not suffice since U.S. forces did not have enough combat power to adequately secure an area the size of which they desired for offensive operations. Some arrangement was needed to allow U.S. commanders to share tactical responsibility with the Vietnamese.

Years of experience advising the Vietnamese armed forces was enough to convince knowledgeable U.S. officers that the U.S. did not want to relinquish command authority over its troops to the Vietnamese. Of equal import, it was felt, was the Vietnamese experience under the French and the resultant abhorrence of foreign command over their forces. As a further complication, the Viet Cong were ready to cry "imperialist puppet" at the first sign of GVN weakness. Washington was less sensitive to this problem than were the members of the Mission in Saigon. In May Secretary McNamara urged Westmoreland and Taylor to form a joint command structure with the GVN. Unfortunately, both of those gentlemen were well aware that the GVN was very cool to the idea. 91/ On the 23rd of April Taylor had visited with Prime Minister Quat for the first time since the Honolulu Conference. Although Quat was well aware of the Ambassador's intention to convey the text of the Honolulu recommendations, to Taylor's distress, he was reluctant to even discuss foreign reinforcements much less command arrangements. 92/

In an attempt to get things unstuck, General Westmoreland produced a concept for the employment of U.S./Allied ground combat forces in support of RVNAF. With Ambassador Taylor's concurrence, he forwarded the concept through CINCPAC to Washington on 8 May. Westmoreland proposed that the "basic concept underlying command relations between U.S./Allied forces and RVNAF will be one of combat support through coordination and cooperation in the mutual self-interest of both commands." That this tenuous arrangement might break down in the face of imminent disaster was foreseen and included was an emergency escape clause whereby alternate arrangements could be made through mutual agreement of the tactical commanders on the ground. Westmoreland suggested that U.S./Allied forces would pass through three distinct stages of commitment to the war. Stage I (to which were already committed 9 U.S. battalions) entailed the security of base areas with TAOR's extended out to the range of light artillery. Stage II called for deep patrolling and offensive operations, both predicated on movement outside the TAOR in coordination with RVNAF. Finally, progress would be made into Stage III with long range search and destroy and reserve reaction operations in concert, of course, with Vietnamese wishes and desires. 93/

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Along with the concept Westmoreland presented, without any time frame, a crude sketch showing the evolution of strategies for U.S./Allied forces in the Vietnamese war. The war was to evolve through four phases. During Phase I coastal enclaves were to be secured and improved. In Phase II, operations would be conducted against the enemy from the above. In Phase III the forces would move inland to secure additional bases and areas, and finally in Phase IV would operate from the latter. At the time the concept was forwarded, the U.S. combat forces in Vietnam were in Phase I, Stage I. Progress to a more ambitious stage was stymied while negotiations went on with the GVN to refine the ground rules. In the meantime, the Ambassador observed that the troops would suffer from boredom and lose their edge. 94/

The long official silence between the sanction for U.S. offensive operations contained in NSAM 328 and the final approval of the conditions under which U.S. troops could be committed was not without cost. The President had admonished each of the NSC members not to allow release of information concerning the provisions of the NSAM, but the unduly long interregnum inevitably led to leaks. The Marines incurred some 200 casualties, including 18 killed, as they went about tidying up their TAOR's in April and May. The Commandant of the Marine Corps raised the tempo of speculation by saying to the press during an inspection trip to Vietnam in April that the Marines were not in Vietnam to "sit on their dittyboxes" -- they were there to "kill Viet Cong." 95/ An honest and superficially innocuous statement by Department of State Press Officer Robert McCloskey on 8 June to the effect that "American forces would be available for combat support together with Vietnamese forces when and if necessary" 96/ produced an immediate response. The press reaction to McCloskey's candor is best summed up in this New York Times clip of 9 June: 97/

"The American people were told by a minor State Department official yesterday that, in effect, they were in a land war on the continent of Asia. This is only one of the extraordinary aspects of the first formal announcement that a decision has been made to commit American ground forces to open combat in South Vietnam: The nation is informed about it not by the President, not by a Cabinet member, not even by a sub-Cabinet official, but by a public relations officer."

The White House was hoisted by its own petard. In an attempt to quell the outcry, a statement was issued on the 9th of June which, because of its ambiguity, only served to further exacerbate the situation and to widen what was being described as "the credibility gap." The White House statement said in part: 98/

"There has been no change in the mission of United States ground combat units in Vietnam in recent days or weeks. The

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President has issued no order of any kind in this regard to General Westmoreland recently or at any other time. The primary mission of these troops is to secure and safeguard important military installations like the air base at Da Nang. They have the associated mission of...patrolling and securing actions in and near the areas thus safeguarded.

"If help is requested by the appropriate Vietnamese commander, General Westmoreland also has authority within the assigned mission to employ these troops in support of Vietnamese forces faced with aggressive attack when other effective reserves are not available and when, in his judgment, the general military situation urgently requires it."

The documents do not reveal whether or not the ground rules for engagement of U.S. forces had actually been worked out to everyone's satisfaction at the time of the White House statement. There is good indication that they had not. During at least two of the major battles in late May and early June, Ba Gia and Dong Xoai, the RVNAF were desperately in need of assistance. Although U.S. troops were available in both instances, the Marines at Ba Gia and the 173rd at Dong Xoai, they were not committed and the result in both cases was defeat for the RVNAF.

The first major ground combat operation by U.S. forces in the Vietnam War took place in War Zone D, NW of Saigon, from 27 to 30 June 1965. Participants were the 173rd Airborne Brigade, the 1st Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, two battalions from the ARVN Airborne Brigade, and the ARVN 48th Regiment. The operation could by no stretch of definition have been described as a reserve reaction. It was a search and destroy operation into Viet Cong base areas and its purpose was to deny to the enemy "freedom of action...in these safe havens." The War Zone D excursion was a direct result of the sanction given to General Westmoreland on the 26th of June to "commit U.S. troops to combat, independent of or in conjunction with GVN forces in any situation in which the use of such troops is requested by an appropriate GVN commander and when, in COMUSMACV's judgment, their use is necessary to strengthen the relative position of GVN forces." 99/

At that juncture the 44 Battalion debate was in full swing and the enclave strategy, as a means to limit the amount and use of U.S. combat force in Vietnam, was certainly overcome by events. It was not until the 18th of August that an operation fitting the paradigm description of the Taylor enclave concept, Operation STARLIGHT, was conducted with dramatic success 15 miles south of the Chu Lai enclave. 100/ It established the viability of enclave operations limited to the northern coast of South Vietnam, a fact which no one disputed, but such operations were by that time only one facet of a much more ambitious strategy sanctioned by the President and in the process of being implemented by Westmoreland.

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D. Where U.S. Stood on 1 June 1965

The beginning of the decisive month of June 1965 saw the U.S. in the infant stages of its enclave strategy. Established in coastal enclaves were Marine forces in Phu Bai, Da Nang and Chu Lai and Army forces in Vung Tau. Enclaves at Qui Nhon and Nha Trang were in the planning as locations for an Army brigade, and Korean troops were being considered for the defense of the provincial capital of Quang Ngai near the coast and as possible relief for the Marines at Chu Lai. The Secretary of Defense was also considering proposals from General Westmoreland and others to open up a major logistics base and enclave around the fine deep water harbor at Cam Ranh Bay. 101/

As of the 1st of June 1965, the U.S. had approved for permanent deployment to South Vietnam forces which, when all had closed, would bring total combat strength to approximately 70,000 and the number of maneuver battalions, Army and Marine, to 13. 102/ Included in this total were 7 Marine BLT's already located at Phu Bai, Da Nang, and Chu Lai. Also included were 3 battalions in a brigade of the Army's 1st Division to be landed at Qui Nhon and 3 battalions in a brigade of the Army's 101st Airborne Division scheduled to replace the 173rd. In the planning stages but not yet approved were a further 11 maneuver battalions, the remaining 2 from the III MAF ("MEF was changed to "MAF" because the word "Expeditionary" was offensive to the Vietnamese and was therefore changed to "Amphibious") and 9 battalions planned for the new Army Airmobile Division.

Third Country forces considered approved at this time amounted to 7,250 men of which 1,250 were already in-country in the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, 2,000 were Korean service troops also already in-country, and the rest were to be deployed sometime later in a ROK Regimental Combat Team of 3 battalions. Still in the talking stages were a further 6 battalions of ROK troops totaling 12,000 men. The grand total of approved U.S./3rd Country forces was 17 maneuver battalions and approximately 77,250 men. If the additional forces then being discussed were thrown in, the total would have been 34 maneuver battalions and about 134,750 men. This, then, was the state of the build-up when General Westmoreland asked on 7 June for reinforcements from the U.S. and Third Countries "as rapidly as possible." 103/

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IV. The U.S. Moved to Take Over the Land War -- The Search and Destroy Strategy and the 44 Battalion Debate

General Westmoreland's message #19118, of 7 June 1965, already quoted in part in Section I of this paper, punctuated a very grim period of ARVN defeats in Vietnam and stirred up a veritable hornet's nest in Washington. Up to that time, most of the Washington decision makers had been content to indulge in relatively low-key polemics about the enclave strategy and to advocate some experimentation with small numbers of U.S. troops in Vietnam. Westmoreland's request for reinforcements on a large scale, accompanied as it was by a strategy to put the troops on the offensive against the Viet Cong, did not contain any of the comfortable restrictions and safeguards which had been part of every strategy debated to date. Washington saw that it was Westmoreland's intention to aggressively take the war to the enemy with other than Vietnamese troops, and in such a move the spectre of U.S. involvement in a major Asian ground war was there for all to see. With no provision for quick withdrawal, and there was none, the long-term implications for the U.S. in terms of lives and money could not be averted. Temperatures rose rapidly after 7 June, and the debate was acrimonious and not without its casualties.

Just as Ambassador Taylor was consistent in his resistance to proposed involvement of U.S. forces in the Vietnamese War, so also was General Westmoreland equally determined to get enough US/3rd Country force into Vietnam to influence the situation. In addition to the level of force, Westmoreland was also bent on having a free hand in the use of it.

A. Westmoreland Provided the Push

It has been suggested that COMUSMACV elected to interpret the landing of two Marine BLT's at Da Nang as the first step in a build-up of U.S. combat forces in Vietnam. It seems clear that General Westmoreland had reached the conclusion by early March that the RVNAF simply did not have the capability to overcome the Viet Cong by itself. Outside forces were going to be required to take up the slack until the GVN forces could be revamped and built up. It appears that General Westmoreland had a powerful ally in the person of General Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, who was in Saigon from the 5th through the 12th of March 1965, and who returned to Washington to submit the first of many recommendations that the U.S. send significant numbers of combat troops to Vietnam. 104/ Westmoreland was not far behind Johnson in submitting to Washington his own ideas on the subject.

The "Commander's Estimate of the Situation" prepared by General Westmoreland and his staff during the early weeks of March and completed

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on the 26th was a classic Leavenworth-style analysis, detailed and thorough in its consideration of possible U.S. courses of action. 105/ Copies of the Estimate, which in bulk amounted to a full half inch of foolscap paper, were delivered to Washington by Brigadier General De Puy, Westmoreland's J-3, who was traveling with Ambassador Taylor to the NSC meetings of 1-2 April. 106/ If the awesome bulk of the Estimate deterred anyone from giving it the careful study it merited, that is most unfortunate. As Westmoreland himself said:

"Recognizing recent marked changes in situation in SVN, we considered it appropriate to undertake a classical Commander's Estimate of the Situation to think through in a logical and precise manner strategy, objectives, enemy capabilities and our own possible courses of action before making what may prove to be in the light of history a momentous recommendation. In addition, by reducing the Estimate to writing we expose our thoughts to others, thus making possible careful review by higher authority and perhaps introduction of new considerations that were not apparent here." 107/

The Estimate is as good as the Commander's word. The basic considerations to be analyzed are all laid out for the reader to see. First, the Mission as General Westmoreland interpreted it:

"Forces of the Government of Vietnam supported and assisted by forces of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, together with additional supporting U.S. and Free World forces, take as rapidly as possible those necessary actions to:

"A. Cause the DRV to cease its political and military support of the VC in SVN, and

"B. Enable an anti-communist GVN to survive so that ultimately it may defeat the VC insurgency inside SVN."

