

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

Counterinsurgency: The Kennedy Commitments, 1961-
1963 (5 Vols.)

1. The Kennedy Commitments and Programs, 1961

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UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS
1945 - 1967



VIETNAM TASK FORCE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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SET #13

Sec Def Cont Nr. X- 0295

IV.B.1.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

THE KENNEDY PROGRAM AND COMMITMENTS: 1961

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IV.B.1 THE KENNEDY COMMITMENTS AND PROGRAMS, 1961

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

When Kennedy took office, the prospect of an eventual crisis in Vietnam had been widely recognized in the government, although nothing much had yet been done about it. Our Ambassador in Saigon had been sending worried cables for a year, and twice in recent months (in September 1960 and again in December) had ended an appraisal of the situation by cautiously raising the question of whether the U.S. would not sooner or later have to move to replace Diem. Barely a week after taking office, Kennedy received and approved a Counter-Insurgency Plan (CIP) which, at what seems to have been a rather leisurely pace, had been going through drafting and staffing for the previous eight months.

The CIP was a most modest program by the standard we have become accustomed to in Vietnam. It offered Diem financial support for a 20,000 man increase in his army, which then stood at 150,000; plus support for about half of the counter-guerrilla auxiliary force known as the Civil Guard. In return, it asked Diem for a number of reforms which appeared to the American side as merely common sense -- such as straightening out command arrangements for the army under which 42 different officials directly responsible to Diem (38 province chiefs, 3 regional commanders, and a Chief of Staff) shared operational command.

The CIP was superseded in May by an enlarged version of the same program, and the only longer term significance the original program held was that it presumably offered the Administration a lesson in dealing with Diem (and perhaps, although it was not foreseen then, a lesson in dealing with Vietnamese governments generally.) The negotiations dragged on and on; the U.S. military and eventually most of the civilians both in Saigon and Washington grew impatient for getting on with the war; Diem promised action on some of the American points, and finally even issued some decrees, none of which were really followed up. For practical purposes, the list of "essential reforms" proposed as part of the CIP, including those Diem had given the impression he agreed to, could have been substituted unchanged for the list of reforms the U.S. requested at the end of the year, with equal effect, as the quid pro quo demanded for the much enlarged U.S. aid offer that followed the Taylor Mission.

Negotiations with Diem came to an end in May, not because the issues had been resolved, but because the U.S. decided to forget trying to pressure Diem for a while and instead try to coax him into reforming by winning his confidence. Partly, no doubt, this reflected the view that pressure was

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getting nowhere and the alternative approach might do better. Mainly, however, the changed policy, and the somewhat enlarged aid program that accompanied it, reflected the pressures created by the situation in neighboring Laos. (We will see that there is a strong case to be made that even the Fall, post-Taylor Mission, decisions were essentially dominated by the impact of Laos. But in May the situation was unambiguous. Laos, not anything happening in Vietnam, was the driving force.)

A preliminary step came April 20. Immediately following the Bay of Pigs disaster, and with the prospect of a disaster in Laos on the very near horizon, Kennedy asked Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric to work up a program for saving Vietnam. The program was delivered, as requested, a week later. It was a somewhat enlarged version of the CIP, with the implication, not spelled out in the paper, that the new effort would be put into effect without making any demands on Diem. (Simultaneously, Ambassador Durbow, who had been in Vietnam for four years, was being replaced by Nolting, and this added to the hope that a new start might be made with Diem.) There is nothing to suggest that anything more was expected of Gilpatric's program, and indeed all the evidence suggests that the main point of the exercise was to work General Lansdale into the role of government-wide coordinator and manager of the country's first major test in the new art of counter-insurgency. Lansdale served as Executive Officer of the Task Force which Gilpatric organized and which he proposed should be given a continuing, dominant role in managing the Vietnamese enterprise.

By the time the report was submitted on April 27 when the Laos crisis was reaching its peak, a new Geneva conference had been agreed upon. But there were serious doubts that the pro-western side in Laos would be left with anything to negotiate about by the time the conference opened. Even the U.S.-favored settlement (a coalition government) represented a major, if prudent, retreat from the previous U.S. position taken during the closing months of the Eisenhower Administration.) So the situation in Laos was bad, if unavoidable; and it followed right on the heels of the Bay of Pigs, and at a time when the Soviets were threatening to move against Berlin. The emphasis of the Gilpatric Task Force shifted from shaping up the counter-insurgency aid program for Vietnam, to finding ways to demonstrate to the South Vietnamese (and others) that a further retreat in Laos would not foreshadow an imminent retreat in Vietnam.

On April 28, an annex to the Task Force report proposed to counter the impact of Laos with U.S. support for an increase in South Vietnamese forces (the original report had proposed only more generous financial support for forces already planned under the CIP) and, further, a modest commitment of U.S. ground combat units in South Vietnam, with the nominal mission of establishing two training centers. On April 29, Kennedy endorsed the proposals of the original draft, but took no action on the far more significant proposals in the annex. On May 1, a revised Task Force draft came out, incorporating the Laos Annex proposals, and adding a recommendation that the U.S. make clear an intent to intervene in Vietnam to the extent needed to prevent a Viet Cong victory. At this point, practical control of the

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Task Force appears to have shifted out of Gilpatric's (and Defense's) hands to State (and, apparently, George Ball.) A State redraft of the report came out May 3, which eliminated the special role laid out for Lansdale, shifted the chairmanship of the continuing Task Force to State, and blurred, without wholly eliminating, the Defense-drafted recommendations for sending U.S. combat units to Vietnam and for public U.S. commitments to save South Vietnam from Communism. But even the State re-draft recommended consideration of stationing American troops in Vietnam, for missions not involving combat with the Viet Cong, and a bilateral U.S.-SVN security treaty. On May 4 and 5, still acting under the pressures of the Laos crisis, the Administration implied (through a statement by Senator Fulbright at the White House following a meeting with Kennedy, and at Kennedy's press conference the next day) that it was considering stationing American forces in Vietnam. On May 6, a final draft of the Task Force report came out, essentially following the State draft of May 3. On May 8, Kennedy signed a letter to Diem, to be delivered by Vice President Johnson the next week, which promised Diem strong U.S. support, but did not go beyond the program outlined in the original Task Force report; it offered neither to finance expanded South Vietnamese forces, nor to station American troops in Vietnam. On May 11, the recommendations of the final, essentially State-drafted, report were formalized. But by now, the hoped for cease-fire in Laos had come off. Vice President Johnson in Saigon on the 12th of May followed through on his instructions to proclaim strong U.S. support for and confidence in Diem. When Diem talked of his worries about U.S. policy in Laos, Johnson, obviously acting on instructions, raised the possibility of stationing American troops in Vietnam or of a bilateral treaty. But Diem wanted neither at that time. Johnson's instructions were not available to this study, so we do not know how he would have responded if Diem had asked for either troops or a treaty, although the language of the Task Force report implies he would only have indicated a U.S. willingness to talk about these things. With Johnson, came the new Ambassador, Fritz Nolting, whose principal instruction was to "get on Diem's wavelength" in contrast to the pressure tactics of his predecessor.

A few weeks later, in June, Diem, responding to an invitation Kennedy had sent through Johnson, dispatched an aide to Washington with a letter outlining Saigon's "essential military needs." It asked for a large increase in U.S. support for Vietnamese forces (sufficient to raise ARVN strength from 170,000 to 270,000 men), and also for the dispatch of "selected elements of the American Armed Forces", both to establish training centers for the Vietnamese and as a symbol of American commitment to Vietnam. The proposal, Diem said, had been worked out with the advice of MAAG Saigon, whose chief, along with the JCS and at least some civilian officials, strongly favored getting American troops into Vietnam.

The question of increased support for Vietnamese forces was resolved through the use of the Staley Mission. This was normally a group of economic experts intended to work with a Vietnamese group on questions of economic policy. Particularly at issue was whether the Vietnamese could not be financing a larger share of their own defenses. But the economic proposals

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and programs, all of which turned out to be pretty general and fuzzy, comprised a less important part of the report than the discussion of Vietnamese military requirements. Here the study group reflected the instructions of the two governments. On the basis of the Staley Report, the U.S. agreed to support a further increase of 30,000 in the RVNAF, but deferred a decision on the balance of the South Vietnamese request on the grounds that the question might not have to be faced since by the time the RVNAF reached 200,000 men, sometime late in 1962, the Viet Cong might already be on the run. The Staley Report also contained what by now had already become the usual sorts of nice words about the importance of social, political, and administrative reforms, which turned out to have the usual relevance to reality. The U.S. was still sticking to the May formula of trying to coax Diem to reform, instead of the equally unsuccessful January formula of trying to pressure him to reform.

The other issue -- the request for "elements of the American Armed Forces" -- was left completely obscure. From the record available, we are not sure that Diem really wanted the troops then, or whether Kennedy really was willing to send them if they were wanted. All we know is that Diem included some language in his letter that made the request a little ambiguous, and that Washington -- either on the basis of clarification from Diem's aide who delivered the letter, or on its own initiative, or some combination of both -- interpreted the letter as not asking for troops, and nothing came of the apparent request.

A new, and much more serious sense of crisis developed in September. This time the problem was not directly Laos, but strong indications of moderate deterioration of Diem's military position and very substantial deterioration of morale in Saigon. There was a sharp upswing in Viet Cong attacks in September, including a spectacular raid on a province capital 55 miles from Saigon during which the province chief was publicly beheaded by the insurgents. At the end of September, Diem surprised Nolting by asking the U.S. for a U.S.-GVN defense treaty. By Diem's account the loss of morale in Saigon was due to worries about U.S. policy growing out of the Laos situation. Both U.S. officials in Washington and South Vietnamese other than those closest to Diem, though, put most of the blame on deterioration within South Vietnam, although the demoralizing effect of Viet Cong successes was unquestionably magnified by uncertainties about the U.S. commitment to Vietnam. In response, President Kennedy sent General Taylor and Walt Rostow, then both on the White House staff, to Vietnam, accompanied by some less prominent officials from State and Defense.

What Taylor and Rostow reported was that Saigon faced a dual crisis of confidence, compounded out doubts arising from Laos that the U.S. would stick by South Vietnam, and doubts arising from the Viet Cong successes that Diem's unpopular and inefficient regime could beat the Viet Cong anyway. The report said that a U.S. military commitment in Vietnam was needed to meet the first difficulty; and that the second could best be met by supplying a generous infusion of American personnel to all levels of the Vietnamese government and army, who could, it was hoped, instill the Vietnamese with the right kind of winning spirit, and reform the regime "from the bottom up"

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despite Diem's weaknesses. The report recommended the dispatch of helicopter companies and other forms of combat support, but without great emphasis on these units. Probably, although the record does not specifically say so, there was a general understanding that such units would be sent even before the report was submitted, and that is why there is relatively little emphasis on the need for them.

The crucial issue was what form the American military commitment had to take to be effective. Taylor, in an eyes only cable to the President, argued strongly for a task force in the delta, consisting mainly of army engineers to work where there had been a major flood. The delta was also where the VC were strongest, and Taylor warned the President that the force would have to conduct some combat operations and expect to take casualties. But Taylor argued that the balance of the program, less this task force, would be insufficient, for we had to "convince Diem that we are willing to join him in a showdown with the Viet Cong..."