Secondly, the Basic U.S. Strategy:

"The analysis is predicated upon the assumption that basic strategy of retaliatory and punitive air strikes against NVN will, in time, bring about desired results, that is, supply and support of the insurgency will be terminated by DRV and hopefully DRV/VC High Command will direct the cessation of offensive operations. In any event, without external support the forces of RVNAF supported by U.S. would be able at first to contain and then to defeat VC. Therefore, Estimate addresses itself primarily to the interval in time between now and time at which basic strategy takes effect. If any time VC

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unilaterally cease fire and effect a cessation of incidents, this would mark end of the interval and end of pressure on GVN. Until pressure eases, stability of GVN is a prime concern and objective. Consequently, courses of action examined are measured as much in terms of their impact on stability and effectiveness as upon their purely military value, although, of course, these two matters are closely interwoven."

As an adjunct to this, Westmoreland said:

"If basic strategy of punitive bombing in RVN (sic!) does not take effect by mid-year additional deployments of U.S. and 3rd Country forces should be considered, including introduction of full MEF into I Corps."

Third, Main VC Capabilities:

"A. Continue with present strategy and build-up and conduct large attacks whenever favorable.

"B. Above plus a major uprising to break the back of the GVN.

"C. By infiltration, commit PAVN up to a division in the I/II Corps.

"D. Create peace movement through subversion of existing organizations; get neutral government established, dominate it, and sue the North for peace and reunification.

"E. Unilaterally cease firing, causing the U.S. forces to leave and permitting the covert VC infrastructure to survive intact.

Courses of action in the Estimate were analyzed in relation to the main enemy capabilities outlined above. Maximum weight was given to the first three, which were considered to be the most likely. In addition, the following considerations formed part of the analysis matrix:

"A. Attainment of critical military objectives of

(1) Security of bases and ports,

(2) Denial of critical areas to the Viet Cong (areas such as the highlands of II Corps),

(3) Provision of a quick reaction reserve, and

(4) Provision of a basis for a combined command.

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"B. Preservation of the stability and effectiveness of the GVN and of its armed forces.

"C. Improvement of force ratios as they changed with time.

"D. Remaining within the restrictions imposed by logistical limitations."

In order to achieve its objectives, the U.S. was presented, as Westmoreland saw it, essentially with three possible courses of action, there being several variations on one of the choices. The choices were:

"1. Accelerate the build-up of RVNAF, commit the 7th Fleet to quarantine the coast against infiltration of men and arms, and continue U.S. logistical support as required. No outside combat power other than Naval and Air support would be provided the GVN under this option.

"2. The above plus the commitment of up to two U.S. divisions with their support, either

"a. to secure vital U.S. installations and defeat VC efforts to control the Kontum, Pleiku, Binh Dinh region, or

"b. to secure critical enclaves in coastal regions, or

"c. to do a combination of both of the above.

"3. Both of the major choices above plus a cordon across SVN and the Laotian panhandle manned by up to three U.S. divisions coupled with ARVN, Thai and Laos forces."

In his subsequent analysis and comparison of courses of action, General Westmoreland gave each thorough coverage in light of all the considerations already enumerated. Course of Action 1, RVNAF build-up without outside ground force reinforcement, was certainly logistically feasible, but it failed to promise improvement in any of the other areas of consideration. Course of Action 3, the cordon plus the other courses, promised to attain all the military objectives, to provide a basis for improving GVN stability, and to improve force ratios in critical areas. Because of port and inland communications difficulties, however, the cordon force probably could not have been fully deployed before the end of Calendar Year 1965, which would have been too late to take up the slack during the critical phase of the RVNAF build-up. Also, if the basic strategy of punitive bombing had been successful, then the provision of a force of 165,000 men -- 132,000 of them from the U.S. -- would have been out of proportion to the results expected. Should the bombing strategy fail or take effect only very slowly, then Westmoreland felt the cordon should be reconsidered.

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The most propitious course of action to emerge from the analysis in the Estimate was the second one dealing with the commitment of up to two U.S. divisions, including 17 maneuver battalions, with support. Over and above what was in or authorized to be in Vietnam, Course of Action 2 called for an additional 33,000 men.

In order to illustrate trends in force ratios, Westmoreland postulated that one USMC BLT was the equivalent of three ARVN battalions, and one U.S. Army battalion was the equivalent of two ARVN battalions. Using that rationale, the combat battalions added on through Course of Action 2 would have amounted to 38 ARVN battalion-equivalents. Input on that scale would have had a fair effect on force ratios overall and a very dramatic effect locally in the areas where they were to operate.

Without the benefit of the increased battalion-equivalents provided by Course of Action 2, the ratio of ARVN (and the two Marine BLT's then in Vietnam) battalions to Viet Cong battalions would have degraded, according to the Estimate, from 1.7 to 1 in March 1965 to 1.6 to 1 in December of that year. This would have been the case despite an accelerated RVNAF build-up and only a modest rate of Viet Cong build-up as in 1964. With the input of Course of Action 2, the equivalent of a 10 month acceleration in the RVNAF build-up could have been accomplished by mid-year and by the end of the build-up period the forces could have been doubled -- that is, assuming that the forces in Course of Action 2 were introduced during April, May, and June, a proposal which was barely feasible logistically and which was urged by General Westmoreland.

At the conclusion of his Estimate, General Westmoreland recommended that the U.S. build up its combat force in Vietnam to 17 battalions by early June at the latest. He rejected the enclave alternative because it was too negative, because it brought U.S. troops into too intimate contact with the population, and because it posed some almost insurmountable problems in real estate acquisition. In the highlands the U.S. troops would have had no difficulty recognizing the enemy among the few mountaineers who lived there, therefore Westmoreland recommended that a full U.S. division be deployed along the Qui Nhon-Pleiku axis with a brigade each at An Khe, Pleiku, and Kontum. This deployment would have altered the force ratios in the critical II Corps from 1.9:1 to 2.9:1 in favor of the RVNAF immediately. The ports of Qui Nhon and Nha Trang, rather than serving as enclave bases, would, according to the recommendation, have been developed as logistic support bases for the forces in the highlands and would have been provided with a battalion each for security. The rest of the 17 battalions were to provide base and installation security in the Da Nang/Hue (4 USMC BLT's) and the Bien Hoa-Vung Tau (3 Army battalions) areas.

This was the position of COMUSMACV in March 1965. In concluding his Estimate, Westmoreland recognized the possibility that the GVN might

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infer from either Course of Action 2 or Course of Action 3 that the U.S. was determined to fight on alone. That possibility was outweighed in his eyes, however, by the tactical benefits to be gained plus the guarantee of a "more orderly buildup" than could have been the case under Course of Action 1.

In regard to the build-up of the RVNAF, MACV had in late 1964 two alternative proposals under discussion. Alternative 1 called for increases of 30,309 in the regular forces, plus 35,387 in the Regional Force and 10,815 in the Popular Force. Alternative 2 called for the same increases in RF/PF but for an accelerated figure for the regular forces of 47,556. Taking into account the limited leadership resources available to the GVN and the restricted training facilities, General Westmoreland in January 1965 recommended the more modest Alternative 1 build-up for Military Assistance Program funding. The Secretary of Defense approved the recommended increases on 23 January, thereby bringing the MAP supported RVNAF to levels of 275,058 for the regulars, plus 137,187 for RF and 185,000 for PF. 108/

In response to COMUSMACV's Estimate of the Situation of March 1965 and a memorandum from the Joint Chiefs which followed it, the Secretary of Defense approved the accelerated Alternative 2 force level for the regulars and authorized MAP funding for an additional 17,247 spaces in RVNAF on 12 April 1965. Also provided was an increase in the MACV JTD of 160 spaces for advisors to work with the enlarged RVNAF. 109/

In late May, the JCS asked the Secretary of Defense to authorize MAP support for another 2,369 spaces for ARVN. The purpose was to fatten out a division base for the eventual organization of a tenth ARVN division from existing separate regiments. 110/ The request was approved on the 4th of June. 111/

Any further plans to build up the RVNAF were torpedoed by the extremely heavy losses suffered in combat during late May and early June. On 7 June, General Westmoreland told CINCPAC and Washington that a moratorium on RVNAF build-up was unavoidable as any trainees in the pipeline would have to be used as fillers in existing units. No new ARVN battalions would be coming on the scene until November of that year. 112/

General Westmoreland was not in attendance at the NSC meetings of 1-2 April 1965. Having gone on record in his Estimate in favor of the earliest possible input of up to two division equivalents of U.S. forces, he was understandably disappointed with the very modest increases sanctioned by the President. He communicated to CINCPAC his concern that, while he understood that divisions were not immediately in the offing, he nevertheless felt a pressing need for a division in the highlands. 113/ Throughout the early part of April prior to the Honolulu Conference,

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Westmoreland also kept up the pressure to get an Army brigade into Bien Hoa-Vung Tau. The latter action happened to dovetail with the current Washington strategy options and hence was favorably considered at Honolulu while, as has already been noted, proposals to deploy divisions were not.

Only on one occasion through the spring of 1965 did General Westmoreland display any inclination to abandon his aggressive highlands campaign in favor of the more conservative enclave strategy. On 8 May he cabled to CINCPAC, with Ambassador Taylor's concurrence, his Concept of Operations by US/Allied Ground Combat Forces in Support of RVNAF. 114/ The Concept, as spelled out in that message, has already been discussed at length in an earlier section of this paper. Not discussed were some proposed deployments of U.S. and Third Country forces included by Westmoreland. Perhaps in deference to the Ambassador's known preference, Westmoreland suggested that the U.S. Airmobile Division be deployed to Qui Nhon and Nha Trang. In light of his previous recommendations and subsequent ones to be discussed, it is difficult to conclude that Westmoreland really seriously entertained this recommendation or that it was anything other than an aberration. On the 15th of the same month, Westmoreland sent a message to the Department of the Army indicating that, as far as he was concerned, the concept for employment of the Airmobile Division was still to be determined. Since he preferred an Airmobile Division, he asked the Department of the Army to send airmobile experts to Vietnam to assist him in the preparation of "a concept of operations for a division size force." 115/

In his message #19118 of 7 June, General Westmoreland asked for U.S. and Third Country reinforcements after he had explained that redressing deteriorating force ratios was beyond the capability of the RVNAF. He said, "the force ratios continue to change in favor of the VC. I believe that the DRV will commit whatever force it deems necessary to tip the balance and that the GVN cannot stand up successfully to this kind of pressure without reinforcement." Westmoreland was convinced that U.S. troops could "successfully take the fight to the VC," and he explained that the forces he was requesting were "to give us a substantial and hard-hitting offensive capability on the ground to convince the VC that they cannot win." [Emphasis added]

At the time Westmoreland submitted his recommendations in his 19118, which has erroneously been dubbed "the 44 Battalion request," there were, in addition to one Australian battalion, 7 U.S. Marine, and 2 U.S. Army battalions in Vietnam. In his message, Westmoreland said this:

"In sub-paragraph 'A' below, deployments and actions are recommended on which decisions should be made now. In sub-paragraph 'B' we have identified further actions on which planning should start and on which separate recommendations will be forthcoming.

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- "(3) One additional MAB to reinforce the III MAF.
- "(4) Tactical air units for support of increased U.S. force (additional airfields in SVN and Thailand may be required).
- "(5) Required combat and logistic support forces to include helicopter units to support the foregoing.

"Message has been discussed with Ambassadors Taylor and Johnson. Ambassador Taylor is prepared to comment thereon during current visit to Washington."

In his subparagraph 'A' General Westmoreland did no more than request expeditious approval of forces which had been in the planning stages for some time. If his request had been approved as written, the grand total of maneuver battalions so provided would have been 33. This is one less than the total indicated in Section II of this paper as approved and planned because the Airmobile Division, when it was finally organized, had 8 rather than 9 airmobile battalions. If the 173d Airborne, which was only to be retained until the Airmobile Division was ready to begin operations, were counted, then the total of maneuver battalions requested by Westmoreland on 7 June was 35. In subparagraph 'B' he identified a further 9 battalions which might be needed and requested at some later date.

B. CINCPAC Appeared to Back Into Enclaves

The CINCPAC, Admiral Sharp, was by and large a consistent supporter of General Westmoreland in the latter's drive to get more forces into South Vietnam. With regard to the momentous recommendation of 7 June, CINCPAC concurred in General Westmoreland's evaluation of the situation and agreed also that Allied troops were needed to enable the friendly side to take the offensive. He said: "We will lose by staying in enclaves defending coastal bases." Having said that, Admiral Sharp then went on to disagree with Westmoreland as to the proper place for the Airmobile Division. Rather than have it deployed inland on the Qui Nhon-Pleiku axis as planned by Westmoreland, CINCPAC would have had it based on Qui Nhon with the primary mission of clearing Binh Dinh Province before moving inland. Sharp was very concerned that logistic backup for the Airmobile Division be assured before it be sent into the highlands. Securing one division's LOC with another division (Westmoreland intended to send the ROK's to Qui Nhon) was counterproductive, and Sharp felt that 600 to 800 tons of aerial resupply per day, should highway 19 be closed, would overtax the already limited airfield facilities in the highland areas where the Airmobile Division was to go. 116/

Sharp's initial objections to Westmoreland's deployment plans smacked of conservatism and may well have played into the hands of those

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who continued to advocate the enclave strategy. The Ambassador was in Washington on 9 June, and one of the questions put to him by the Joint Chiefs was whether or not the Airmobile Division should go into the highlands. Taylor convinced them that it should not. 117/ Perhaps without Sharp's backing for the coastal deployment, the Joint Chiefs might not have been convinced.

It seems clear, however, that Admiral Sharp was not really an exponent of the enclave strategy. His insistence that the Airmobile Division stick to Binh Dinh was prompted by his conviction that the U.S. forces should operate in close proximity to the objective of the Viet war -- the people. He was consistent in this approach when he pushed for deployment of the ROK RCT to Quang Ngai, where it was originally supposed to go and where there were plenty of people to be pacified, instead of to sparsely populated Cam Ranh for unremunerative security duty. He also recommended that the remaining ROK division (-), which would have been superfluous at Qui Nhon, be sent instead to Nha Trang or perhaps even into the Mekong Delta. 118/

C. The JCS Yielded the Torch

The JCS put the first major recommendation for ground troop commitment on the docket, as it were, on 20 March, shortly after Chief of Staff of the Army Johnson returned from Saigon. 119/ Because the Viet Cong were stronger and because the leaders of the RVNAF were overly involved in political matters, there had been, according to the JCS, for the first time a downward turn in what had been a relatively stable military situation. Unless the trend could be reversed, the Chiefs said, the war would be lost and it would be seen as a U.S. defeat. That would be intolerable; hence, the Chiefs recommended that U.S. and Allied forces be introduced with a new mission to stem the tide and assume the offensive. The Chiefs were manifestly not interested in any kind of holding action. As they said, "the requirement is not simply to withstand the Viet Cong, however, but to gain effective operational superiority and assume the offensive. To turn the tide of the war requires an objective of destroying the Viet Cong, not merely to keep pace with them, or slow down their rate of advance." 120/ The level of force which they recommended to carry out this aggressive mission and which they saw as an essential component of the broader program to put pressure on the DRV/VC and to deter Chinese Communist aggression, was three divisions, one ROK and two U.S.

In summary, the JCS recommended that one U.S. Marine division conduct, on order, offensive operations to kill Viet Cong with or without centralized GVN/US command structure. The Marines should operate out of their existing TAOR, and expand it as the force grew in size. The U.S. Army division should go to Pleiku, where it should operate with

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the RF/PF and CIDG troops there under U.S. command. The ARVN battalions thus released and shielded by a U.S. buffer along the Laotian border should then move to the populous coastal provinces. No location was specified for the ROK division, but the Chiefs recommended that its mission be similar to that of the U.S. divisions. They felt the Koreans' presence would have good "psychological effect."

This "three-division plan," as it was dubbed, was discussed with the Secretary of Defense and Ambassador Taylor on the 29th of March and was undoubtedly the topic of some discussion during the subsequent NSC meetings. 121/ In any case, even though the recommended deployments were not sanctioned in NSAM 328, the JCS continued to plan for ultimate implementation. 122/

In earlier sections of this paper the possibility that the JCS may have gotten ahead of some of the other decision-makers in the U.S. Government was discussed. Thus, in early April they were forced to back down on the deployment they had ordered of the 173rd Airborne to Bien Hoa-Vung Tau, 123/ and in JCSM 321-65, 30 April 1965, they erroneously described as "approved" a package of some 4,700 logistical troops which were part of the three-division plan and still in the talking stage. 124/ The mission of forces listed in JCSM 321-65 as "approved" by the JCS was to be as follows:

"These forces are to bolster GVN forces during their continued build-up, secure bases and installations, conduct counterinsurgency combat operations in coordination with the RVNAF, and prepare for the later introduction of an airmobile division to the central plateau, the remainder of III MEF to the Da Nang area, and the remainder of a ROK division to Quang Ngai."

"Logistic forces of all services will strengthen support of in-country forces, provide support for the new forces, prepare bases and installations for possible future developments, and be prepared to support those additional forces."

The tone of JCSM 321-65 was consistent with the JCS' advocacy of a full three divisions of troops for Vietnam plus an aggressive mission for those troops. It was not in keeping, however, with the cautious language of the "Victory Strategy" sanctioned at the Honolulu Conference of 20 April. That strategy was the basis for the enclavists and it promised success through denial of victory to the Viet Cong. The enemy was to be denied victory because he would be unable to seize a certain number of decisive areas held by U.S. and Third Country forces, despite any successes he might enjoy throughout the rest of the country. Realizing his own impotence, the enemy would be moved to seek a negotiated settlement to the conflict. The level of commitment

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recommended to the President after the Honolulu Conference and in keeping with the "Victory Strategy" as described above was considerably less than three divisions as has been pointed out in earlier sections of this paper. The JCS should have been addressing the "Victory Strategy" in their 30 April memorandum, but preferred instead to continue the push for three divisions. 125/

COMUSMACV's request of 7 June altered drastically the role of the JCS in the build-up debate. Up to that time the JCS had, if anything, been ahead of General Westmoreland in advocating Allied forces for Vietnam. The 27 battalions of their three-division plan were in themselves more than Westmoreland ever requested until 7 June. After that date, the big push came from Westmoreland in Saigon, and the JCS were caught in the middle between the latter and the powerful and strident opposition his latest request for forces had surfaced in Washington. The JCS memoranda of June and July 1965 were numerous and reflected, apparently without guiding, the 44 Battalion debate's progress. They showed the Airmobile Division in and out of Qui Nhon as the debate on the strategy for its employment ebbed and flowed. The 173rd Airborne Brigade and the brigade from the 101st Airborne Division were first counted and then dropped and then counted again as the total permanent force to be deployed to Vietnam approached 44 maneuver battalions as a limit. On the 9th of June, the JCS favored the deployment of the Airmobile Division to the highlands. 126/ On the 11th they favored its going to Qui Nhon after discussing the matter with the Ambassador. 127/ On the 11th, the total recommended force was 33 battalions, 23 U.S. with the 173rd coming out, and 10 Third Country. 128/ On the 18th of June, the total had dropped to 22 and 10 as the 173rd was scheduled to stay but the brigade from the 101st was to leave. 129/ Final sanction for both airborne units to remain in Vietnam was not secured until August. 130/

D. Search and Destroy as a Strategy and 44 Battalions as a Force

It was not at all clear that with the advent of the 44 battalion debate the vestiges of the enclave strategy and the conservatism which had characterized it had expired. On the contrary, enclave thinking was still very much alive. On the 11th of June, the JCS cabled CINCPAC and informed him that somewhat less than Westmoreland's 19118 was very close to being approved for deployment. The force described amounted to two Marine BLT's and three Army brigades, two of which had already been approved. The JCS wanted to know where Westmoreland intended to put this force in Vietnam. 131/ The implicit intention to keep a string on every unit going into Vietnam was obvious to General Westmoreland. In reply to this query and in response to the rising volume of criticism directed at his estimate of the seriousness of the situation and his proposed utilization of combat forces, Westmoreland sent the following cable to CINCPAC: 132/

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"A. Actions recommended:

"(1) Deploy at once to I CTZ the remaining two BLT's of the 3d Marine Division and appropriate supporting division and air elements (approximately 8,000 personnel). Reconstitute the SLF as a floating reserve.

"(2) Deploy balance of increment 1 and all of increment 2 (as defined in Reference C Ref C was an earlier MACV message of 26 May 1965) of Army logistic and other support units in accordance with schedule set out in Reference D. Ref D was a U.S. Army Support Command Vietnam message of 31 May (Approximately 8,000 personnel)

"(3) Deploy the U.S. Army Air Mobile Division (and logistic increment 3) through Qui Nhon to An Khe, Pleiku and Kontum (approximately 21,000 personnel). Qui Nhon will be ready to receive the division approximately 1 August upon the closure of increment 2 forces.

"(4) Concurrently with the Air Mobile Division, deploy I Corps Headquarters (approximately 1,500 personnel).

"(5) Deploy the ROK Marine RCT to Cam Ranh Bay as soon after 1 July as the unit can be readied for movement (approximately 4,000 personnel). Deploy balance of the ROK division force (approximately 14,500 personnel) plus U.S. logistic increment 4 (1,500 personnel), starting 15 September to the general area of Qui Nhon. (This answers Ref E CINCPAC message of 5 June in part - separate message on pages 96 through 103.)

"(6) Deploy additional tactical fighter squadrons to Cam Ranh Bay when expeditionary landing field complete at that location. Also provide naval aircraft carrier support of in-country operations as required; we believe the latter will engage one carrier full time.

"(7) Hold the 173d Airborne Brigade in-country until the Air Mobile Division has deployed and is ready for operations.

"(8) Continue air attacks against the DRV. (Reference F MACV message of 20 May applies)

"B. Additional deployment that may be required and on which planning should begin: Emphasis added

"(1) Three U.S. Army Hawk battalions to TSN Bien Hoa, Qui Nhon and Cam Ranh in that priority.

"(2) The remainder of the 1st Infantry Division or the 101st Airborne Division beginning 1 October.

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FM COMUSMACV
TO RUEKAF/ CINCPAC
INFO RUEKDA/ JCS

(PER NMCC)

BT
TOP SECRET FROM MACJOC SEC1 OF 3

~~TOP SECRET~~

SUBJ: CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS - FORCE REQUIREMENTS AND
DEPLOYMENTS, SVN

REF: A. MACV 070335Z,
B. CINCPAC 112210Z,

1. THERE HAS BEEN AN EXTENDED EXCHANGE OF MESSAGES REGARD-
ING THE VC/ DRV THREAT, THE REQUIREMENT FOR US FORCES, THE CON-
CEPT OF THEIR EMPLOYMENT AND THE DETAILS OF THEIR DEPLOYMENT.
MACV PROPOSES TO TREAT EACH OF THESE MATTERS IN AN EFFORT TO
BRING THE PICTURE INTO CLOSER FOCUS.

2. THE THREAT, STATE MESSAGE 287311 JUNE 1965, RAISES
QUESTIONS ABOUT MACV'S CURRENT ESTIMATE OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF
THE SITUATION IN SVN. THIS MESSAGE WILL BE ANSWERED SEPARATELY
AS EMBTEL REFLECTING MACV VIEWS. SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT ARVN
AS LOST FIVE INFANTRY BATTALIONS ON THE BATTLEFIELD IN THE LAST
THREE WEEKS WHILE RISING CASUALTIES AND HIGH DESERTION RATES
HAVE CAUSED A MORTALITY TO BE PROPOSED IN CONNECTION WITH THE
FORMATION OF NEW BATTALIONS. THUS, ARVN BATTLEFIELD STRENGTH IS
DECLINING IN THE FACE OF DRV REINFORCEMENTS AND A VC OFFENSIVE.
IT IS MACV'S CONSIDERED OPINION THAT RVNAF CANNOT STAND UP TO
THIS PRESSURE WITH OUT SUBSTANTIAL US COMBAT SUPPORT ON THE GROUND.