We do not know what advice President Kennedy received from State: Sorenson claims all the President's advisors on Vietnam favored sending the ground force; but George Ball, at least, who may not have been part of the formal decision group, is widely reported to have opposed such a move; so did Galbraith, then Ambassador to India, who happened to be in Washington; and perhaps some others. From Defense, the President received a memo from McNamara for himself, Gilpatric, and the JCS, stating that they were "inclined to recommend" the Taylor program, but only on the understanding that it would be followed up with more troops as needed, and with a willingness to attack North Vietnam. (The JCS estimated that 40,000 American troops would be needed to "clean up" the Viet Cong.) The Taylor Mission Report, and Taylor's own cables, had also stressed a probable need to attack, or at least threaten to attack, North Vietnam.

The McNamara memo was sent November 8. But on November 11, Rusk and McNamara signed a joint memo that reversed McNamara's earlier position: it recommended deferring, at least for the time being, the dispatch of combat units. This obviously suited Kennedy perfectly, and the NSAM embodying the decisions was taken essentially verbatim from the recommendations of the Rusk/McNamara paper, except that a recommendation that the U.S. was committing itself to prevent the loss of Vietnam was deleted.

But where the Taylor Report had implied a continuation of the May policy of trying to coax Diem into cooperating with the U.S., the new program was made contingent on Diem's acceptance of a list of reforms; further Diem was to be informed that if he accepted the program the U.S. would expect to "share in decision-making"...rather than "advise only". Thus, the effect of the decision was to give Diem less than he was expecting (no symbolic commitment of ground forces) but to accompany this limited offer with demands for which Diem was obviously both unprepared and unwilling to accede to. On top of this, there was the enormous (and not always recognized) extent to which U.S. policy was driven by the unthinkability of

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avoidably risking another defeat in Southeast Asia hard on the heels of the Laos retreat.

Consequently, the U.S. bargaining position was feeble. Further, Galbraith at least, and probably others, advised Kennedy that there was not much point to bargaining with Diem anyway, since he would never follow through on any promises he made. (Galbraith favored promoting an anti-Diem military coup at the earliest convenient moment.) Kennedy ended up settling for a set of promises that fell well short of any serious effort to make the aid program really contingent on reforms by Diem. Since the war soon thereafter began to look better, Kennedy never had occasion to reconsider his decision on combat troops; and no urgent reason to consider Galbraith's advice on getting rid of Diem until late 1963.

CHRONOLOGY

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THE KENNEDY PROGRAM AND COMMITMENTS: 1961

CHRONOLOGY

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1960-1961	Situation in Vietnam	<p>According to Ambassador Durbrow there was widespread popular dissatisfaction with the Diem Government and a growing guerrilla threat. At the same time, there had been a very gradual growth of U.S. involvement in assisting the GVN to counter the VC.</p> <p>In the U.S. two questions influenced decisions about Vietnam: first, what should the U.S. give Diem to counter the communists; secondly, what -- if any -- demands should be posed as a <u>quid pro quo</u> for assistance?</p>
	US-Soviet Relations	<p>The problems of dealing with Moscow were far more pressing than those related to Vietnam. A feeling that America's position in the world had been eroded by the USSR prevailed; Kennedy was particularly determined to regain American strength, prestige and influence. Anything which could be construed as American weakness <u>vis-a-vis</u> the USSR was to be avoided. This affected policy toward Vietnam.</p>
	Situation in Laos	<p>The US-backed, pro-American faction under Phoumi Nosavan was losing to the pro-Communist/neutralist faction supported by the Soviet Union. Commitment of U.S. forces was rejected and on May 2, 1961 a cease-fire was declared. President Kennedy decided to support a coalition solution, even though the odds on coalition leader Souvanna Phouma's staying in power were very low. As a consequence of this decision, Washington believed that Southeast Asian leaders doubted the sincerity of the U.S. commitment to the area, and the U.S. felt</p>

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		compelled to do something to restore confidence, demonstrate U.S. resolve and dispel any idea Moscow might have that the U.S. intended to withdraw from Southeast Asia. Laos was thus particularly influential in development of policy toward Vietnam.
20 Jan 1961	President Kennedy Inaugurated	
28 Jan 1961	Kennedy Approves the Counterinsurgency Plan (CIP) for Vietnam	<p>Gradually developed during 1961, the CIP was to be the basis for expanded U.S. assistance to Vietnam. Kennedy automatically approved its main provisions; negotiations with Diem about the CIP began 13 February and continued through May of 1961. The U.S. offered \$28.4 million to support a 20,000-man increase in the ARVN (for a new total of 170,000); to train, equip and supply a 32,000-man Civil Guard at \$12.7 million. The full package added less than \$42 million to the current \$220 million aid program.</p> <p>The CIP called for consolidation of the RVNAF chain of command (never fully accomplished under Diem.) No agreement was reached on the question of strategy during this period. (Diem wanted "strategic" outposts, Agrovilles, lines of strength throughout the country; the MAAG favored a "net and spear" concept -- small units operating out of pacified areas to find the enemy, call in reserve forces, gradually extend security to all of Vietnam.)</p> <p>Civil reforms included urging Diem to broaden his government, include opposition political leaders in the cabinet, give the National Assembly some power, institute civic action to win hearts, minds and loyalty of the peasants.</p>

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		<p>The CIP assumed the GVN had the potential to cope with the VC if necessary corrective measures were taken and if adequate forces were provided. The implicit bargain of the plan: the U.S. would support "adequate forces" if Diem would institute "necessary corrective measures." Again, although socio-political reforms were sought through the CIP and other plans, they were not realized during the early Kennedy years.</p>
Mid-Jan 1961	A Lansdale Report on Vietnam	<p>Following a trip to Vietnam, Major General E. G. Lansdale called for strong support for Diem and recommended the U.S. demonstrate that support immediately. Only if Diem's confidence in the U.S. were restored would U.S. influence be effective, said Lansdale. He recommended the immediate transfer of Durbrow (he was "too close to the forest" and was not trusted by the GVN) and immediate adoption of social, economic, political and military programs to prove U.S. backing for Diem as well as help Diem stabilize the countryside.</p>
February-May 1961	Durbrow Negotiations with Diem on the CIP	<p>Diem stalled the implementation of his "major promises" (to establish a central intelligence organization, put operational control for counter-insurgency operations under the military command system, reform the cabinet and governmental administration). Washington held up the "green light" on aid as long as Diem stalled -- although the JCS and MAAG in Saigon were impatient to get on with the war and were annoyed by the delay. Finally, in mid-May (after Durbrow had ended his four-year tour in Vietnam) Diem implemented some "major promises" by decree. But nothing changed.</p>

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12 Apr 1961	Rostow Memorandum for President Kennedy	W. W. Rostow suggested several ways for "gearing-up the whole Vietnam operation." These included: assigning a first-rate, fulltime backstop man in Washington to Vietnam affairs (Lansdale); a Vice Presidential visit in Southeast Asia; exploring ways to use new American techniques and gadgets in the fight against the VC; replacing the ICA (AID) chief; high-level discussion of tactics for persuading Diem to broaden his government; a Presidential letter to Diem in which Kennedy would reaffirm support for him but express the urgency attached to finding a "more effective political and morale setting" for military operations.
20 Apr 1961	The Presidential Program for Vietnam	Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric was directed to appraise the current status and future prospects of the VC drive in South Vietnam, then recommend a series of actions to prevent communist domination of the GVN. (At this same time: the Bay of Pigs invasion force surrendered and the Laos crisis was coming to a head.) Gilpatric and Lansdale headed a Task Force established immediately to carry out these instructions.
27 Apr 1961	Gilpatric Task Force Report submitted; the NSC meets	This first Task Force draft called for a moderate acceleration of the CIP program approved in January, with stress on vigor, enthusiasm and strong leadership. The report recommended building on present US-GVN programs, infusing them with a new sense of urgency and creating action programs in almost every field to create a viable and increasingly democratic government in SVN to prevent communist domination. No ARVN increase

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		beyond the already-authorized 20,000-man addition was recommended; a modest MAAG increase was proposed. The US would support the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps. Emphasis was on stabilizing the countryside, not on pressing Diem for political or administrative reforms. (Gilpatric wanted Lansdale to go to Vietnam immediately after the program was approved to consult with Vietnamese and US leaders and make further recommendations for action; but McNamara made Lansdale's mission contingent upon an invitation from the US Ambassador in Saigon -- an invitation that never came.)
		The NSC was to discuss this report but the 27 April meeting was dominated by the acute Laotian crisis.
28 Apr 1961	Laos Annex to (first) Task Force Report	A report -- a response, really -- concerning the critical situation in Laos and its effect on Vietnam was prepared for the NSC on 28 April. It recommended a two-division ARVN increase and deployment of 3600 US troops to Vietnam (two 1600-man teams to train each new division; 400 Special Forces troops to speed over-all ARVN counterinsurgency training). Rationale: to enable ARVN to guard against conventional invasion of South Vietnam. (Both the increased forces and their justification were different from two earlier reports. Lansdale had advocated no ARVN increase but felt some US force build-up was called for as a demonstration of American support for the GVN. Gilpatric's military aide, Colonel E. F. Black, wrote the other report which saw no need for more US troops but recommended expansion of ARVN to meet the threat of increased infiltration. These

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		views were rejected in favor of Black's second paper which advocated more ARVN troops -- to counter overt aggression, not increased infiltration -- and commitment of US troops for training purposes -- not for political reassurance or demonstration of US resolve. Black's second paper was sent to the NSC.)
29 Apr 1961	Kennedy Decisions on the Draft Report	Kennedy did not act on the Laos Annex. He approved only the limited military proposals contained in the first Gilpatric Task Force report. The 685-man MAAG would be increased to 785 to enable it to train the approved 20,000 new ARVN troops. Kennedy also authorized the MAAG to support and advise the Self Defense Corps (40,000 men); authorized MAP support for the entire Civil Guard of 68,000 (vice 32,000 previously supported); ordered installation of radar surveillance equipment and okayed MAP support and training for the Vietnamese Junk Force.
1 May 1961	NSC Meets; New Draft of the Task Force Report Issued	Kennedy again deferred decision on sending troops into Laos apparently because the feeling that the US would not make such a move was now firm. The 1 May draft report was little different from the 28 April version. The Laos Annex was incorporated into the main paper; the US was to make known its readiness to "intervene unilaterally" in Southeast Asia to fulfill SEATO commitments (vice intervene in conjunction with SEATO forces). ARVN increases were now justified by the threat of overt aggression as well as increased infiltration.