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INFO....CJCS-1(1) DJS-3(2-4) SJCS-1(5) J1-1(6) J3-8(7-14) J4-3(15-17)

J5-2(18-19) SACSA-5(20-24) NMCC-1(25) SECDEF-5(26-30) ASD/ISA-9
(31-39) DIA-4(40-43) W/HOUSE-3(44-46) CSA-2(47-48) CNO-2(49-50)
CSAF-2(51-52) CMC-5(53-57) FILE-1(58) (58) SO/CL

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TOP SECRET

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3. FORCE REQUIREMENTS. MACV HAS ASKED FOR ADDED FORCES IN REF A. THESE CONSIST OF TWO BATTALIONS TO ROUNDOUT THE 3D MARINE DIVISION, A ROK DIVISION, AN AIRMOBILE DIVISION, THE RETENTION OF THE 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE, TACTICAL FIGHTERS AND A CORPS HEAD-QUARTERS PLUS COMBAT AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT FORCES. WE HAVE ALSO FLAGGED THE POSSIBILITY OF ADDITIONAL FORCES.

4. CONCEPT OF EMPLOYMENT.

Q. CINCPAC ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION AND CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS IS PROPERLY FOCUSSED UPON THE POPULATION- THAT IS, UPON THE PEOPLE. THERE IS NO DOUBT WHATSOEVER THAT THE INSURGENCY IN SOUTH VIETNAM MUST EVENTUALLY BE DEFEATED AMONG THE PEOPLE IN THE HAMLETS AND TOWNS. HOWEVER, IN ORDER TO DEFEAT THE INSURGENCY AMONG THE PEOPLE, THEY MUST BE PROVIDED SECURITY OF TWO KINDS:

(1) SECURITY OF THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE FROM LARGE WELL ORGANIZED AND EQUIPPED FORCES INCLUDING THOSE WHICH MAY COME FROM OUTSIDE THEIR COUNTRY.

(2) SECURITY FROM THE GUERRILLA, THE ASSASSIN, THE TERRORIST AND THE INFORMER.

B. MACV IS CONVINCED THAT US TROOPS CAN CONTRIBUTE HEAVILY IN THE FIRST CATEGORY OF SECURITY AS IN PARAGRAPH 4-(1) ABOVE, BUT THAT ONLY THE VIETNAMESE CAN MAKE REAL PROGRESS AND SUCCEED IN RESPECT TO THE PROBLEM IN PARAGRAPH 4A (2) ABOVE. UNFORTUNATELY, THE ARVN IS BEING DRAWN AWAY FROM THE PEOPLE AND THEIR SECURITY IN ORDER TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF THE MAIN FORCE VC/ DRV OFFENSIVE. THE BEST ILLUSTRATION OF THIS POINT IS THE FACT THAT THE II CORPS COMMANDER HAS REMOVED MOST OF THE TROOPS FROM THE PROVINCE OF BINH DINH WITH ITS NEARLY ONE MILLION PEOPLE IN ORDER TO DEFEND THE RELATIVELY LESS IMPORTANT PROVINCE CAPITALS OF KONTUM AND PLEIKU. THEREFORE, THE MACV CONCEPT IS BASICALLY TO EMPLOY US FORCES TOGETHER WITH VIETNAMESE AIRBORNE AND MARINE BATTALIONS OF THE GENERAL RESERVE AGAINST THE HARDCORE DRV/VC FORCES IN REACTION AND SEARCH AND DESTROY OPERATIONS, AND THUS PERMIT THE CONCENTRATION OF VIETNAMESE TROOPS IN THE HEAVILY POPULATED AREAS ALONG THE COAST, AROUND SAIGON AND IN THE DELTA.

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C. WE HAVE TAILORED LOGISTIC SUPPORT FORCES TO PROVIDE FOR SOME TACTICAL FLEXIBILITY SO THA FORCES MAY BE SHIFTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE STRENGTH AND MOVEMENT OF THE VC. CONTINUOUS ADJUSTMENTS AND REDISTRIBUTIONS UNDOUBTEDLY WILL BE NECESSARY. IT IS LIKELY THAT THE WAR WILL CONTINUE TO BECOME MORE FLUID AND MORE MOBILE. WE BELIEVE THAT THE MAJOR BASES AT DA NANG, CHU LAI, QUI NHON, CAM RANH AND SAIGON - BIEN HOA PROVIDE THE BACKBONE SUPPORT ON WHICH MOBILE FORCES CAN BE SUPPORTED AND FROM WHICH THEY CAN MANEUVER.

D. IT IS NOT OUR CONCEPT THAT THE US WOULD TAKE EXCLUSIVE CONTROL OR RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY ENTIRE PROVINCE ALTHOUGH, IN PRACTICE, ONLY TOKEN GVN FORCES MIGHT REMAIN. THUS GENERALLY, WE MUST MATCH OUR FORCES WITH THE TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE GVN. WE MUST STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT THE RVNAF STRUCTURE TO KEEP IT ALIVE AND OPERATIVE. WE SHOULD GENERALLY CONCENTRATE US FORCES AWAY FROM MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS AND WHENEVER POSSIBLE DO THE BULK OF OUR FIGHTING IN MORE REMOTE AREAS

5. DEPLOYMENTS.

A. MACV RECOGNIZES THAT THE IN-COUNTRY LOCATION OF GROUND COMBAT FORCES HAS A BEARING UPON THE SIZE, NATURE AND LOCATION OF LOGISTIC SUPPORT FORCES, PORTS, AIRFIELDS AND RELATED FACILITIES. FOR THIS REASON, MACV HAS INDICATED FROM TIME TO TIME THE PROPOSED INITIAL LOCATION OF THE COMBAT FORCES FOR WHICH REQUIREMENTS HAVE DEVELOPED. HOWEVER, AS THE NUMBER OF COMBAT FORCES REQUESTED AND REQUIRED INCREASES AND THE NUMBER OF COMBINATIONS AND PERMUTATIONS REGARDING LOCATION CORRESPONDINGLY INCREASES, WE RAPIDLY APPROACH A POINT WHERE EVERYONE WILL BE CONFUSED AND NO USEFUL PURPOSE WILL BE SERVED.

B. THE VC ARE NOW MANEUVERING LARGE FORCES UP TO REINFORCE REGIMENTS EQUIPPED WITH HEAVY WEAPONS. THUS, WE ARE APPROACHING THE KING OF WARFARER FOCED BY THE FRENCH IN THE LATTER STAGES OF THEIR EFFORTS HERE. IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT THE DRV CAN AND WILL DEPLOY THREE OR MORE DIVISIONS INTO SOUTH VIETNAM BY INFILTRATION. IT IS HIGHLY LIKELY THAT ONE IS ALREADY HERE. THEREFORE, IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO REACT TO THE INTRODUCTION OF
BR

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ADV CY TO OSD CNO/AC NMCC

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SECTION 2 OF 3
OF 1409-69

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AF CP/NAVY FP/ARMY WR/
MARINE CORPS CC/

T O P S E C R E T 23055 FROM MACJOC SECTION 2 OF 3
DRV FORCES AND TO THE SHIFT AND TACTICAL PLAY OF THE VC. THUS,
TACTICAL DISPOSITIONS WILL CHANGE AND ONLY THE MAJOR BASES WILL
BE FIXED IN SHORT, WE WILL BE CONDUCTING MOBILE WARFARE FROM
FIXED AND DEPENDENT BASES, SOME OF THESE BASES WILL BE MAJOR
LOGISTICS CENTERS AT PORTS AND AIRFIELDS SUCH AS CHU LAI AND CAN
PANH, OTHERS WILL BE TACTICAL BASES SUCH AS AN KHE OR PLEIKU,
THE TACTICAL BASES WILL MOVE AS NECESSARY AND THAT MAY BE WITH
SOME FREQUENCY AS THE BATTLE DEVELOPS.
C. WITH THESE THOUGHTS IN MIND, A MACV REVIEW OF THE TACTICAL
SITUATION CORPS-BY-CORPS WILL INDICATE THE PROBABLE DEPLOYMENT
OF REQUIRED US FORCES.

(1) I CORPS. THIS CORPS IS HIGHLY VULNERABLE TO THE
INTRODUCTION OF DRV FORCES, IT HAS VIRTUALLY NO RESERVE AND IS
HARDELY ABLE TO HOLD THE MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS, PROVINCE AND
DISTRICT TOWNS. WE BELIEVE THAT THE 3D MARINE DIVISION AUGMENTED
BY TWO BATTALIONS AS RECOMMENDED CAN PROVIDE ADEQUATE RESERVE
REACTION FORCES FOR I CORPS AT THE PRESENT LEVEL OF VC ACTIVITY.
WITH A FULL DIVISION, THE EQUIVALENT OF ONE BRT WILL BE AVAILABLE
FOR EMPLOYMENT THROUGHOUT THE CORPS IN A REACTION ROLE AWAY FROM
THE BSI AREA.
(2) II CORPS. THIS CORPS HAS A HOPELESSLY LARGE

- INFO: CJCS-1(1) JJS-3(2-4) SJCS-1(5) J3-1(6) J3-8(7-14) J4-3(15-17)
- J5-2(18-19) SACSA-5(20-24) NMCC-1(25) SECDEF-5(26-30) ASD/ISA-9(31-39)
- DIA-4(40-43) WHOUSE-3(44-46) CSA-2(47-48) CNO-2(49-50) CSAF-2(51-52)
- CMC-5(53-57) FILE-1(58) SO/D

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AREA TO COVER WITH THE REARER FORCES AVAILABLE. ADDITIONALLY, THE VIETNAMESE HAVE A FIXATION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF KONTUM AND PLEIKU, PROBABLY DERIVED FROM THE HISTORY OF THE VIET MINH WAR. PRESENTLY, THE CORPS COMMANDER HAS DENIED BINH DINH PROVINCE WITH NEARLY A MILLION INHABITANTS) IN ORDER TO REINFORCE KONTUM WITH TWO MARINE BATTALIONS, THE VC CONTROL PHU YEN PROVINCE EXCEPT FOR TUY HOA ITSELF AND, AS REPORTED EARLIER, THE 325TH DIVISION MAY BE DEPLOYED IN KONTUM, PLEIKU AND PHU SON. THE 23D DIVISION IS SCATTERED SO WIDELY THAT IT CANNOT REACT IN STRENGTH TO VC ATTACKS AGAINST ISOLATED PROVINCE CAPITALS AND DISTRICT TOWNS. WE ARE GREATLY CONCERNED THAT SUCH TOWNS AS HAM TAN IN BINH TUY AND GIA NHUA IN QUANG DUC AND EVIN PHAN THIEP IN BINH THUAN MAY BE ATTACKED. CORPS COMMANDERS WITHOUT ADEQUATE RESERVES HAVE SHOWN CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE THAT THEY WILL MOVE TIMIDLY AND TOO LATE IN A PITIFUL MANNER UPON THE EVENT OF A VC HEAVY ATTACK, THIS IS RESULTING IN THE LOSS OF ARVN BATTALIONS FASTER THAN THEY CAN BE REORGANIZED, TRAINED AND EQUIPPED. II CORPS REQUIRES HEAVY REINFORCEMENTS. WE HAVE ASKED FOR AN INFANTRY BRIGADE, AN AIR-MOBILE DIVISION AND A ROK DIVISION. WE WOULD GENERALLY EMPLOY THESE FORCES AS FOLLOWS:

(A) THE ROCKS APPEAR TO BE SENSITIVE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF HEAVY CASUALTIES AND WOULD BE PLAGUED, WE BELIEVE, TO TAKE OVER THE SECURITY MISSION AT THE MAJOR LOGISTIC BASES OF CAM RANH AND QUI NHON, ALTHOUGH TWO REGTS ARE NOT REQUIRED FOR THE DEFENSE OF QUI NHON, THEY CAN PROBABLY BE USED THERE TO EXTEND THE SECURE AREA AND REINFORCE THE ARVN IN THAT POPULOUS AND IMPORTANT PROVINCE. IF ONLY ONE ROK REGT BECOMES AVAILABLE, WE WOULD DEPLOY IT TO BELIEVE THE 1ST DIVISION BRIGADE AT QUI NHON AND CAM RANH.

(B) HAVING BEEN BELIEVED BY THE ROCKS OF THE SECURITY OF QUI NHON AND CAM RANH, WE VISUALIZE THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE 1ST DIVISION BRIGADE IN THE CENTRAL AREA OF HIGHWAY 19 WEST OF QUI NHON TOWARD AN KHI. THE SECURITY OF ROUTE 19 IS IMPORTANT NOT ONLY IN THE EVENT OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF MAJOR US FORCES ON THE HIGH PLATEAU, BUT IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE POPULATION IN THAT AREA AND FOR THE DELIVERY OF POL FOR CURRENT COMBAT OPERATIONS. THE FACT IS THAT HIGHWAY 19 MUST BE KEPT OPEN. THERE IS NO ALTERNATE WAY INTO THE HIGH PLATEAU FROM NORTH OR SOUTH. IF THE PLATEAU IS ABANDONED, IT WILL FORK THE FIRST SIGNIFICANT TERRITORY OF THE NLSVN AND WILL BE RECOGNIZED AND SUPPORTED BY

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CHINA THROUGH CAMBODIA.

(C) WE BELIEVE THAT ROUTE 19 AND THE PLEIKU-KONTUM AREA PRESENT A CHALLENGE WHICH MUST BE MET. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE RVNAF CAN DO THE JOB. IF THE VC ELECT TO FIGHT A MAJOR CAMPAIGN FOR ROUTE 19 WITH DRV OR VC FORCES, THIS IS AS GOOD TERRAIN AS ANY, AND BETTER THAN MOST, ON WHICH SUCH A BATTLE SHOULD TAKE PLACE. IT IS VASTLY PREFERABLE TO THE POPULATED LOWLANDS. THE PROBLEM IN VIETNAM HAS ALWAYS BEEN ONE OF FINDING, FIXING AND FIGHTING SUCCESSFULLY THE ELUSIVE VC. IF ROUTE 19 BECOMES A MAGNET, IT TENDS TO SOLVE SEVERAL OF THESE PROBLEMS. WITH THE MOBILITY, COMMUNICATION AND FIREPOWER OF THE AIR ASSAULT DIVISION SUPPORTED BY TACTICAL AIR, WE BELIEVE THE BATTLE OF THE ROAD WILL BE WON AND THAT THE ROAD CAN BE USED BY THE DIVISION. THE DIVISION CAN BE SUPPORTED OVER THE ROAD FOR THE BULK OF ITS REQUIREMENTS, AND CAN BE BACKED UP AS NECESSARY BY A C130 SQUADRON ON A CONTINGENCY BASIS, AUGMENTED BY C-123 AND CARIBOU, AS WELL AS CHINOOK HELICOPTERS WHICH ARE ORGANIC TO THE DIVISION. THE AIR ASSAULT DIVISION CONSUMES POL, AMMUNITION, FOOD AND MISCELLANEOUS SUPPLIES AT A RATE WHICH VARIES FROM 600 TONS AT THE MAXIMUM TO 100 TONS OR LESS AT THE MINIMUM. WHEN ALL AIRCRAFT ARE FLYING AT THE MAXIMUM RATE AND AMMUNITION EXPENDITURES ARE THE HIGHEST CONCEIVABLE IN THIS KIND OF WAR, THE DIVISION MIGHT HIT THE 600 TON REQUIREMENT. IF ON THE OTHER HAND IT IS NECESSARY TO PULL IN THE BELT - DEFEND THE HARD BASES, CURTAIL BOTH FLYING AND SHOOTING - THEN THE CONSUMPTION COMES DOWN DRAMATICALLY. IN SHORT, THE DIVISION CAN SUBSIST EASILY ON AIR RESUPPLY WHILE RELATIVELY INACTIVE AND YET DEFEND ITSELF. WE WOULD HAVE A CORPS FORCE WITH ONE US AND ONE ROK DIVISION BT

ADV CY TO SECDEF/CNO(AC) NMCC

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SECTION 3 OF 1 0 9 6 9

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FM COMUSMACV

TO RUEKA/JCPCPAC

INFO RUEKDA/JCS

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NOFORN

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BT
T O P S E C R E T 20055 FROM MACJ00 FINAL SEC OF 3
OPERATING IN THE NORTHERN HALF OF II CORPS. THIS WOULD PERMIT
THE REGROUPING OF THE 22D AND 23D DIVISIONS SO THAT MORE AMPLE
COVERAGE COULD BE PROVIDED IN THE SOUTH AND WOULD PROVIDE THE
KIND OF REACTION FORCE REQUIRED TO MEET AND DEFEAT MAJOR VC
ATTACKS. THE FOREGOING DEPLOYMENT RELATES TO THE SITUATION AS
WE KNOW IT NOW. IF THAT SITUATION CHANGES OR ADDITIONAL FORCES
ARE INTRODUCED BY THE DRV, THESE FORCES WILL BE SHIFTED CORRE-
UPONDINGLY.

(3) III CORPS. THIS CORPS IS EXTREMELY WEAK ON

- 0: CJCS-1(1) DJS-3(2-4) SJCS-1(5) J1-1(6) J3-3(7-14) J4-3(15-17)
- J5-2(18-19) SACS-5(20-24) NMCC-1(25) SECS-5(26-30) ASD/ISA-9(31-39)
- DIA-4(40-42) WHOUSE-3(43-45) CSA-2(47-49) CNO-2(49-50) CSAF-2(51-57)
- CMC-5(53-57) FILE-1 (58) D/D

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ITS NORTHERN AND EASTERN FLANKS AND HAD INADEQUATE RESERVES TO REACT TO HEAVY VC ATTACKS PARTICULARLY IN ISOLATED AREA. THE VC ATTACKS IN PHUOC LONG PROVINCE ON 16 AND 142 JUNE ILLUSTRATED THE DIRE CONSEQUENCES OF A PIECEMEAL COMMITMENT OF SMALL X BATTALIONS AGAINST A VC REGIMENT IN AN INTELLIGENCE VACUUM. THERE ARE NO PROSPECTS OF ADDITIONAL ARVN FORCES IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THUS, WE FORESEE THE EVENTUAL REQUIREMENT FOR A FULL US DIVISION NORTHWEST OF SAIGON TO MEET THE VC THREAT AS IT IS NOW CONSTITUTED. IN THE MEANTIME, WE WISH TO RETAIN THE 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRIGADE OF THE 1ST AIRBORNE DIVISION. IF FOR SOME REASON THE AIRMOBILE DIVISION IS NOT DEPLOYED, WE WOULD STATION ONE OF THE AIRBORNE BRIGADES AT PLEIKU.

(4) IV CORPS. AT THE MOMENT, THIS CORPS IS STANDING ON ITS OWN TWO FEET. THE TERRAIN IN IV CORPS LENDS ITSELF TO THE FULL USE OF AIR MOBILITY AND THE ABSENCE OF COVER COMPOUNDS THE DIFFICULTY OF THE VC. THE UNITS OF THE 7TH AND 21ST DIVISIONS HAVE ATTAINED A HIGH STATE OF MORAL AND CERTAIN UNITS HAVE ACQUIRED AN OUTSTANDING RECORD AGAINST THE VC. WE CONSIDER THAT, ALTHOUGH THE MARGIN IS FAVORABLE, IT IS CERTAINLY THIN. WHETHER OR NOT US FORCES WILL BE REQUIRED IN THIS AREA CANNOT NOW BE FORECAST.

6. THE VC ARE DESTROYING BATTALIONS FASTER THAN THEY CAN BE RECONSTITUTED AND FASTER THAN THEY WERE PLANNED TO BE ORGANIZED UNDER THE BUILDUP PROGRAM. THE RVNAF COMMANDERS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT THE ACTIVE COMMITMENT OF US GROUND COMBAT FORCES. THE ONLY POSSIBLE US RESPONSE IS THE AGGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT OF US FORCES TOGETHER WITH VIETNAMESE GENERAL RESERVE FORCES TO REACT TO VC STRONG VC/DRV ATTACKS. TO MEET THIS CHALLENGE SUCCESSFULLY, TROOPS MUST BE MANEUVERED FREELY, DEPLOYED AND REDEPLOYED IF NECESSARY, AND THE CHALLENGE OF HIGHWAY 19 AND THE HIGH PLATEAU MUST BE MET

GP-5
BT

ADV CY TO NWCC

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JCS IN 10969

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TOP SECRET

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This message was extremely important, for in it COMUSMACV spelled out the concept of keeping U.S. forces away from the people. The search and destroy strategy for U.S. and Third Country forces which continues to this day and the primary focus of RVNAF on pacification both stem from that concept. In addition, Westmoreland made a big pitch in this cable for a free hand to maneuver the troops around inside the country. That is the prerogative of a major field commander -- there is good indication that at this stage Westmoreland saw himself in that light rather than as advisor and assister to the Vietnamese armed forces.

Ambassador Taylor returned to Vietnam from Washington shortly after the battle at Dong Xoai, just as the new Thieu-Ky government was being installed. His first report confirmed the seriousness of the military situation as reported by General Westmoreland and also pointed up the very tenuous hold the new government had on the country. 133/ This report apparently helped to remove the last obstacles to consideration of all of the forces mentioned in Westmoreland's request of 7 June. On 22 June, the Chairman of the JCS cabled Westmoreland and CINCPAC to inform them that the ante had gone up from 35 to 44 battalions, counting all forces planned and programmed and including the 173rd. Westmoreland was asked if 44 battalions would be enough to convince the VC/DRV that they could not win. 134/ General Westmoreland replied that there was no evidence the VC/DRV would alter their plans regardless of what the U.S. did in the next six months. The 44 battalion force should, however, establish a favorable balance of power by the end of the year. If the U.S. was to seize the initiative from the enemy, then further forces would be required into 1966 and beyond. 135/

On the 26th of June, as has already been noted, General Westmoreland was given the authority to commit U.S. forces to battle in support of RVNAF "in any situation...when, in COMUSMACV's judgment, their use is necessary to strengthen the relative position of GVN forces." 136/ This was about as close to a free hand in managing the forces as General Westmoreland was likely to get. The enclave strategy was finished, and the debate from then on centered on how much force and to what end. There were some attempts to snatch the chestnuts from the fire, however.

Westmoreland's opposition, while far from presenting a united front, had its day in court during late June and early July 1965. The Embassy in Saigon, while recognizing the seriousness of the situation in South Vietnam, was less than sanguine about the prospects for success if large numbers of foreign troops were brought in. Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson told Assistant Secretary of Defense McNaughton on 25 June that the U.S. should not bring in more troops. The situation, according to Johnson, was in many ways no more serious than the previous

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year. Even if it were more serious, he went on, massive input of U.S. troops was unlikely to make much difference. The best they could do would be to hold a few enclaves. Johnson pointed out that the Vietnamese were afraid they would lose authority if more U.S. troops were brought in. He advised that the U.S. allow the forces already in the country to settle. After some experimentation with them, the way would be much clearer. Once in, troops could not, without difficulty, be taken out again. 137/

The views expressed by Johnson to McNaughton paralleled those of Ambassador Taylor throughout the build-up debate. Both men were very much concerned with the effect of the proposed build-up on the Vietnamese. They were not directly opposed to the use of U.S. forces to help the GVN; they merely wanted to go very slowly to insure against loss of control.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from General Westmoreland was Under Secretary of State George Ball. Convinced that the U.S. was pouring its resources down the drain in the wrong place, Ball placed himself in direct opposition to the build-up. In a draft memorandum he circulated on the 28th of June, Ball stated that Westmoreland's intention was to go to Phase III combat (Phase III of the 8 May Concept of Operations which called for US/Allied forays inland to secure bases and areas for further operations). In Ball's view there was absolutely no assurance that the U.S. could with the provision of more ground forces achieve its political objectives in Vietnam. Instead, the U.S. risked involving itself in a costly and indeterminate struggle. To further complicate matters, it would be equally impossible to achieve political objectives by expanding the bombing of the North -- the risks of involving the USSR and the CPR were too great, besides which such action would alienate friends. No combination of the two actions offered any better prospect for success. Since the costs to achieve its objectives if the U.S. embarked on an expanding program were indeterminate, the U.S. should, in Ball's view, not elect to follow such a course of action. It should instead "cut its losses" by restricting itself to the programmed 15 battalions and 72,000 men made public at a press conference in mid-June by the Secretary of Defense. 138/ By holding those forces to a very conservative Phase II strategy of base defense and reserve in support of RVNAF, U.S. combat losses could be held to a minimum while the stage was being set for withdrawal. 139/