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3 May 1961	State (George Ball) Revision of Task Force Report	This draft was very different from the original. Lansdale's role was eliminated; the Gilpatric-Lansdale Task Force was to be replaced by a new group chaired by Ball, then Undersecretary of State. (Lansdale reacted with a "strong recommendation" that Defense stay out of the directorship proposed by State and said the "US past performance and theory of action, which State apparently desires to continue, simply offers no sound basis for winning...") In State's rewritten political section of the report, the Defense recommendation to make clear US determination to intervene unilaterally if necessary to save South Vietnam from communism was replaced by a proposal to explore new bilateral treaty arrangements with Diem (arrangements which might mean intervention against the guerrillas but might mean intervention only against DRV attack). The need for new arrangements was tied to the "loss" of Laos. State incorporated unchanged the Defense draft as the military section of its revised report, but implied "further study" would be given to some Defense recommendations. Overall, the State revision tried to tone down commitments to Vietnam suggested in the Defense version. It left the President a great deal of room to maneuver without explicitly overruling recommendations presented him.
5 May 1961	NSC Meeting	Again, Laos was the main subject. Most agreed the chance for salvaging anything out of the cease-fire and coalition government was slim indeed. Ways in which to reassure Vietnam and Thailand were sought. The Vice President's trip to Southeast Asia was announced after the meeting.

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6 May 1961	Second State Re-Draft of the Task Force Report	Here, military actions were contained in an annex; the political section reflected less panic over the loss of Laos; deployment of US troops was less definite -- called something which "might result from an NSC decision following discussions between Vice President Johnson and President Diem." The matter is being studied, said the draft. The report said: Diem "is not now fully confident of US support," that it is "essential (his) full confidence in and communication with the United States be restored promptly." (Lansdale's recommendations of January, April, etc.) The report called for a "major alteration in the present government structure," "believed" a combination of inducements plus discreet pressures might work, but it was unenthusiastic both about Diem, and his chances of success. The Diem-is-the-only-available-leader syndrome is evident here.
10 May 1961	JCSM 320-61	"Assuming the political decision is to hold Southeast Asia outside the communist sphere," the JCS emphatically recommended deployment of sufficient US forces to provide a visible deterrent to potential DRV/CHICOM action, release ARVN from static to active counterinsurgency operations, assist training and indicate US firmness. (In JCSM 311-61 of 9 May, the Chiefs recommended deployment of US forces to Thailand also.)
11 May 1961	NSAM 52	Directed "full examination" by DOD of a study on the size and composition of forces which might comprise a possible commitment of troops to Southeast Asia. In effect, Kennedy "took note" of the study but made no decision on the issue of troop

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		commitment. The Ambassador in Saigon was empowered to open negotiations about a bilateral treaty but was directed to make no commitments without further review by the President. These recommendations from the May 6 Task Force report were approved: help the GVN increase border patrol and counterinsurgency capability through aerial surveillance and new technological devices; help set up a center to test new weapons and techniques; help ARVN implement health, welfare and public work projects; deploy a 400-man special forces group to Nha Trang to accelerate ARVN training; instruct JCS, CINCPAC, MAAG to assess the military utility of an increase in ARVN from 170,000 to 200,000 (the two-division increase recommended previously).
9-15 May 1961	Vice President Johnson Visits Southeast Asia	Purpose: to reassure Asian leaders that despite Laos, the United States could be counted on to support them. Johnson reported the mission had halted the decline of confidence in the United States, but did not restore confidence already lost. Johnson strongly believed that faith must be restored, the "battle against communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination" (or the US would be reduced to a fortress America with defenses pulled back to California's shores); he believed there was no alternative to US leadership in Southeast Asia but that any help extended -- military, economic, social -- must be part of a mutual effort and contingent upon Asian willingness to "take the necessary measures to make our aid effective." He reported that American troops were neither required nor desired by Asian leaders at this time.

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		<p>Calling Thailand and Vietnam the most immediate, most important trouble spots, the Vice President said the US "must decide whether to support Diem -- or let Vietnam fall," opted for supporting Diem, said "the most important thing is imaginative, creative, American management of our military aid program," and reported \$50 million in military and economic assistance "will be needed if we decide to support Vietnam." The same amount was recommended for Thailand.</p> <p>The Vice President concluded by posing this as the fundamental decision: "whether...to meet the challenge of Communist expansion now in Southeast Asia or throw in the towel." Cautioning that "heavy and continuing costs" would be required, that sometime the US "may be faced with the further decision of whether we commit major United States forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw should our other efforts fail," Johnson recommended "we proceed with a clear-cut and strong program of action."</p>
18 May 1961	Lansdale Memorandum for Gilpatric	Lansdale noted Diem's rejection of US combat forces <u>per se</u> at this time but pointed out Diem seemed willing to accept troops for training purposes only. At this same time, MAAG Chief McGarr requested 16,000 US troops (combat units) be sent, nominally to establish centers to train RVNAF divisions. If Diem would not accept 16,000, McGarr would settle for 10,000 men.
5 June 1961	Rostow Note to McNamara	Saying "we must think of the kind of forces for Thailand now, Vietnam later," Rostow suggested "aircraft, helicopters, communications, men,

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		Special Forces, militia teachers, etc." would be needed to support a "counter-guerrilla war in Vietnam." Rostow does not mention combat units.
9 June 1961	Diem Letter to Kennedy	Here, in response to Vice President Johnson's request that he outline military needs, Diem did request US troops explicitly for training RVNAF "officers and technical specialists" -- not entire divisions. He proposed ARVN be increased from 170,000 to 270,000 to "counter the ominous threat of communist domination" -- a threat he documented by inflated infiltration figures and words about the "perilous" situation created by the Laos solution. To train these 100,000 new ARVN troops Diem asked for "considerable expansion" of the MAAG in the form of "selected elements of the American Armed Forces."
Mid-June to July 1961	The Staley Mission	A team headed by Eugene Staley (Stanford Research Institute) was to work with Vietnamese officials in an effort to resolve the continuing problem of how Vietnam was to finance its own war effort (deficit financing, inflation, the commodity import program, piaster/dollar exchange rates, all presented difficulties). But the Staley group became the vehicle for force level discussions and economic issues were treated rather perfunctorily. The group "does not consider itself competent to make specific recommendations as to desired force levels" but adopted two alternative levels for "economic planning purposes": 200,000 if the insurgency in Vietnam remains at present levels, if Laos does not fall; 270,000 if the Vietcong significantly increase the insurgency and if the communists win <u>de facto</u> control of Laos.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
11 Aug 1961	Kennedy Decision NSAM 65	President Kennedy agreed with the Staley Report (of 4 August) that security requirements demanded first priority, that economic and social programs had to be accelerated, that it was in the US interest to promote a viable Vietnam. He agreed to support an ARVN increase to 200,000 if Diem in turn agreed to a plan for using these forces. The 270,000 level was thus disapproved. But the plan for using ARVN forces had not yet been drawn. Diem had not yet designed -- much less implemented -- social reforms supposedly required in return for US assistance.
15 Aug 1961	NIE 14-3/53.61	Although collapse of the Saigon regime might come by a coup or from Diem's death, its fall because of a "prolonged and difficult" struggle was not predicted.
Late Aug 1961	Theodore White Reports	"The situation gets worse almost week by week..." particularly the military situation in the delta. If the U.S. decides it must intervene, White asked if we had the people, instruments or clear objectives to make it successful.
1 Sep 1961	General McGarr Reports	The ARVN has displayed increased efficiency, a spirit of renewed confidence is "beginning to permeate the people, the GVN and the Armed Forces."
27 Sep 1961	Nolting Reports	Nolting was "unable report...progress toward attainment task force goals of creating viable and increasingly democratic society," called the government and civil situation unchanged from early September. A series of large scale VC attacks in central Vietnam, the day-long VC seizure of Phuoc Vinh, capital of [former] Phuoc Thanh Province -- 55 miles from Saigon -- in

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
27 Sep 1961 (Continued)		which the VC publicly beheaded Diem's province chief and escaped before government troops arrived and increased infiltration through Laos demonstrated "that the tide has not yet turned" militarily.
1 Oct 1961	Diem Request	Diem requested a bilateral treaty with the U.S. This surprised Nolting but probably did not surprise the White House, already warned by White of the grave military situation.
1 Oct 1961	State "First 12-Month Report"	This political assessment mirrored Nolting's "no progress" report but State found the military situation more serious than Embassy reports had indicated.
5 Oct 1961	The "Rostow Proposal"	Suggested a 25,000-man SEATO force be put into Vietnam to guard the Vietnam/Laos border between the DMZ and Cambodia. (The Pathet Lao had gained during September, as had VC infiltration through Laos to the GVN. This prompted plans for U.S. action.)
9 Oct 1961	JCSM 717-61	The JCS rejected the Rostow proposal: forces would be stretched thin, they could not stop infiltration, and would be at the worst place to oppose potential DRV/CHICOM invasion. The Chiefs wanted to make a "concentrated effort in Laos where a firm stand can be taken saving all or substantially all of Laos which would, at the same time, protect Thailand and protect the borders of South Vietnam." But if this were "politically unacceptable" the Chiefs "provided...a possible limited interim course of action": deployment of about 20,000 troops to the central highlands near Pleiku to assist the GVN and free certain GVN forces for offensive action against the VC.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
10 Oct 1961	"Concept of Intervention in Vietnam"	Drafted by Alexis Johnson, the paper blended Rostow's border control proposal with the JCS win-control-of-the-highlands counter-proposal for the initial mission of U.S. forces in Vietnam. "The real and ultimate objective" of U.S. troops was also addressed. To defeat the Vietcong and render Vietnam secure under a non-Communist government, Johnson "guessed" three divisions would be the ultimate force required in support of the "real objective." The paper estimated a satisfactory settlement in Laos would reduce but not eliminate infiltration into South Vietnam, that even if infiltration were cut down, there was no assurance that the GVN could "in the foreseeable future be able to defeat the Viet Cong." Unilateral U.S. action would probably be necessary. The plan's viability was dependent on the degree in which the GVN accelerated "political and military action in its own defense."
11 Oct 1961	NSC Meeting on Vietnam	The NSC considered four papers: the Alexis Johnson draft; an NIE estimate that SEATO action would be opposed by the DRV, Viet Cong and the Soviet Union (airlift), that these forces stood a good chance of thwarting the SEATO intervention; third, a JCS estimate that 40,000 U.S. troops would be required to "clean up the Viet Cong threat" and another 128,000 men would be needed to oppose DRV/CHICOM intervention (draining 3 to 4 reserve divisions). Finally, a memorandum from William Bundy to McNamara which said "it <u>is</u> really now or never if we are to arrest the gains being made by the Viet Cong," and gave "an early and hard-hitting operation" a 70 percent chance of doing that. Bundy added, the chance of cleaning up the situation "depends