Ball was cold-blooded in his analysis. He recognized that the U.S. would not be able to avoid losing face before its Asian allies if it staged some form of conference leading to withdrawal of U.S. forces. The loss would only be of short term duration, however, and the U.S. could emerge from this period of travail as a "wiser and more mature nation." On 1 July, Ball sent to the President a memorandum entitled "A Compromise Solution for South Vietnam." In that memorandum, Ball presented his case for cutting losses essentially as it is described above. 140/

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Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, like so many others, found himself in between Westmoreland and Ball. The U.S. needed to avoid the ultimatum aspects of the 44 battalions and also the Ball withdrawal proposal, both of which were undesirable in Bundy's estimation. On 1 July, Bundy suggested to the President that the U.S. should adopt a policy which would allow it to hold on without risking disasters of scale if the war were lost despite deployment of the full 44 battalions. For the moment, according to Bundy, the U.S. should complete planned deployments to bring in-country forces to 18 maneuver battalions and 85,000 men. The Airmobile Division and the remainder of the 1st Division should be brought to a high state of readiness, but the decision as to their deployment should be deferred. By so acting the U.S. would gain time in which to work diplomatically to realign Southeast Asia and thereby salvage its honor and credibility. The forces in Vietnam, which Bundy assumed would be enough to prevent collapse, would be restricted to reserve reaction in support of RVNAF. This would allow for some experimentation without taking over the war effort -- a familiar theme. Bundy felt, as did Ambassador Taylor, that there remained considerable uncertainty as to how well U.S. troops would perform in the Vietnam environment. We needed to find out before going big. 141/

E. The Influence of the President and This Secretary of Defense

It is difficult to be precise about the position of the Secretary of Defense during the build-up debate because there is so little of him in the files. In March, Ambassador Taylor sent to Saigon the following description of the Secretary's views regarding the JCS's three-division plan: 142/

"a. The JCS has recommended to the Secretary of Defense the early deployment of a three division force with appropriate combat and logistic support. This force would include the entire MEF and I Corps area. An Army Division in the high plateau, and a Korean Division, location unspecified. The Chairman, JCS emphasized the urgent necessity to deploy a logistical command and the forward deployment of tactical fighter squadrons as well as the earliest possible construction of the airfield at Chu Lai and a runway at Da Nang.

"b. Ambassador Taylor indicated that 3 divisions seemed high; that Quat was not persuaded that more troops were necessary; that anti-American sentiment lies just below the surface and that finally there are two very real limitations on the number and rate of introduction of U.S. and Third Country forces. First is the absorptive capacity of the country and second logistical limitations.

"c. The Chairman, JCS outlined the importance of establishing a goal against which logistics planning could proceed.

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"d. The Secretary of Defense indicated that further U.S. deployments must be accompanied by deployment of Koreans for reasons of domestic reaction.

"e. After an exchange of views on the missions and operating methods of U.S. forces the Secretary of Defense stated that he was impressed with the adverse force ratios and favored deployment of U.S. forces conditioned by:

- "(1) political (psychological) absorption capacity
- "(2) logistical absorption capacity
- "(3) operational absorption -- (that is operational requirements)."

In his official reply to the JCS memorandum containing the three-division plan, the Secretary said this: 143/

"I have considered the views of the JCS presented in referenced memorandum. As you are aware the substance of their recommendations was considered in the high-level discussions which took place in connection with the recent visit of Ambassador Taylor. I believe that the decisions made at that time reflect the views of the JCS to the extent required at this time."

It has already been pointed out that (after the NSC meetings of 1-2 April 1965) Mr. McNamara was interested in the JCS continuance of planning for the earliest possible introduction of the three divisions. 144/ In reply to the JCSM of 30 April in which the Chiefs summed up the results of the Honolulu Conference and subsequent discussions and in which they made another pitch for the three-division plan, the Secretary said in regard to the letter: 145/

"The other deployments described will be considered in conjunction with continuing high-level deliberations on the Southeast Asia situation and as further requested by the JCS."

In the files are several other bits of information which, while perhaps not always directly attributable to the Secretary's personal philosophy, nevertheless are an indication of how he interpreted his guidance from the President. On 1 March he sent this memorandum to all departments: 146/

"I want it clearly understood that there is an unlimited appropriation available for the financing of aid to Vietnam. Under no circumstances is lack of money to stand in the way of aid to that nation."

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In response to a query by General Johnson, Army Chief of Staff, as to how much the U.S. must contribute directly to the security of South Vietnam, the Secretary said: 147/

"Policy is: anything that will strengthen the position of the GVN will be sent."

On 2 April, the JCS sent the Secretary a bold memorandum in which they recommended clearing the decks of all "administrative and procedural impediments that hamper us in the prosecution of this war." They went on to list a whole panoply of problems which they felt were causing unnecessary headaches in providing support to General Westmoreland. 148/ The JCSM was a direct slap at some of the Secretary's management techniques and an appeal that the military staff be allowed to run the show. McNamara was silent for a long time. He replied to the memorandum on 14 May and addressed each of the JCS recommendations in turn. The gist of his reply was that he was not yet ready to yield the reins to the military. He said: 149/

"I am sure it is recognized that many of these recommendations have received, or are now receiving, separate action review in appropriate channels. Also, it appears clear that many of the actions recommended should be implemented only if execution of a major CINCPAC OPLAN were ordered."

There are plenty of other indications in the files that the Secretary was very carefully and personally insuring that the Defense Establishment was ready to provide efficient and sufficient support to the fighting elements in Vietnam. From the records, the Secretary comes out much more clearly for good management than he does for any particular strategy.

During the more heated debate following Westmoreland's request of 7 June, there is hardly a trace in the files of the Secretary's opinion. In a letter to Representative Mahon of the House Appropriations Committee on 9 June, McNamara indicated that the reserve stocks provided for combat consumption in the Fiscal Year 1966 Budget might have to be replenished as the situation in South Vietnam developed. He was not sure, however, and in any case could afford to wait and see. Perhaps there would be a request for a supplementary appropriation when the Congress reconvened the following January. 150/ (The President asked for a 1.7 billion supplementary appropriation in August of 1965 for military operations in Vietnam.)

Secretary McNamara went out to Vietnam for a firsthand look from 16 to 20 July. He wanted to hear Westmoreland's concept for the employment of the 44 battalions, and he sought the answers to a number of other questions including what forces Westmoreland thought would be required

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through January 1966 and beyond. 151/ When McNamara left Washington, the 44 battalion debate remained unresolved. While he was in Saigon, he received a cable from Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance informing him that the President had decided to go ahead with the plan to deploy all 34 of the U.S. battalions. 152/ The debate was over. McNamara left Saigon bearing Westmoreland recommendations for an even greater increase in forces which will be the subject of a later paper. 153/ "In many respects," McNamara told the press on leaving Vietnam, "it [the situation] has deteriorated since 15 months ago when I was last here." 154/

There is no question that the key figure in the early 1965 build-up was the President of the United States. In NSAM 328, he only approved the modest input of two Marine battalions even though he was presented with a JCS recommendation that three full divisions be sent. The whole tone of the NSAM is one of caution. The President was determined that any changes authorized in that NSAM be understood as "being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy." 155/ He was terribly concerned with control over release of information to the press, and a premature leak from Saigon of some of the details of the 1-2 April NSC meetings brought a sharp response from him. 156/ The subdued tones of NSAM 328 notwithstanding, the President apparently lent his sanction to the broader proposals contained in the joint State/Defense 7-point cable of 15 April, and in so doing he upset the Ambassador. 157/

Most of the recommendations which came out of the Honolulu Conference received early attention by President Johnson, but during May things tended to slow down as his focus was diverted, no doubt, by the situation in the Dominican Republic.

On the 4th of May, the President sent a special message to the Congress in which he requested a supplemental appropriation of \$700 million "to meet mounting military requirements in Vietnam." He described in that message the landing of U.S. Marines at Da Nang and Phu Bai the more recent arrival of the 173rd Airborne. He went on to say:

"Nor can I guarantee this will be the last request. If our need expands I will turn again to the Congress. For we will do whatever must be done to insure the safety of South Vietnam from aggression. This is the firm and irrevocable commitment of our people and Nation."

And later in the same message:

"I do ask for prompt support of our basic course: Resistance to aggression, moderation in the use of power, and a constant search for peace." 158/

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On 18 June, McGeorge Bundy sent this memorandum to the Secretary of Defense: 159/

"The President mentioned to me yesterday his desire that we find more dramatic and effective actions in South Vietnam. He also mentioned his desire for a report on the progress of his idea that we need more light planes for operations there. Finally, he asked if we have enough helicopters."

On the 16th of June Secretary McNamara had given the Army permission to proceed with the organization of an Airmobile Division using the assets of the 11th Air Assault Division and the 2nd Infantry Division. 160/ On the 22nd, four days after the Bundy Memorandum, the Secretary proceeded with readiness preparation of the Airmobile Division for deployment to South Vietnam, and the number of maneuver battalions being considered for eventual deployment rose from 23 U.S. to 34 U.S. or 44 U.S./3rd Country total. 161/ On the 23rd of June the deployments of one Marine BLT to Da Nang and one to Qui Nhon were approved. 162/ The latter move provided the needed security for the port of Qui Nhon in preparation for the arrival of the Airmobile Division and also allowed Westmoreland to divert the Army brigade originally scheduled for Qui Nhon to Cam Ranh Bay and Bien Hoa. 163/

F. Presidential Sanction for Phase I

On 17 July, McNamara was in Saigon with the new Ambassador, Mr. Lodge, when he received the cable from Vance telling him that the President had decided to proceed with the deployment of all 34 U.S. battalions then under consideration. At that time, the Chief Executive was said by Vance to be favorably inclined toward calling up reserves to make the deployments a little less of a strain on the military establishment. 164/

Upon his return from Vietnam, Secretary McNamara prepared a draft release to the press which stated that the total increase in U.S. forces with the latest approved add-ons would be about 100,000. 165/ That information was not given out. Instead, after a week of deliberation, the President held a press conference on the 28th of July in which he told the American people "the lesson of history" dictated that the U.S. commit its strength to resist aggression in South Vietnam. He said: 166/

"We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else.

"Nor would surrender in Vietnam bring peace, because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another country, bringing with it perhaps even larger and crueler conflict, as we have learned from the lessons of history.

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"Moreover, we are in Vietnam to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American Nation. Three Presidents -- President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President -- over 11 years have committed themselves and have promised to help defend this small and valiant nation.

"Strengthened by that promise, the people of South Vietnam have fought for many long years. Thousands of them have died. Thousands more have been crippled and scarred by war. We just cannot now dishonor our word, or abandon our commitment, or leave those who believed us and who trusted us to the terror and repression and murder that would follow.

"This, then, my fellow Americans, is why we are in Vietnam."

As far as increases in U.S. forces were concerned, the President said this:

"First, we intend to convince the Communists that we cannot be defeated by force of arms or by superior power. They are not easily convinced. In recent months they have greatly increased their fighting forces and their attacks and the number of incidents. I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. We will meet his needs.

"I have today ordered to Vietnam the Airmobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested. This will make it necessary to increase our active fighting forces by raising the monthly draft call from 17,000 over a period of time to 35,000 per month, and for us to step up our campaign for voluntary enlistments.

"After this past week of deliberations, I have concluded that it is not essential to order Reserve units into service now. If that necessity should later be indicated, I will give the matter most careful consideration and I will give the country due and adequate notice before taking such action, but only after full preparations.

"We have also discussed with the Government of South Vietnam lately the steps that we will take to substantially increase their own effort, both on the battlefield and toward reform and progress in the villages. Ambassador Lodge is now formulating a new program to be tested upon his return to that area."