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
11 Oct 1961 (Continued)		on Diem's effectiveness, which is very problematical," favored going in with 70-30 odds but figured the odds would slide down if the U.S. "let, say, a month go by" before moving.
13 Oct 1961	Saigon Message 488	Reversing his previous position, Diem requested an additional fighter-bomber squadron, civilian pilots for helicopters and C-47 transports and U.S. combat units for a "combat-training" mission near the DMZ, possibly also in the highlands. He asked consideration be given a possible request for a division of Chiang Kai-shek's troops to support the GVN. Nolting recommended "serious and prompt" attention for the requests.
14 Oct 1961	<u>New York Times</u>	In an article leaked by the government -- perhaps by Kennedy himself -- leaders were called reluctant to send U.S. combat units into Southeast Asia. Obviously untrue, the leak was probably designed to end speculation about troop deployment and guard Kennedy's freedom of action.
20 Oct 1961	CINCPAC Recommendation	Admiral Felt felt the pros and cons of U.S. troop deployment added up in favor of <u>no</u> deployment until other means of helping Diem had been exhausted.
18-24 Oct 1961	Taylor Mission to Vietnam	On the 18th, Diem said he wanted no U.S. combat troops for any mission. He repeated his request for a bilateral defense treaty, more support for ARVN and combat-support equipment (helicopters, aircraft, etc.).
23 Oct 1961	Ch MAAG Message	General McGarr suggested that the serious Mekong River flood could provide a cover for U.S. troop deployment: combat units could be disguised as humanitarian relief forces and be dispatched to the delta.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
25 Oct 1961	Saigon Message 536	Taylor reported the pervasive crisis of confidence and serious loss in Vietnamese national morale created by Laos and the flood, weakened the war effort. To cope with this Taylor recommended: Improvement of intelligence on the VC; building ARVN mobility; blocking infiltration into the highlands by organizing a border ranger force; introduction of U.S. forces either for emergency, short-term assistance, or for more substantial, long-term support (a flood relief plus military reserve task force). Diem had reacted favorably "on all points."
1 Nov 1961	BAGUIO Message 0005	Taylor told the President, Rusk and McNamara "we should put in a task force (6-8,000 men) consisting largely of logistical troops for the purpose of participating in flood relief and at the same time of providing a U.S. military presence in Vietnam capable of assuring Diem of our readiness to join him in a military showdown with the Viet Cong..."
1 Nov 1961	BAGUIO 0006 <u>EYES ONLY</u> <u>FOR THE PRESIDENT</u>	Taylor concluded that the communist strategy of taking over Southeast Asia by guerrilla warfare was "well on the way to success in Vietnam"; he said the GVN was caught in "interlocking circles" of bad tactics and bad administrative arrangements" which allow VC gains and invite a political crisis. He recommended more U.S. support for paramilitary groups and ARVN mobility; the MAAG should be reorganized and increased and the task force introduced to "conduct such combat operations as are necessary for self-defense and for the security of the area in which (it) is stationed," among other things. Taylor felt the disadvantages of deployment were outweighed by gains, said SVN is "not an ex-

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1 Nov 1961 (Continued)		cessively difficult or unpleasant place to operate" and the "risks of backing into a major Asian war by way of SVN" are not impressive: North Vietnam "is extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing...there is no case for fearing a mass onslaught of communist manpower... particularly if our air power is allowed a free hand against logistical targets..."
3 Nov 1961	Taylor Report	The "Evaluation and Summary" section suggested urgency and optimism: SVN is in trouble, major U.S. interests are at stake; prompt and energetic U.S. action -- military, economic, political -- can lead to victory without a U.S. take-over of the war, can cure weaknesses in the Diem regime. That the Vietnamese must win the war was a unanimous view -- but most mission participants believed all Vietnamese operations could be substantially improved by America's "limited partnership" with the GVN. The GVN is cast in the best possible light; any suggestion that the U.S. should limit rather than expand its commitment -- or face the need to enter the battle in full force at this time -- is avoided. Underlying the summary was the notion that "graduated measures on the DRV (applied) with weapons or our own choosing" could reverse any adverse trend in the South. And ground troops were always possible. The Taylor Report recommended the U.S. make obvious its readiness to act, develop reserve strength in the U.S. "to cover action in Southeast Asia up to the nuclear threshold in that area" and thereby sober the enemy and discourage escalation. However, bombing was a more likely Vietnam contingency than was use of ground troops; the latter

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
3 Nov 1961 (Continued)		<p>option was tied to a U.S. response to renewed fighting in Laos and/or overt invasion of South Vietnam. But Taylor suggested troops be sent to Diem; the Taylor Report and cables recommend combat troop deployment to Vietnam. (A message from Nolting summarizing the Diem-Taylor meeting on which the recommendations apparently rest (Saigon message 541, 25 Oct 61) does not indicate any enthusiasm on Diem's part to deployment of troops, however. He hinted U.S. troops for training <u>might</u> be requested, then dropped the subject.)</p> <p>Appendices to the Taylor Report written by members of the group give a slightly different picture. There is less optimism about the GVN's chances of success, less optimism about chances of U.S. action -- political or military -- tipping the balance. For example: William Jordan (State) said almost all Vietnamese interviewed had emphasized the gravity of the situation, growing VC successes and loss of confidence in Diem. The ARVN lacked aggressiveness, was devoid of any sense of urgency, short of able leaders. Sterling Cottrell (State) said: It is an open question whether the GVN can succeed even with U.S. assistance. Thus it would be a mistake to make an irrevocable U.S. commitment to defeat communists in South Vietnam. Foreign military forces cannot win the battle at the village level -- where it must be joined; the primary responsibility for saving Vietnam must rest with the GVN. For these reasons Cottrell argued against a treaty which would either shift ultimate responsibility to the U.S. or engage a full U.S. commitment to defeat the Vietcong.</p>

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
5 Nov 1961	SNIE 10-4-61	This estimated the DRV would respond to an increased U.S. troop commitment by increasing support to the Vietcong. If U.S. commitment to the GVN grew, so would DRV support to the VC. Four possible U.S. courses were given: airlift plus more help for ARVN; deployment of 8-10,000 troops as a flood relief task force; deployment of 25-40,000 combat troops; with each course, warn Hanoi of U.S. determination to hold SVN and U.S. intention to bomb the DRV if its support for the VC did not cease. The SNIE estimated air attacks against the North would not cause its VC support to stop and figured Moscow and Peking would react strongly to air attacks.
8 Nov 1961	McNamara Memorandum for the President	Secretary McNamara, Gilpatric and the JCS were "inclined to recommend that we do commit the U.S. to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to communism and that we support this commitment by the necessary military actions." The memorandum said the fall of Vietnam would create "extremely serious" strategic implications worldwide, that chances were "probably sharply against" preventing that fall without a U.S. troop commitment but that even with major troop deployment (205,000 was the maximum number of ground forces estimated necessary to deal with a large overt invasion from the DRV and/or China) the U.S. would still be at the mercy of external forces -- Diem, Laos, domestic political problems, etc. -- and thus success could not be guaranteed. McNamara recommended against deployment of a task force (the 8,000-man group mentioned in the Taylor Report) "unless we are willing to make an affirmative decision" to full support a commitment to save South Vietnam.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
11 Nov 1961	Rusk/McNamara Memorandum for the President	This may have been prepared at Kennedy's specific instruction; it recommended what Kennedy wanted to hear: that the decision to commit major ground forces could be deferred. In this paper, rhetoric is escalated from that of McNamara's 8 November memorandum but U.S. actions recommended are far less significant, less committing. Military courses are divided into two phases: first, promptly deploy support troops and equipment (helicopters, transport aircraft, maritime equipment and trainers, special intelligence and air reconnaissance groups, other men and materiel to improve training, logistics, economic and other assistance programs). Then study and <u>possibly</u> deploy major ground combat forces at a later date. Despite the clear warning that even deployment of major U.S. units could not assure success against communism, the memorandum's initial recommendation was that the U.S. "commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism," be prepared to send troops and to "strike at the source of aggression in North Vietnam." A number of diplomatic moves (in the U.N., in NATO and SEATO councils, etc.) are suggested to signal U.S. determination; economic, social and other programs designed to help South Vietnam are suggested; ways to elicit improvements from Diem are recommended.
14 Nov 1961	DEPTEL 619 to Saigon	This was Nolting's guidance, based on the Rusk/McNamara memorandum. Nolting was told the anti-guerrilla effort "must essentially be a GVN task...No amount of extra aid can be substitute for GVN taking measures to permit [it] to assume offensive

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
14 Nov 1961		and strengthen the administrative and political bases of governmentDo not propose to introduce into GVN the U.S. combat troops now but propose a phase of intense public and diplomatic activity to focus on infiltration from North. Shall decide later on course of action should infiltration not be radically reduced." Diem's taking necessary measures -- political, military, economic -- to improve his government and relations with the people were a prerequisite to further U.S. assistance: "Package should be presented as first steps in a partnership in which the U.S. is prepared to do more as joint study of facts and GVN performance makes increased U.S. aid possible and productive." Strictly for his own information, Nolting was told Defense was "preparing plans for the use of U.S. combat forces in SVN under various contingencies, including stepped up infiltration as well as organized...(military) intervention. However, objective of our policy is to do all possible to accomplish purpose without use of U.S. combat forces." And, Nolting was to tell Diem: "We would expect to share in the decision-making process in the political, economic and military fields as they affect the security situation."
22 Nov 1961	NSAM 111	Called the "First Phase of Vietnam Program" this NSAM approved all Rusk/McNamara recommendations of 11 November except the first one: their initial recommendation that the U.S. commit itself to saving South Vietnam was omitted.
7 Dec 1961	Alexis Johnson/Rostow Redraft ("Clarification") of Nolting's 14 November guidance	"What we have in mind is that in operations directly related to the security situation, partnership will be so close that one party

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
7 Dec 1961 (Continued)		will not take decisions or actions affecting the other without full and frank prior consultation." This is different from the idea that American involvement should be so intimate that the GVN would be reformed "from the bottom up" -- despite Diem. (Although Washington gave in -- or gave up -- on the kind and degree of pressure to exert on Diem, Washington did not soften on Lansdale. Despite four requests from Diem and the recommendations from Cottrell, the Taylor Report and William Bundy that Lansdale be sent to Saigon, he did not get there until late 1965.)
11 Dec 1961	<u>New York Times</u>	Two U.S. helicopter companies (33 H-21Cs, 400 men) arrived in Vietnam, the first direct U.S. military support for the GVN. ICC reaction: shall we continue functioning here in the face of U.S. assistance (increase barred by the Geneva Accords)?
15 Dec 1961	<u>New York Times</u>	Reported the formal exchange of letters between Kennedy and Diem announcing a stepped-up aid program for Vietnam.

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IV.B.1. KENNEDY PROGRAM AND COMMITMENTS: 1961

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EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

KENNEDY PROGRAM AND COMMITMENTS: 1961

IV.B.1.

CHAPTER I

I. INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1959, it was hard to find an American official worried about Vietnam. This was not because things were going well. They were not. A National Intelligence Estimate published in August portrayed Diem as unpopular, his economy as developing less rapidly than its rival in the North, and his government under pressure from guerrillas encouraged and in part supported from the North. Nevertheless, the NIE suggested no crisis then or for the foreseeable future. What the NIE called "harassment" (i.e., support for the VC) from the North would continue, but overt invasion seemed most unlikely. Neither communist nor anti-communist enemies within South Vietnam were seen as an immediate threat. Diem would remain as President, said the NIE, "formany years." In sum, the NIE saw the situation in Vietnam as unhappy, but not unstable. That was to be about as close to good news as we would hear from South Vietnam for a long time. 1/

From then on, the classified record through the end of 1961 shows a succession of bleak appraisals of the regime's support in the cities, and among the military, almost always accompanied by increasingly bleak estimates of increased VC strength and activity in the countryside. A dispatch from our Embassy in Saigon in March, 1960, described the situation in grave terms, but ended on the hopeful note that as of January Diem was recognizing his problems and promising to do something about them. 2/ In August, an NIE analysis reported a "marked deterioration since January." 3/ In November, a military coup barely failed to overthrow Diem.

In January, 1961 an old counterinsurgency hand, General Edward Lansdale, went to Vietnam to look things over for the Secretary of Defense. He returned with a report that "the Viet Cong hope to win back Vietnam south of the 17th parallel this year, if at all possible, and are much further along towards accomplishing this goal than I had realized from reading the reports received in Washington." 4/

Nevertheless, the situation was never seen as nearly so grave as these reports, read years later, might suggest. We will see that at least up until the fall of 1961, while appraisals of the situation sometimes suggested imminent crisis, the recommendations made to the President (by the authors of these frightening appraisals) always implied a less pessimistic view.

The top levels of the Kennedy Administration dealt only intermittently with the problem of Vietnam during 1961. There was a flurry of

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of activity in late April and early May, which we will see was essentially an offshoot of the Laos crisis which had come to a head at that time. A much more thorough review was undertaken in the fall, following General Taylor's mission to Saigon, which then led to an important expansion of the American effort in Vietnam.

No fundamental new American decisions on Vietnam were made until the Buddhist unrest in the last half of 1963, and no major new military decisions were made until 1965. Consequently, the decisions in the fall of 1961 (essentially, to provide combat support -- for example, helicopter companies -- but to defer any decision on direct combat troops) have come to seem very important. This paper tries to describe what led up to those decisions, what alternatives were available and what the implications of the choices were.

The story is a fairly complicated one. For although it is hard to recall that context today, Vietnam in 1961 was a peripheral crisis. Even within Southeast Asia it received far less of the Administration's and the world's attention than did Laos. The New York Times Index for 1961 has eight columns of Vietnam, twenty-six on Laos. Decisions about Vietnam were greatly influenced by what was happening elsewhere. In the narrow Vietnamese context, the weaknesses and peculiarities of the Diem government had a substantial, if not always obvious, impact on the behavior of both the Vietnamese officials seeking American aid and the American decision-makers pondering the nature and terms of the aid they would offer.

As it happens, the Eisenhower Administration was never faced with a need for high-level decisions affecting the crisis developing in Vietnam during 1960. A formal Counterinsurgency Plan, intended to be the basis of an expanded program of assistance to Vietnam, was being worked on through most of that year, but (presumably reflecting a subdued sense of urgency), it took eight months to reach the White House. By that time, a new Administration had just taken office. President Kennedy promptly approved the plan, but this merely set off lengthy negotiations with the Vietnamese about whether and when they would do their share of the CIP. In late April, though, a crisis atmosphere developed, not because of anything fresh out of Vietnam, but because of a need to shore up the Vietnamese and others in Southeast Asia in the face of a likely collapse of the U.S. position in Laos. This led to a U.S. offer to discuss putting American troops into Vietnam, or perhaps negotiate a bilateral security treaty with the Vietnamese. When, however, Vice President Johnson mentioned the possibility of troops to Diem in May, Diem said he wanted no troops yet. The idea of a bilateral treaty similarly slipped out of sight. Consequently, although the United States had itself indicated a willingness in May to discuss a deeper commitment, the South Vietnamese did not take up the opportunity, and the Administration had no occasion to face up to really hard decisions.

But by October, the situation in Vietnam had worsened. The VC were becoming disturbingly aggressive. Now, Diem did raise the question of

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a treaty. This request, coming after the American offer in May to consider such steps and in the context of a worsening situation in Vietnam, could hardly be ignored. The Taylor Mission and the Presidential review and decisions of November followed.

The present paper is organized around these natural climaxes in the policy process. The balance of Part I describes the situation inherited by the new Administration. Part II covers the period through the May peak. Part III covers the fall crisis.

II. THE CONTEXT

In January, 1961, there were five issues that were going to affect American policy toward Vietnam. They turned on:

1. The VC Insurgency Itself

An illustration of the growth of the insurgency, but also of the limits of U.S. concern can be seen in the 1960 CINCPAC Command History. For several years prior to 1960, CINCPAC histories do not mention the VC insurgency at all. In 1960, the development of a counterinsurgency plan for Vietnam (and simultaneously one for Laos) received a fair amount of attention. But when, in April, MAAG in Saigon asked for additional transports and helicopters for the counterinsurgency effort, CINCPAC turned down the requests for transports, and OSD overruled the recommendation CINCPAC forwarded for 6 helicopters. By December, OSD was willing to approve sending 11 helicopters (of 16 newly requested) on an "emergency" basis. But the emergency was partly a matter of reassuring Diem after the November coup, and the degree of emergency is suggested by the rate of delivery: 4 in December, and the balance over the next three months. 5/

The record, in general, indicates a level of concern such as that illustrated by the helicopter decisions: growing gradually through 1960, but still pretty much of a back-burner issue so far as the attention and sense of urgency it commanded among policy-level officials. As we will see, the new Kennedy Administration gave it more attention, as the Eisenhower Administration undoubtedly would have had it remained in office. But it is important (though hard, now that Vietnam has loomed so large) to keep in mind how secondary an issue the VC threat to Vietnam seemed to be in early 1961.

2. Problems With the Diem Government

Yet, although the VC gains were not seen -- even in the dispatches from Saigon -- as serious enough to threaten the immediate collapse of the Diem government, those gains did have the effect of raising difficult questions about our relations with Diem that we had never had to face before. For by late 1960, it was a quite widely held view that the Diem government

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was probably going to be overthrown sooner or later, barring major changes from within. In contrast to the May 1959 NIE's confident statement that Diem "almost certainly" would remain president "for many years," we find the August 1960 NIE predicting that the recent "adverse trends," if continued, would "almost certainly in time cause the collapse of Diem's regime." 6/

The simple, unhappy fact was that whatever his triumphs in 1955 and 1956, by the end of the 1950s the feeling was growing that the best thing that could be said for Diem was that he was holding the country together and keeping it from succumbing to the communists. Once even this came into doubt, talk among Vietnamese and eventually among Americans of whether it might be better to look for alternative leadership became inevitable.

The sense of trouble shows through even among the optimists. We find Kenneth Young, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand and a strong believer in Diem, warning him in October, 1960 that "there seems to be somewhat of a crisis of confidence in Vietnam." 7/

But the long list of measures Young suggested were all tactical in nature, and required no basic changes in the regime.

Our Ambassador in Saigon (Eldridge Durbrow) was more pessimistic:

...situation in Viet-Nam [December, 1960] is highly dangerous to US interests. Communists are engaged in large-scale guerrilla effort to take over countryside and oust Diem's Government. Their activities have steadily increased in intensity throughout this year. In addition, Diem is faced with widespread popular dissatisfaction with his government's inability to stem the communist tide and its own heavy-handed methods of operation. It seems clear that if he is to remain in power he must meet these two challenges by improvements in his methods of conducting war against communists and in vigorous action to build greater popular support. We should help and encourage him to take effective action. Should he not do so, we may well be forced, in not too distant future, to undertake difficult task of identifying and supporting alternate leadership. 8/

But the difficulties (and risks) of that task looked forbidding. During the November, 1960 coup attempt the U.S. had apparently used its influence to get the coup leaders to negotiate with Diem for reforms, allowing Diem to retain his position with reduced powers. Whether because of their own indecision or U.S. pressure, the coup leaders allowed a delay that let Diem bring loyalist troops in to regain control. (Three years

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later, a leader of the November, 1963 coup "somewhat emphatically" told an American agent that "it would do no good to send anyone around to attempt to stop things, as happened in November, 1960.") 9/

The situation that was left -- with a number of American officials unhappy with Diem and doubtful that he was capable of winning the war, yet unwilling to risk a coup -- produced strains within the American government. Short of encouraging a coup, we seemed to have two alternatives: attempt to pressure Diem or attempt to so win his confidence that he would accept our advice willingly. The only effective form of U.S. pressure, however, was to withhold aid, and doing so would sooner or later weaken the war effort.

Consequently a division developed, mainly (but not purely) along the lines of Defense against State, about the advisability of using pressure. The division was particularly sharp since Diem seemed willing to go part way, at least, in meeting our military suggestions, so that the Defense view tended to be that the U.S. would be weakening the war effort if aid were withheld to seek to gain civil reforms that not many people in Defense regarded as crucial. Besides, it was argued, Diem would not succumb to pressure anyway. We would just encourage another coup, and the communists would exploit it.

Given this sort of argument, there would always (at least through 1961) be at least two layers to decisions about aid to Vietnam: What should the U.S. be willing to give? and What, if any, demands should be made on Diem in return for the aid?

3. Problems With the Soviets

But from Washington, both problems within Vietnam -- how to deal with the Viet Cong, and how to deal with Diem -- seemed quite inconsequential compared to the problems of dealing with the Soviets. There were two elements to the Soviet problem. The first, which only indirectly affected Vietnam, was the generally aggressive and confident posture of the Russians at that time, and the generally defensive position of the Americans. To use W.W. Rostow's terminology, the Soviets were then entering the third year of their "post-sputnik" offensive, and their aggressiveness would continue through the Cuban missile crisis. On the U.S. side there was dismay even among Republicans (openly, for example, by Rockefeller; necessarily subdued by Nixon, but reported by any number of journalists on the basis of private conversations) at what seemed to be an erosion of the American position in the world. The Coolidge Commission, appointed by the President, warned him in January, 1960, 'to, among other steps, "close the missile gap" and generally strengthen our defenses. Kennedy, of course, made erosion of our position in the world a major campaign issue. All of this made 1961 a peculiarly difficult year for Americans to make concessions, or give ground to the Soviets when it could be avoided, or even postponed. That was clear

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in January, and everything thereafter that was, or could be interpreted to be a weak U.S. response, only strengthened the pressure to hold on in Vietnam. 10/

A further element of the Soviet problem impinged directly on Vietnam. The new Administration, even before taking office, was inclined to believe that unconventional warfare was likely to be terrifically important in the 1960s. In January 1961, Krushchev seconded that view with his speech pledging Soviet support to "wars of national liberation." Vietnam was where such a war was actually going on. Indeed, since the war in Laos had moved far beyond the insurgency stage, Vietnam was the only place in the world where the Administration faced a well-developed Communist effort to topple a pro-Western government with an externally-aided pro-communist insurgency. It was a challenge that could hardly be ignored.