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During the questioning period which followed the President's presentation, the following dialogue between the President and one of his interlocutors is recorded:

"Question: Mr. President, does the fact that you are sending additional forces to Vietnam imply any change in the existing policy of relying mainly on the South Vietnamese to carry out offensive operations and using American forces to guard installations and to act as emergency backup?

"The President: It does not imply any change in policy whatever. It does not imply change of objective."

The Annex to JCSM 590-65, forwarded by the JCS on 30 July 1965, reflected the final Phase I package approved for deployment as 44 maneuver battalions and a total strength in South Vietnam after all units had closed of 193,887 U.S. fighting men. During ensuing discussions concerning Phase II of the build-up, the Phase I package was further refined and increased. By 10 November, the Phase I package was fixed at 219,000 U.S. personnel. 167/

The build-up progressed apace while the debate continued. In July two more Army brigades arrived followed closely by a corps headquarters. The 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, which had originally been scheduled to protect Qui Nhon, went to Bien Hoa, leaving one battalion at Cam Ranh Bay for security. 168/ That battalion rejoined its parent unit when relieved at Cam Ranh by the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. In August the landing of the 7th Marine Regiment brought III MAF to a total strength of one Marine Division plus one regiment or 12 BLT's. 169/ The airmobile division, organized on 1 July as the 1st Air Cavalry Division, was fully deployed and responsible for its TAOR on 28 September. The remainder of the 1st Infantry Division closed on 7 October, 170/ and the ROK forces were fully deployed by 8 November, bringing the US/3rd Country forces in-country to a total fighting force of 44 maneuver battalions. 171/ U.S. strength in South Vietnam at the end of 1965 was 184,314 men. 172/

V. EXPECTATIONS

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V. Expectations

The first four sections of this paper have presented the development of the situation in South Vietnam through the early months of 1965 and discussed the three strategies (1) Strategy of Security, 2) Enclave Strategy, and 3) Search and Destroy Strategy) which were considered during the same time span for the employment of United States ground forces. Each of the strategies had its heyday and its proponents, and each was associated in the minds of the decision-making principals who were weighing it with certain expectations.

A. The Strategy of Security

The short-lived strategy of security saw the deployments as a necessary evil to meet an immediate need -- the bolstering of base security in South Vietnam for the air effort against North Vietnam. Few of the principals read any more into it than that.

The only intelligence estimate dealing with the ramifications of this strategy came when the intelligence community was tasked to predict probable communist reactions to the input of an entire Korean division for base security duty in South Vietnam. The SNIE resulting, dated 19 March 1965, indicated that input of Chinese or North Korean "volunteers" was very unlikely to occur. Inevitably there would be a great upsurge in propaganda and vilification directed against the Koreans and the U.S. for making such a move. In the main, however, communist reaction depended on how the signal was interpreted. They would almost certainly estimate that the input of a ROK division would "not in itself significantly alter the military situation. They might consider, however, that it portended a substantial further build-up of foreign forces...e.g., Nationalist Chinese, Thai, Philippines, and U.S....for ground combat." 173/

The strategy of security was intimately tied to the Rolling Thunder bombing program. It remained alive only so long as the decision-making principals were reasonably confident that the bombing was going to produce the desired effects on the DRV/VC will to persist. Expectations for the security strategy were quite modest if the foot-in-the-door aspects of it are discounted. No input of "volunteers" from China or other communist allies of the DRV was expected to occur in response to the provision of a few foreign troops to look after the bases in the South. It was merely expected that those bases would be better protected from attack.

B. The Enclave Strategy

At the NSC meetings of 1-2 April, those in attendance could see that Ho Chi Minh was not quite ready to throw in the towel. The McNaughton

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"trilemma" was addressed and it was decided to embark, albeit cautiously, on a program of ground troop deployments in excess of the requirements of base security. To insure control of troops untested in the environment of Asian insurgency, to provide security for the orderly construction of an expandable logistics base, and to provide for rapid and easy exit if the situation suddenly deteriorated, the forces were to be placed in coastal enclaves with their backs to the sea.

The proponents of the enclave strategy expected it to frustrate the DRV/VC by denying them victory. This denial of victory strategy spelled out at the Honolulu Conference, the high water mark of the enclave strategy, predicted that enemy impotence would lead eventually to a political solution. The enemy would be denied victory simply because a modicum of U.S. and 3rd Country force would enable the RVNAF to be expanded at a controlled rate without undue risk of collapse, loss of a key area, or a major defeat. The brunt of the war against the enemy's regular units would still be borne by the RVNAF. The Allied forces, operating from their secure bases, would be prepared to come to the aid of the Vietnamese if necessary. The relatively low intensity of operations to which the Allied forces would be exposed would permit low risk experimentation with them. The information gained from such experiments would be useful if the strategy failed and more forces had to be brought in. If the experiments verified that foreign soldiers could not fight effectively in the Vietnamese environment, a stronger case could be made for resisting any future attempts to get foreign troops enmeshed in the war.

Ambassador Taylor wanted to give the Vietnamese maximum opportunity to save themselves. He was quite sanguine about their prospects in the spring of 1965 and therefore was predisposed to hold the foreign troops down to the bare minimum. He thought things would remain stable enough to permit leisurely experimentation with four U.S. Marine battalions for two months before thought should be given to bringing in any more. As Taylor saw the situation at that time, the enclave strategy would buy enough time for the preparation of an entire logistics base. Any additional foreign reinforcements needed could be brought in later. As far as the few U.S. troops already in the country were concerned, Taylor expected their most serious problem would be boredom.

General Westmoreland expected, and CINCPAC supported him in this, that the war would be lost if the Allied forces were put into enclaves. The difference between Westmoreland and Taylor was the former's insistence on using U.S. and 3rd Country forces to take the war to the enemy. Taylor was quite content to let RVNAF do that with the occasional assist from the Allied forces if they got into difficulty. Westmoreland did not think they could do it, and he was convinced that no kind of victory could be had unless some pressure were put on the VC/DRV forces in South Vietnam.

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Westmoreland was convinced that there would be an enemy offensive in the II Corps highlands sometime during the 1965 summer monsoon. If Allied forces weren't there to meet it, he was sure the highlands would be lost to the DRV/VC forces, who would then proceed to establish a front government there. Westmoreland expected this to happen if U.S. and 3rd Country forces went into coastal enclaves in lieu of moving directly into the interior.

CINCPAC expected the Airmobile Division to exhaust its supply lines if it were to move directly inland. He was not convinced that it could be supplied adequately by air as Westmoreland had suggested. The Ambassador expected the VC/DRV to try for another Dien Bien Phu if a U.S. division were to go inland to the highlands.

Westmoreland expected U.S. troops to have an abrasive effect on the Vietnamese population if they were in too close proximity to one another. The Ambassador was inclined to agree with him, but CINCPAC expected U.S. and 3rd Country forces to concentrate their efforts in areas where there were plenty of people, and he expected them to succeed. The Ambassador was prepared to put up with the prospect of poor relations between foreign troops and the Vietnamese in return for the low risk prospects offered by the enclave strategy.

It is not at all clear that the JCS ever endorsed the enclave strategy with any enthusiasm or that they expected much from it. From analysis of their recommendations it seems that they strove constantly to override the enclavists and get enough force into the country to do some good. In their three-division plan, they derided those who wanted to "merely keep pace" with the enemy or "slow down the rate" of his advance. The JCS said that to turn the tide of the war required "an objective of destroying the VC." 174/ The only way to win was to provide enough force to both stem the tide and assume the offensive. They recommended three divisions to accomplish the latter. The enclave strategists advocated neither the objective nor the amount of force.

Probably the last enclavist to be heard during the build-up debate was William Bundy. His "A Middle Way Course of Action in South Vietnam" memorandum was submitted to the President on the 1st of July. Bundy expected 18 battalions and 85,000 men operating in conservative fashion from coastal enclaves to be enough to hold the whole facade together while the U.S. made concerted efforts to shore up Southeast Asia and extricate itself honorably from South Vietnam. He did not expect a victory from such a move, but he did not expect a loss either.

The reaction of the intelligence community to the enclave strategy was consistently less than optimistic. Immediately following the NSC meetings of the 1st of April, CIA Director McCone circulated a memorandum in which he argued that changing the mission of U.S. troops in Vietnam to offensive operations would merely lead to requests for

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more and more troops for a war the U.S. "cannot win." In the same memorandum, McCone argued that a marked increase in the tempo of air operations against NVN was an indispensable concomitant of a change in ground strategy. 175/ The NSAM which sanctioned the change of ground strategy called for no more than "slowly ascending tempo" for Rolling Thunder operations. 176/

McCone circulated another memorandum on the day after the Honolulu Conference in which he estimated probable enemy reactions to greater U.S. involvement in the war. The enemy, McCone said, still saw things essentially going his way. An increased U.S. involvement on the ground would be seen by the enemy as an acceptance by the U.S. of a greater commitment, but he would also infer from the cautious enclave approach that the U.S. was quite reluctant to widen the war. It was probable that the VC would be reinforced with men and equipment, but direct intervention by the DRV or the Chinese Communists was unlikely. 177/

On the 28th of April, a SNIE entitled "Communist Reactions to Certain U.S. Actions" described what could be expected of the enemy:

"The policies and tactics of the Communist powers engaged by the Vietnamese crisis have settled into a fairly definitive pattern. It appears that the DRV, with strong Chinese encouragement, is determined for the present to ride out the U.S. bombardment. Both the DRV and Communist China have hardened their attitude toward negotiations, without categorically excluding the possibility under all conditions. They apparently calculate that the DRV can afford further punishment and that, in the meantime, U.S. determination to persist will weaken because of increasing DRV air defense capability, the threat of broader conflict, and the pressure of international and U.S. domestic opinion. Moreover, they consider that the tide is running in their favor in the South..."

If the enemy's attitudes were as hard as described above, then a great deal of patience was going to be required of those who expected the Honolulu strategy to come to fruition.

C. The Search and Destroy Strategy

There are many aspects of the enclave strategy which were galling to professional military men. Many of those were brought out by the military men themselves in documents quoted in this paper. Probably the single most disturbing factor in the enclave approach was the implicit failure to try and seize the initiative from the enemy. Instead, it was proposed that the U.S. and the GVN try and ride out the war by denying the enemy a victory. The

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The initiative to come to the conference table and thus end the fighting was left strictly to the enemy and depended on his appreciation of his own impotence. It looked as though the communists were to have all the options.

The JCS expected any strategy to fail if it did not include among its courses of action some provision for the seizure of the initiative. They said as much in each of their recommendations. General Westmoreland was of a similar bent, and he stated explicitly that the enclave strategy was "too negative." 178/ Nevertheless, both Westmoreland and the JCS are on record stating that 44 battalions would not be enough to seize the initiative from the enemy either. Westmoreland told the JCS on 24 June that he felt substantial increases of forces would be required over and above the 44 battalions in 1966. The U.S. would be too busy building up its forces in 1965 to seize the initiative from the enemy during that year. 179/ JCSM-515-65 of 2 July, which contained the JCS recommendation for the full 44 battalions, included the following paragraph:

"Pursuant to your discussions with the JCS on 28 June 1965, there is furnished in the Annex hereto a program for the deployment of such additional forces to South Vietnam at this time as are required to insure that the VC/DRV cannot win in South Vietnam at their present level of commitment." /Emphasis added/

The JCS went on to recommend the concurrent implementation of stepped-up air action against the DRV as "an indispensable component of this overall program." Thus, the JCS, who in March 1965 were recommending 27 battalions to "stem the tide and assume the offensive," 180/ were ready to admit in July of that year that 44 battalions would only be enough to hold the fort and that even greater effort would be required to seize the initiative.