4. The Situation in Laos

Meanwhile, within Southeast Asia itself there was the peculiar problem of Laos, where the Western position was in the process of falling apart as Kennedy took office. The Eisenhower Administration had been giving strong support to a pro-American faction in Laos. As a consequence, the neutralist faction had joined in an alliance with the pro-communist faction. The Soviets were sending aid to the neutralist/communist alliance, which they recognized as the legitimate government in Laos; the U.S. recognized and aided the pro-western faction. Unfortunately, it turned out that the neutralist/communist forces were far more effective than those favored by the U.S., and so it became clear that only by putting an American army into Laos could the pro-Western faction be kept in power. Indeed, it was doubtful that even a coalition government headed by the neutralists (the choice the U.S. adopted) could be salvaged. The coalition government solution would raise problems for other countries in Southeast Asia: there would be doubts about U.S. commitments in that part of the world, and (since it was obvious that the communist forces would be left with de facto control of eastern Laos), the settlement would create direct security threats for Thailand and Vietnam. These problems would accompany a "good" outcome in Laos (the coalition government); if the Pathet Lao chose to simply overrun the country outright (as, short of direct American intervention, they had the power to do), the problem elsewhere in Southeast Asia would be so much the worse. Consequently, throughout 1961, we find the effects of the Laos situation spilling over onto Vietnam.

5. The Special American Commitment to Vietnam

Finally, in this review of factors that would affect policy-making on Vietnam, we must note that South Vietnam, (unlike any of the other countries in Southeast Asia) was essentially the creation of the United States.

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Without U.S. support Diem almost certainly could not have consolidated his hold on the South during 1955 and 1956.

Without the threat of U.S. intervention, South Vietnam could not have refused to even discuss the elections called for in 1956 under the Geneva settlement without being immediately overrun by the Viet Minh armies.

Without U.S. aid in the years following, the Diem regime certainly, and an independent South Vietnam almost as certainly, could not have survived.

Further, from 1954 on there had been repeated statements of U.S. support for South Vietnam of a sort that we would not find in our dealings with other countries in this part of the world. It is true there was nothing unqualified about this support: it was always economic, and occasionally accompanied by statements suggesting that the Diem regime had incurred an obligation to undertake reforms in return for our assistance. But then, until 1961, there was no occasion to consider any assistance that went beyond economic support and the usual sort of military equipment and advice, and no suggestion that our continued support was in doubt.

Consequently, the U.S. had gradually developed a special commitment in South Vietnam. It was certainly not absolutely binding, even at the level of assistance existing at the start of 1961, much less at any higher level the South Vietnamese might come to need or request. But the commitment was there; to let it slip would be awkward, at the least. Whether it really had any impact on later decisions is hard to say. Given the other factors already discussed, it is not hard to believe that in its absence, U.S. policy might have followed exactly the same course it has followed. On the other hand, in the absence of a pre-existing special relation with South Vietnam, the U.S. in 1961 possibly would have at least considered a coalition government for Vietnam as well as Laos, and chosen to limit direct U.S. involvement to Thailand and other countries in the area historically independent of both Hanoi and Peking. But that is the mootest sort of question. For if there had been no pre-existing commitment to South Vietnam in 1961, there would not have been a South Vietnam to worry about anyway.

III. SUMMARY

Looking over the context we have been reviewing, it seems like a situation in which mistakes would be easy to make. The Viet Cong threat was serious enough to demand action; but not serious enough to compete with other crises and problems for the attention of senior decision-makers. A sound decision on tactics and levels of commitment to deal with the Viet Cong involved as much a judgment on the internal politics of non-communists in Vietnam as it did a judgment of the guerrillas' strength, and character, and relation with Hanoi. (Even a judgement that the war could be treated as a strictly military problem after all, involved at least an implicit judgement, and a controversial one, about Vietnamese politics.) Even if Diem

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looked not worth supporting it would be painful to make a decision to let him sink, and especially so in the world context of 1961. Faced with a challenge to deal with wars of national liberation, it would be hard to decide that the first one we happened to meet was "not our style." And after the U.S. stepped back in Laos, it might be hard to persuade the Russians that we intended to stand firm anywhere if we then gave up on Vietnam. Finally, if the U.S. suspected that the best course in Vietnam was to seek immediately an alternative to Diem, no one knew who the alternative might be, or whether getting rid of Diem would really make things better.

Such was the prospect of Vietnam as 1961 began, and a new Administration took office.

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THE COUNTERINSURGENCY PLAN

IV.B.

CHAPTER II

I. WINTER, 1961

The Vietnam Counter-Insurgency Plan which was being worked on through most of 1960 finally reached the White House in late January, apparently just after Kennedy took office. We do not have a document showing the exact date, but we know that Kennedy approved the main provisions of the Plan after a meeting on January 28th, and negotiations with Diem began February 13. 1/

The provisions of the CIP tell a good deal about how the Viet Cong threat looked to American and Vietnamese officials at the beginning of 1961, for there is nothing in the record to suggest that anyone -- either in Saigon or Washington, Vietnamese or American -- judged the CIP to be an inadequate response to the VC threat.

The U.S. offered Diem equipment and supplies to outfit a 20,000 man increase in his army. The cost was estimated at \$28.4 million. The U.S. also offered to train, outfit and supply 32,000 men of the Civil Guard (a counter guerrilla auxilliary) at a cost of \$12.7 million. These two moves would help Diem expand the RVNAF to a total of 170,000 men, and expand the Civil Guard to a total of 68,000 men. There were some further odds and ends totalling less than another million. The full package added up to less than \$42 million, which was a substantial but not enormous increment to on-going U.S. aid to Vietnam of about \$220 million a year. (Since most of these costs were for initial outfitting of new forces, the package was mainly a one-time shot in the arm.) 2/

For their part, the Vietnamese were supposed to pay the local currency costs of the new forces, and carry out a number of military and civil reforms.

The key military reforms were to straighten out the chain of command, and to develop an agreed overall plan of operations.

[The chain of command problem was that control of the counter-insurgency effort in the provinces was divided between the local military commander and the Province Chief, a personal appointee of Diem, and reporting directly to Diem. Even at a higher level, 3 regional field commands reported directly to Diem, by-passing the Chief of Staff. So a total of 42 officials with some substantial (and overlapping) control of the war effort reported directly to Diem: 38 Province Chiefs, 3 regional commanders, and the Chief of Staff. The "reform" eventually gotten from Diem put

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the regional commanders under the Chief of Staff, and combined the office of Province Chief (usually a military man in any event) and local field commander. But the Province Chiefs still were personally responsible to Diem, and could appeal directly to him outside the nominal chain of command. Diem's reform, consequently, turned out to be essentially meaningless. His reluctance to move on this issue was not surprising. After all, the division and confusion of military authority served a real purpose for a ruler like Diem, with no broad base of support: it lessened the chance of a coup that would throw him out.

√The overall plan issue, on which not even a paper agreement was reached during the period covered by this account, was really an argument over strategy. It has a familiar ring.

√Diem seemed oriented very much towards maintaining at least the pretense of control over all of South Vietnam. Consequently, he favored maintaining military outposts (and concentrating the population in Agrovilles, the predecessors of the strategic hamlets) along "lines of strength" (generally main roads) which stretched throughout the country. To assert at least nominal control over the countryside between these lines of strength, the military forces would periodically organize a sweep. In contrast to this, the American plan stressed what MAAG called a "net and spear" concept. Small units would scour the jungles beyond the pacified area. When this "net" found an enemy unit, they would call in reserves (the spear) for a concentrated attempt to destroy the unit. As new areas were thus cleared, the net would be pushed further out into previously uncontested areas. It is not clear how well refined either concept was, or (with hindsight) whether the American plan was really a great deal more realistic than Diem's. But the American interest in getting Diem to agree to a plan does seem to have been primarily oriented to getting him to agree to some systematic procedure for using forces to clear areas of VC control, instead of tying up most of his forces defending fixed installations, with periodic uneventful sweeps through the hinterland.] 3/

On the civil side, the stress in the CIP was on trying to shore up the regime's support within the cities by such steps as bringing opposition leaders into the government, and giving the National Assembly the power to investigate charges of mismanagement and corruption in the executive.

The Plan also called for "civic action" and other steps to increase the change of winning positive loyalty from the peasants. 4/

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A good deal of bureaucratic compromise had gone into the CIP. Ambassador Durbrow only reluctantly conceded any real need for the 20,000 man force increase. The stress on civil reforms, in particular on civil reforms as part of a quid pro quo, came into the plan only after the Saigon Embassy became involved, although there were general allusions to such things even in the original military draft of the CIP.

Nevertheless, there was at least a paper agreement, and so far as the record shows, substantial real agreement as well. No one complained the plan was inadequate. It would, "if properly implemented," "turn the tide." And, by implication, it would do so without any major increase in American personnel in Vietnam, and indeed, aside from the one-shot outfitting of the new units, without even any major increase in American aid. 5/

None of this meant that the warnings that we have seen in the Saigon Embassy's dispatches or in the August SNIE were not seriously intended. What it did mean was that, as of early 1961, the view that was presented to senior officials in Washington essentially showed the VC threat as a problem which could be pretty confidently handled, given a little more muscle for the army and some shaping up by the Vietnamese administration. Any doubts expressed went to the will and competence of the Diem regime, not to the strength of the VC, the role of Hanoi, or the adequacy of U.S. aid.

Consequently, among the assumptions listed as underlying the CIP, we find (with emphasis added):

That the Government of Viet-Nam has the basic potential to cope with the Viet Cong guerrilla threat if necessary corrective measures are taken and adequate forces are provided. 6/

That of course was the heart of the CIP bargain: the U.S. would provide support for the "adequate forces" if Diem would take the "necessary corrective steps." The hinted corollary was that our commitment to Diem should be contingent on his performance:

That at the present time the Diem government offers the best hope for defeating the Viet Cong. 7/

II. LANSDALE'S REPORT

Running against these suggestions (of a firm bargaining position contingent on Diem's performance), was concern that if Diem were overthrown his successors might be no better; and that the VC might exploit the confusion and perhaps even civil war following a coup. Further, there was an argument that part of Diem's reluctance to move on reforms was that he was

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afraid to make any concession that might weaken his grip: consequently the U.S. needed to reassure him that he could count on our firm support to him personally.

A strong statement of this point of view is contained in a report submitted in January by Brig. General Edward Lansdale, then the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Special Operations. Lansdale had become famous for his work in the Philippines advising on the successful campaign against the Huk insurgents. In 1955 and 1956, he was a key figure in installing and establishing Diem as President of South Vietnam. As mentioned in the Introduction, Lansdale visited Vietnam in early January. Here, from his report, are a few extracts on Diem and how Lansdale felt he should be handled:

...We must support Ngo Dinh Diem until another strong executive can replace him legally. President Diem feels that Americans have attacked him almost as viciously as the Communists, and he has withdrawn into a shell for self-protection. We have to show him by deeds, not words alone, that we are his friend. This will make our influence effective again.

...If the next American official to talk to President Diem would have the good sense to see him as a human being who has been through a lot of hell for years -- and not as an opponent to be beaten to his knees -- we would start regaining our influence with him in a healthy way. Whatever else we might think of him, he has been unselfish in devoting his life to his country and has little in personal belongings to show for it. If we don't like the heavy influence of Brother Nhu, then let's move someone of ours in close. This someone, however, must be able to look at problems with understanding, suggest better solutions than does Nhu, earn a position of influence....

Ambassador Durbrow should be transferred in the immediate future. He has been in the 'forest of tigers' which is Vietnam for nearly four years now and I doubt that he himself realizes how tired he has become or how close he is to the individual trees in this big woods. Correctly or not, the recognized government of Vietnam does not look upon him as a friend, believing he sympathized strongly with the coup leaders of 11 November.

...Ngo Dinh Diem is still the only Vietnamese with executive ability and the required determination to be an effective President. I believe there will be another attempt to get rid of him soon, unless the U.S. makes it clear that we are backing him as the elected top man. If the 11 November coup had been successful, I believe that a number of highly selfish and

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mediocre people would be squabbling among themselves for power while the Communists took over. The Communists will be more alert to exploit the next coup attempt.... 8/

Lansdale's view was not immediately taken up, even though Hilsman reports that his presentation impressed Kennedy enough to start the President thinking about sending the General to Saigon as our next Ambassador. 9/ Instead, Kennedy made what was under the circumstances the easiest, least time-consuming decision, which was simply to let the Ambassador he had inherited from the Eisenhower Administration go forward and make a try with the plan and negotiating tactics already prepared.

Durbrow's guidance specifically tells him (in instructions he certainly found suited his own view perfectly):

...considered U.S. view (is) that success requires implementation entire plan...If Ambassador considers GVN does not provide necessary cooperation, he should inform Washington with recommendations which may include suspension U.S. contribution. 10/

III. NEGOTIATING THE CIP

Kennedy's approval of the CIP apparently was seen as quite a routine action. None of the memoirs of the period give it any particular attention. And, although both Schlesinger and Hilsman refer to General Lansdale's report as shocking the President about the state of things in Vietnam, that report itself does not criticize the CIP, or the adequacy of its programs.

The guidance to Durbrow assumed agreement could be reached "within two weeks." This choice of language in the guidance cable implies that we believed Diem would quickly agree on the terms of the CIP, and the question of using pressure against him ("suspension of U.S. contribution") would only arise later, should he fail to follow through on his part of the agreement. 11/

As it turned out, Durbrow's efforts took a more complicated form. Even reaching a nominal agreement on the CIP took about 6 weeks. Then, Durbrow recommended holding up what is constantly referred to as "the green light" on increased aid until Diem had actually signed decrees implementing his major promises.

On March 8 (in response to a Washington suggestion for stepping up some aid prior to agreement on the CIP), Saigon cabled that:

...despite pressure of Embassy and MAAG, GVN has not decreed the required measures and will continue to delay unless highly pressured to act. 12/

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But by the 16th both the MAAG Chief and the Ambassador were taking a gentler line. Durbrow's cable of that date reports that agreement on military reforms had reached a point "which MAAG considers it can live with provided GVN follows through with proper implementation." He was more concerned about the civil reforms, but nevertheless concluded the cable with:

Comments: Diem was most affable, exuded confidence and for first time expressed some gratitude our CIP efforts which he promised implement as best he could. Again before giving full green light believe we should await outcome detail discussion by GVN-US officials. In meantime MAAG quietly ordering some equipment for 20,000 increase. 13/

And a week later, Washington replied, agreeing that the "green light" should be held up until the CIP was approved, but also noting that since success depended on the willing cooperation of the Vietnamese, the Embassy ought not to push Diem too hard in the negotiations. 14/

Following this, the CIP negotiations dragged on inconclusively, and there is a ghostly quality to it all. There are cables giving encouraging progress reports which, in fact, seem limited to vague promises which, with hindsight, we know to have been quite meaningless. MAAG (and eventually the JCS in Washington) grew increasingly impatient with Durbrow's insistence on further holding up the "green light." They wanted to get on with the war.

By the end, Durbrow was simply holding out for Diem to actually complete the paperwork on some steps he had long ago said he intended to take. His very last cable (May 3) gives a good feeling for the flavor of the negotiations that had been going on between Diem and Durbrow for the nearly 3 months since the CIP talks began (and indeed it gives the flavor of Durbrow's relations with Diem at least since the previous October).

During the inauguration reception at Palace April 29, Diem took me aside and asked if I had given green light for US implementation of our part of counter insurgency plan (CIP). I replied frankly that I had not and noted that as stated in my letter of February 13 certain minimum actions must be taken by the GVN first if CIP is to produce results. I listed following actions: (1) Establishment of a central intelligence organization; (2) assignment of operational control for counter insurgency operations within military chain of command; and (3) implementation of reforms announced by Diem on February 6. Diem replied that he would do all these things, but that time was required to work out details. He said various GVN Cabinet members and Joint

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General Staff studying proposals and have different ideas. Since he wants to be sure that whatever done is well thought out, will be successful and not have to be changed in future he letting responsible officials thoroughly consider proposals. Diem stated that Secretary Thuan working on detailed statute for central intelligence organization, but it required more work and needs to be polished up. I replied that frankly time was slipping by and as yet there no action on these three points, which essential before I can give "green light" on equipment for 20,000 increase in armed forces.

In connection Diem remarks, Vice President Tho told me April 28 that he had not seen CIP, although he had heard of its existence, and he does not believe other Ministers have seen it either. Question thus arises as to whether Diem's statement that various Cabinet members studying CIP refers only to Thuan. I gave Tho fairly detailed fill-in on CIP contents. Tho said action now by President, at least implementation of reforms, needed in order capitalize on present upswing in popular feeling about situation following GVN success in carrying out elections despite VC efforts to disrupt. Stating he did not know when if ever reforms will be implemented, he commented that failure take such action after so many promises would lose all momentum gained from elections. Tho added that, aside from psychological impact, reforms likely take (sic; make) little change unless Diem himself changes his method of operating. He noticed that if "super ministers" without real authority they likely become just additional level in bureaucracy without making GVN more effective.

On May 2 in course my formal farewell call I asked Diem if decrees yet signed on intelligence organization, chain of command and reforms. Diem stated he working on these matters but went through usual citation of difficulties including problem of convincing available personnel that they capable and qualified carry out responsibilities. He stated he already named Colonel Nguyen Van Yankee to head intelligence organization, Colonel Yankee has selected building for his headquarters and in process recruiting staff, while Secretary Thuan working on statute for organization. Re chain of command, I strongly emphasized that this one of most important factors in CIP, GVN must organize itself to follow national plan with one man in charge operational control and not waste time chasing will of wisps. Diem replied that he not feeling well (he has cold) and with inauguration he has not had time focus on this question but he will do it. He stated that he realizes only effective way is to place counter insurgency operations under Joint General Staff, but that his generals disagreed as to exactly how this should be done.

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Diem, referring Sihanouk's Vientiane press conference (Vientiane's 1979), stated he did not believe there would be 14-nation conference and he afraid Laos almost lost already. Diem argued that since PL occupy almost all of southern Laos, we must agree increase in RVNAF to provide additional personnel to train self defense corps which in very bad shape.

Comment: Although Thuan has indicated to MAAG Chief General McGarr decree designating single officer to conduct counter insurgency operations being signed imminently, I asked him morning May 3 when seeing off Harriman and Lemnitzer whether I would receive before departure "present" he has long promised me. He replied presents often come when least expected, which apparently means Diem not yet ready sign decree.

While we should proceed with procurement equipment for 20,000 increase as recommended my 1606, I do not believe GVN should be informed of this green light, particularly until above decree signed. Durbrow. 15/

The February 6 reforms referred to involved a cabinet re-organization Diem had announced before the start of the CIP negotiations. The intelligence re-organization was to consolidate the 7 existing services. The chain of command problem has been discussed above. Diem finally issued decrees on all these points a few days after Durbrow went home. The decrees were essentially meaningless: exactly these same issues remained high on the list of "necessary reforms" called for after the Taylor Mission, and indeed throughout the rest of Diem's life.

IV. DURBROW'S TACTICS

Did Durbrow's tactics make sense? There is an argument to be made both ways. Certainly if Durbrow's focus was on the pro forma paperwork, then they did not. Mere formal organizational re-arrangements (unifying the then 7 intelligence services into 1, setting up at least a nominal chain of command for the war) often change very little even when they are seriously intended. To the extent they are not seriously intended, they are almost certain to be meaningless. Vice President Tho, of course, is cited in the cable as making exactly that point. The very fact that Durbrow chose to include this remark in the cable (without questioning it) suggests he agreed. But if squeezing the formal decrees out of Diem really did not mean much, then what was the point of exacerbating relations with Diem (not to mention relations with the military members of the U.S. mission) to get them? In hindsight, we can say there was none, unless the U.S. really meant what it had said about making U.S. support for Diem contingent on his taking "corrective measures." Then the function of those tactics would not have been to squeeze a probably meaningless concession from Diem; for the cable quoted alone makes it pretty clear that it would

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have been naive to expect much follow-through from Diem. The purpose would have been to begin the process of separating U.S. support for Vietnam from support for the Diem regime, and to lay the basis for stronger such signals in the future unless Diem underwent some miraculous reformation. That, of course, is exactly the tack the U.S. followed in the fall of 1963, once the Administration had really decided that we could not go on with the Diem regime as it then existed.

All this can be said with hindsight. It is not clear how much of this line of thinking should be attributed to American officials in Washington or Saigon at the time. There is no hint in the cables we have that Durbrow was thinking this way. Rather he seems to have felt that the concessions he was wringing from Diem represented real progress, but that we would have to keep up the pressure (presumably with threats to suspend aid -- as his guidance considered -- even after the "green light" was given) to keep goading Diem in the right direction. Meanwhile, the predominant view (pushed most strongly, but hardly exclusively by the military) was that we should, and could effectively get on with the war with as much cooperation as we could get from Diem short of interfering with the war effort: it was all right to try for a quid pro quo on aid, but not very hard. The Lansdale view went even further, stressing the need for a demonstration of positive, essentially unqualified support for Diem if only to discourage a further coup attempt, which Lansdale saw as the main short-run danger.

In a significant way, Lansdale's view was not very different in its analysis of tactics from the view that Diem was hopeless. Both Lansdale, with his strong pro-Diem view, and men like Galbraith with a strong anti-Diem view, agreed that Diem could not be pressured into reforming this regime. ("He won't change, because he can't change," wrote Galbraith in a cable we will quote in more detail later.)

Where the Lansdale and Galbraith views differed -- a fundamental difference, of course, -- was in their estimate of the balance of risks of a coup. Lansdale, and obviously his view carried the day, believed that a coup was much more likely to make things worse than make things better. This must have been an especially hard view to argue against in 1961, when Diem did not look as hopeless as he would later, and when a strong argument could be made that the U.S. just could not afford at that time to risk the collapse of a pro-Western government in Vietnam. It must have seemed essentially irresistible to take the route of at least postponing, as seemed quite feasible, a decision on such a tough and risky course as holding back on support for Diem. The President, after all, could remember the charges that the Truman Administration had given away China by holding back on aid to Chiang to try to pressure him toward reform. As a young Congressman, he had even joined the chorus.

Meanwhile Durbrow was about to come home (he had been in Vietnam for 4 years); security problems in Vietnam were, at best, not improving;

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and the repercussions of Laos were spilling over and would make further moves on Vietnam an urgent matter. By the middle of April, the Administration was undertaking its first close look at the problem in Vietnam (in contrast to the almost automatic approval of the CIP during the opening days of the new Administration).

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IV.B.