When the Secretary of Defense came to Saigon during the third week of July 1965, he was introduced to General Westmoreland's latest ideas concerning the employment of U.S. and Free World Military Assistance Force (FWMAF) forces. Westmoreland laid out for the Secretary the force requirements projected into 1966. Force ratios based on estimates of enemy build-up capability and projections of the RVNAF rate of build-up called for the 44 US-FWMAF battalions through the end of 1965. In concert with Westmoreland's Concept of Operations, later formalized and published on 30 August, the 44 battalions were labeled Phase I forces. Secretary McNamara left Saigon with the first estimate by Westmoreland of the requirements for assuming the offensive in 1966. Phase II was anticipated by Westmoreland to require 24 additional maneuver battalions. 181/

As an indication of Westmoreland's expectations for the 44 Phase I maneuver battalions which are the subject of this paper, there is no better

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source then his Concept of Operations. 182/ The Concept was developed through three distinct phases:

Phase I -- The commitment of US/FWMAF forces necessary to halt the losing trend by the end of 1965.

Phase II -- The resumption of the offensive by US/FWMAF forces during the first half of 1966 in high priority areas necessary to destroy enemy forces, and reinstatement of rural construction activities.

Phase III -- If the enemy persisted, a period of a year to a year and a half following Phase II would be required for the defeat and destruction of the remaining enemy forces and base areas.

Withdrawal of US/FWMAF forces would commence following Phase III as the GVN became able to establish and maintain internal order and to defend its borders.

The overall Concept was based on some assumptions:

- (1) That the VC would fight until convinced that military victory was impossible and then would not be willing to endure further punishment.
- (2) That the Chinese Communists would not intervene except to provide aid and advice.
- (3) That friendly forces would maintain control of the air over RVN.

The specific military tasks associated with each phase of the Concept were spelled out as follows:

Phase I

- (1) Secure the major military bases, airfields and communications centers.
- (2) Defend major political and population centers.
- (3) Conduct offensive operations against major VC base areas in order to divert and destroy VC main forces.
- (4) Provide adequate reserve reaction forces to prevent the loss of secure and defended areas.
- (5) Preserve and strengthen the RVNAF.
- (6) Provide adequate air support, both combat and logistic.

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(7) Maintain an anti-infiltration screen along the coast and support forces ashore with naval gunfire and amphibious lift.

(8) Provide air and sea lifts necessary to transport the necessary but minimum supplies to the civil populace.

(9) Open up necessary critical lines of communication for essential military and civil purposes.

(10) Preserve and defend, to the extent possible, areas now under effective governmental control.

Phase II

(1) All Phase I measures.

(2) Resume and/or expand pacification operations. Priority will be given to the Hop Tac area around Saigon, to that part of the Delta along an east-west axis from Go Cong to Chau Doc, and in the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tri, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen.

(3) Participate in clearing, securing, reserve reaction and offensive operations as required to support and sustain the resumption of pacification.

Phase III

(1) All Phase I and II measures.

(2) Provide those additional forces necessary to extend and expand clearing and securing operations throughout the entire populated area of the country and those forces necessary to destroy VC forces and their base areas.

General Westmoreland went on in his Concept to lay out the tactics to be associated with the various military tasks and to list explicit tasks to be accomplished within each RVNAF Corps area. The above is sufficient for the needs of this paper, however, as it shows that General Westmoreland expected by the end of 1965 to have effectively stemmed the tide of the VC insurgency through the input of 44 US/FWMAF maneuver battalions and their accompanying support. It further shows that in the first half of 1966, with the input of more force, Westmoreland expected to shift his emphasis from the strategic defensive to the strategic offensive.

In his 25 June interview with McNaughton, Deputy Ambassador Johnson summed up the expectations for Ambassador Taylor and himself. 183/ In Johnson's view what was expected depended on how serious the situation

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actually was. If it were as bad as Westmoreland said it was, then large numbers of foreign troops could do little more than hold on to a few enclaves. If the situation were not significantly worse than the year before (and Johnson apparently felt in many ways it was not) then the U.S. was merely bringing in more foreign troops than were needed and could be expected to have difficulty getting them out again. Finally, Johnson expected the Vietnamese reaction to the massive input of foreign troops to be a major problem.

Under Secretary George Ball clearly felt that the U.S. was already engaged in an indeterminate struggle in Vietnam. Raising the US/FWMAF force levels to 44 battalions would, he expected, accomplish nothing more than raise the cost to the U.S. when it finally lost the war and pulled out.

Assistant Secretary Bundy saw in the 44 battalion request some ultimatum aspects that he felt were undesirable. Apparently, although he did not say so, he expected approval of that request and announcement of it to trigger some kind of dire response from the other side.

The person among the principals whose views can be found in the files dared to attach a probability to his expectations. Assistant Secretary McNaughton gave Secretary McNamara on the 13th of July a memorandum entitled "Analysis and Options for South Vietnam." McNaughton described three possible courses the war could take:

(1) Success for the US/GVN. (Actions one should expect to see in such a case were the extension of GVN control throughout the country, the disarming of the VC armed units, the cessation of infiltration and other DRV support, and the relegation of the terror and other insurgent activity to little more than a rural police problem.)

(2) Inconclusive for either side (self-explanatory).

(3) GVN collapse and concomitant U.S. defeat (self-explanatory).

McNaughton recommended to Secretary McNamara that the U.S. deploy the 44 battalions and be prepared to send more force to try for a win as defined above. McNaughton's expectations for such a course, as expressed in probabilities, are laid out below. The assumed U.S. force level to develop these probabilities was between 200,000 and 400,000 men. With that amount of force, the probability of Success/Inconclusive/Collapse was for the year 1966: .2/.7/.1
for the year 1967: .4/.45/.15 and
for the year 1968: .5/.3/.2 -- no further projection being made.

It is noteworthy that while McNaughton expected the probability of success to increase with each year of investment, he also expected the probability

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of failure to increase, although not by as much. The probability that the war would end inconclusively was expected by McNaughton to shrink dramatically after the first year. In concluding his memorandum, McNaughton observed that the U.S. might decide at any time in mid-course to try for a compromise solution to the conflict. Such an option, while not assigned a probability of achievement, was defined as a situation in which the VC remained armed and in defense of areas they controlled in the country, the NLF was represented in the GVN, and the GVN agreed to keep hands off the VC areas.

Neither the President nor the Secretary of Defense is on record in 1965 with expectations as to the duration of the war or the impact of the 44 battalions. It looks as though they both were prepared for the moment to go along with General Westmoreland's predictions about the course of the war. The decision not to call up the Reserves, which was made some time during the week just prior to the President's press conference of 28 July, indicated that the President expected the war to last in Vietnam well beyond a year. No doubt the Secretary of Defense told him that without a declaration of national emergency -- a move the President found politically unpalatable -- the Reserves as an asset would be fully expended in one year, leaving the military establishment in worse shape than before if the war still continued.

The final element in the expectations matrix was provided by the NIB in a SNIE issued on 23 July entitled "Communist and Free World Reactions to a Possible U.S. Course of Action." The analysis was predicated on the following proposed action:

- (1) The U.S. would increase its strength in SVN to 175,000 by 1 November,
- (2) 225,000 U.S. Reserves would be called up,
- (3) 20,000 tours of duty per month would be extended,
- (4) The regular strength of the U.S. Armed Forces would be increased by 400,000 over the next year, and
- (5) U.S. draft calls would be doubled.

In conjunction with the above, the U.S. would also make public statements reiterating its objectives and its readiness to negotiate. The forces going to Vietnam would be deployed so as not to threaten the 17th parallel. Also considered was a possible step-up of U.S. air activity against the DRV land lines of communication with China.

In reaction to the above, the Communists would probably see the U.S. moves as indication that the U.S. held little hope of negotiation. They would probably expect some increase in US/3rd Country forces anyway

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as they clearly felt they were winning. In order to offset the increases of US/3rd Country forces in South Vietnam, the Communists would probably build up their own strength with the input of 20,000 to 30,000 PAVN regulars by the end of 1965. This, of course, they were already in the process of doing.

It was seen as possible, but less probable, that the Communists might attack GVN forces and installations in hopes of achieving victory before the US/3rd Country build-up took effect. Barring that, they might avoid direct confrontation with U.S. forces and just peck away at them through harassing actions. By so doing, they might hope to demonstrate to the foreigner his own impotence in a Vietnamese war.

If the situation in South Vietnam were going badly for the VC, the DRV might show some interest in negotiations. If the U.S. did increase its air activity, the DRV was most likely to respond by asking the Soviets for more air defense hardware.

As far as the Chinese Communists were concerned, it was estimated that they were very unlikely to intervene in the air war over North Vietnam. They might put service troops into North Vietnam, but they would not be likely to introduce combat troops. The Chinese, the Estimate said, "would believe that the U.S. measures were sufficient only to postpone defeat while magnifying its eventual effect."

It could be expected that the Soviets would step up their aid to the DRV, especially in the field of air defense, and at the same time harden their attitude towards the U.S. without making any major challenge to U.S. interests around the world. It would come as no surprise if the Soviets raised the level of their military spending in response to this U.S. action.

It was felt that most of the allies of the United States realized that the U.S. was going to have to increase its commitment in Vietnam. It was recognized, however, that they would find it increasingly difficult to give U.S. policy any public support.

In order to mitigate somewhat the crisis atmosphere that would result from this major U.S. action, the Estimate concluded with the recommendation that announcements about it be made piecemeal with no more high level emphasis than necessary.

Predictably, the expectations of those outside of the official pale ran the gamut from supporters of Oregon Senator Wayne Morse ("the Administration policy is leading the United States to the abyss of total war" -- "there are doubts beginning to show at the grass roots about our policy there, [in Vietnam] and when the coffins begin coming home those doubts will grow" -- "the war in Asia cannot be won; ...in the end the United States will be kicked out") 184/ to equally misguided zealots on

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the other end of the spectrum, such as Jack Foisie of the Los Angeles Times ("I foresee the day of mixed American-Vietnamese units under American command -- to make our junior leadership stretch as far as possible" -- "we are going to drive to the Laos border -- lying only 50 to 75 miles inland in the central waist of Vietnam. Everything taken will be held, initially with firstline troops, and later -- as a rear area -- by second line militia"). 185/

Whatever their personal assessments of the ramifications of the 44 battalion decision might have been, all interested observers had one thing in common -- they recognized the crossing of a major threshold and the embarkation on a major new course the end of which was not in sight.

VI. NSAM 328

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

○ April 6, 1965

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NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION MEMORANDUM NO. 328

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ✓
THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

On Thursday, April 1, The President made the following decisions with respect to Vietnam:

1. Subject to modifications in the light of experience, and to coordination and direction both in Saigon and in Washington, the President approved the 41-point program of non-military actions submitted by Ambassador Taylor in a memorandum dated March 31, 1965.

2. The President gave general approval to the recommendations submitted by Mr. Rowan in his report dated March 16, with the exception that the President withheld approval of any request for supplemental funds at this time -- it is his decision that this program is to be energetically supported by all agencies and departments and by the reprogramming of available funds as necessary within USIA.

3. The President approved the urgent exploration of the 12 suggestions for covert and other actions submitted by the Director of Central Intelligence under date of March 31.

4. The President repeated his earlier approval of the 21-point program of military actions submitted by General Harold K. Johnson under date of March 14 and re-emphasized his desire that aircraft and helicopter reinforcements under this program be accelerated.

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5. The President approved an 18-20,000 man increase in U. S. military support forces to fill out existing units and supply needed logistic personnel.

6. The President approved the deployment of two additional Marine Battalions and one Marine Air Squadron and associated headquarters and support elements.

7. The President approved a change of mission for all Marine Battalions deployed to Vietnam to permit their more active use under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State.

8. The President approved the urgent exploration, with the Korean, Australian, and New Zealand Governments, of the possibility of rapid deployment of significant combat elements from their armed forces in parallel with the additional Marine deployment approved in paragraph 6.

9. 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 slacked off sharply for what appeared to be more than a temporary operational lull.

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

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

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

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

10. Ambassador Taylor will promptly seek the reactions of the South Vietnamese Government to appropriate sections of this program and their approval as necessary, and in the event of disapproval or difficulty at that end, these decisions will be appropriately reconsidered. In any event, no action into Vietnam under paragraphs 6 and 7 above should take place without GVN approval or further Presidential authorization.

11. The President desires that with respect to the actions in paragraphs 5 through 7, 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 consultation with the Secretary of State. The President's desire is that these movements and changes should be understood as being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy.

McGeorge Bundy

McGeorge Bundy

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FOOTNOTES

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IV.C.6.

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