THE SPRING DECISIONS - I

CHAPTER III

I. THE "PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM"

The development of what eventually came to be called "The Presidential Program for Vietnam" formally began with this memorandum from McNamara to Gilpatric:

20 April 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

This will confirm our discussion of this morning during which I stated that the President has asked that you:

- a. Appraise the current status and future prospects of the Communist drive to dominate South Viet-Nam.
- b. Recommend a series of actions (military, political and/or economic, overt and/or covert) which, in your opinion, will prevent Communist domination of that country.

The President would like to receive your report on or before Thursday, April 27.

During the course of your study, you should draw, to the extent you believe necessary, upon the views and resources of the State Department and CIA. Mr. Chester Bowles was present when the President discussed the matter with me, and I have reviewed the project with Mr. Allen Dulles. Further, the President stated that Mr. Walt Rostow would be available to counsel with you. 1/

Gilpatric, although obviously given a completely free hand under the terms of the memo, nevertheless set up an interagency task force to work on the report. A draft was ready April 26, and Gilpatric sent it to the President the following day. But this turned out to be only the first, and relatively unimportant phase of the effort. For the Laos crisis came to a boil just as the first Gilpatric report was finished, and the Task Force was continued with the essentially new mission of a recommending additional measure to keep our position from falling apart in the wake of what was happening in Laos. Consequently, to understand these late-April, early-May decisions, we have to treat separately the initial Gilpatric effort and the later, primarily State-drafted revision, dated May 6. The same general factors were in the background of both efforts,

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although Laos was only one of the things that influenced the April 26 effort, while it became the overwhelming element in the May 6 effort. It is worth setting out these influencing factors, specifically:

1. The security situation in Vietnam.
2. The Administration's special interest in counter-insurgency.
3. The apparent futility and divisiveness of the Durbrow (pressure) tactics for dealing with Diem.
4. Eventually most important, and substantially narrowing the range of options realistically open to the Administration, the weakness of US policy in Laos, and the consequent strongly felt need for a signal of firm policy in Vietnam.

1. The Security Situation in Vietnam

The VC threat in Vietnam looked worse in April than it had in January. We will see that Gilpatric's report painted a bleak picture. Yet, there is no hint in the record that concern about the immediate situation in Vietnam was a major factor in the decision to formulate a new program.

VC strength was estimated at 3-15,000 in Lansdale's January memorandum; 8-10,000 in a March NIE; 10,000 in an April briefing paper (apparently by Lansdale) immediately preceding -- and recommending -- the Gilpatric Task Force; then 12,000 one week later in the Gilpatric report proper. VC incidents were reported high for April (according to the Task Force report, 650 per month, 4 times higher than January), but an upsurge in activity had long been predicted to coincide with the Vietnamese elections. As would happen in the future, the failure of the VC to prevent the elections was considered a sign of government strength. 2/

On the basis of the Task Force statistics, we could assume that the situation was deteriorating rapidly: taken literally, they indicate an increase in VC strength of 20 percent in about a week, plus the large increase in incidents. But neither cables from the field, nor the Washington files show any sense of a sharply deteriorating situation. And, as we will see, the initial Task Force Report, despite its crisis tone, recommended no increase in military strength for the Vietnamese, only more generous US financial aid to forces already planned under the CIP.

2. The Administration's Special Interest in Counter-insurgency

A more important impetus to the Gilpatric effort than any sense of deterioration in Vietnam seems to have been the Administration's general interest in doing something about counter-insurgency warfare, combined with an interest in finding more informal and more efficient means

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of supervising policy than the Eisenhower Administration's elaborate National Security structure. The effort in Vietnam obviously required some coordination of separate efforts by at least State, Defense, CIA, and ICA (a predecessor of AID). Further, once a coordinated program was worked out, the idea appears to have been to focus responsibility for seeing to it that the program was carried out on some clearly identified individual. This search for a better way to organize policy seems to have been the principal motive behind the initial Gilpatric effort, although it became inconsequential after the original submission.

3. The Apparent Futility and Divisiveness of the Durbrow (Pressure) Tactics for Dealing With Diem

Late April was a peculiarly appropriate time to undertake the sort of sharpening up of policy and its organization just described. It was probably clear by then that Durbrow's pressure tactics were not really accomplishing much with Diem. Besides, Durbrow had been in Vietnam for four years by April, and a new Ambassador would normally have been sent in any event. Fritz Nolting had been chosen by early April, and he was scheduled to take over in early May. Further, Diem had just been reelected, an essentially meaningless formality to be sure, but still one more thing that helped make late April a logical time for taking a fresh look at US relations with Diem. And even to people who believed that a continuation of Durbrow's pressure tactics might be the best approach to Diem, events elsewhere and especially in Laos must have raised questions about whether it was a politic time to be threatening to withhold aid.

4. The Weakness of US Policy in Laos, and the Need for a Signal of Firm Policy in Vietnam

The situation in the world that April seemed to create an urgent requirement for the US to do something to demonstrate firmness, and especially so in Southeast Asia. The Task Force was set up the day after the Bay of Pigs invasion force surrendered, and at a time when the Laos crisis was obviously coming to head. There had been implicit agreement in principle between the US and the Soviets to seek a cease fire in Laos and to organize a neutral coalition government. But it was not clear at all that the cease-fire would come while there was anything left worth arguing about in the hands of the pro-Western faction. Gilpatric's initial Task Force report reached the President the day of a crisis meeting on Laos, and the more important second phase of the effort began then, in an atmosphere wholly dominated by Laos.

But even before the Laos crisis reached its peak, there was a sense in Washington and generally in the world that put strong pressures on the Administration to look for ways to take a firm stand somewhere; and if it was not to be in Laos, then Vietnam was next under the gun.

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Something of the mood of the time can be sensed in these quotes, one from a March 28 NIE on Southeast Asia, another from Lansdale's notes, and finally a significant question from a Kennedy press conference:

From the NIE:

There is a deep awareness among the countries of Southeast Asia that developments in the Laotian crisis, and its outcome, have a profound impact on their future. The governments of the area tend to regard the Laotian crisis as a symbolic test of strengths between the major powers of the West and the Communist bloc. 3/

From Lansdale's notes (about April 21):

1. Psychological -- VN believed always they main target. Now it comes -- 'when our turn comes, will we be treated the same as Laos?' Main task GVN confidence in US. 4/

And suggesting the more general tone of the time (even a week before the Bay of Pigs, prompted by the Soviet orbiting of a man in space) this question at Kennedy's April 12 news conference:

Mr. President, this question might better be asked at a history class than at a news conference, but here it is anyway. The Communists seem to be putting us on the defensive on a number of fronts -- now, again, in space. Wars aside, do you think there is a danger that their system is going to prove more durable than ours. 5/

The President answered with cautious reassurance. Eight days later, after the Bay of Pigs, and the day he ordered the Task Force to go ahead, he told the Association of Newspaper Editors:

....it is clearer than ever that we face a relentless struggle in every corner of the globe that goes far beyond the clash of armies, or even nuclear armaments. The armies are there. But they serve primarily as the shield behind which subversion, infiltration, and a host of other tactics steadily advance, picking off vulnerable areas one by one in situations that do not permit our own armed intervention.... We dare not fail to see the insidious nature of this new and deeper struggle. We dare not fail to grasp the new concepts, the new tools, the new sense of urgency we will need to combat it -- whether in Cuba or South Vietnam. 6/ (Notice Kennedy's explicit assumption about US armed intervention as a means of dealing with insurgencies. Not too much can be read into his remark, for it probably was inspired primarily by criticism of his refusal to try to save the Bay of Pigs contingent. But the balance of the record adds significance to the comment.)

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II. THE APRIL 26 REPORT

The available Gilpatric file consists mostly of drafts of the report and memos from Lansdale. It contains a memorandum dated April 13, in which Lansdale advised Gilpatric of a meeting with Rostow, at which Rostow showed Lansdale a copy of a memorandum to Kennedy recommending a fresh crack at the Vietnam situation. Here is Rostow's memorandum:

April 12, 1961

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

FROM: WWR

Now that the Viet-Nam election is over, I believe we must turn to gearing up the whole Viet-Nam operation. Among the possible lines of action that might be considered at an early high level meeting are the following:

1. The appointment of a full time first-rate back-stop man in Washington. McNamara, as well as your staff, believes this to be essential.
2. The briefing of our new Ambassador, Fritz Nolting, including sufficient talk with yourself so that he fully understands the priority you attach to the Viet-Nam problem.
3. A possible visit to Viet-Nam in the near future by the Vice President.
4. A possible visit to the United States of Mr. Thuan, acting Defense Minister, and one of the few men around Diem with operational capacity and vigor.
5. The sending to Viet-Nam of a research and development and military hardware team which would explore with General McGarr which of the various techniques and gadgets now available or being explored might be relevant and useful in the Viet-Nam operation.
6. The raising of the MAAG ceiling, which involves some diplomacy, unless we can find an alternative way of introducing into the Viet-Nam operation a substantial number of Special Forces types.
7. The question of replacing the present ICA Chief in Viet-Nam, who, by all accounts, has expended his capital. We need a vigorous man who can work well with the military, since some of the rural development problems relate closely to guerrilla operations.

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8. Settling the question of the extra funds for Diem.

9. The tactics of persuading Diem to move more rapidly to broaden the base of his government, as well as to decrease its centralization and improve its efficiency.

Against the background of decisions we should urgently take on these matters, you may wish to prepare a letter to Diem which would not only congratulate him, reaffirm our support, and specify new initiatives we are prepared to take, but would make clear to him the urgency you attach to a more effective political and morale setting for his military operation, now that the elections are successfully behind him.

Neither this memo, nor other available papers, give us a basis for judging how far the stress on the importance of Vietnam was already influenced by developments in Laos, and how much it reflects a separable interest in taking on the challenge of "wars of liberation." Both were undoubtedly important. But this Rostow memo turned out to be pretty close to an agenda for the initial Task Force report. It seems very safe to assume that the "full-time, first-rate, back-stop man in Washington" Rostow had in mind was Lansdale. (Gilpatric himself obviously could not be expected to spend full-time on Vietnam.) Presumably the President's request for the Gilpatric report was intended as either a method of easing Lansdale into that role, or at least of trying him out in it.

Following the description of the Rostow memo, Gilpatric's file contains several carbon copies of a long paper, unsigned but certainly by Lansdale, which among other things recommends that the President set up a Task Force for Vietnam which would lay out a detailed program of action and go on to supervise the implementation of that program. The date on the paper is April 19, but a draft must have been prepared some days earlier, probably about the time of Lansdale's discussion with Rostow on the 13th, since the available copies recommended that the Task Force submit its report to the President by April 21. The paper explicitly foresaw a major role for General Lansdale both in the Task Force, and thereafter in supervising the implementation of the report.

This Task Force was apparently intended to supersede what the paper refers to as "one of the customary working groups in Washington" which was "being called together next week by John Steeves, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs."

In view of all this, it is not surprising to find that the first phase of the Task Force effort appears, from the record, to have been very much a Gilpatric-Lansdale show. The first meeting of the group (which included State and CIA representatives) was apparently held April 24, four days after Gilpatric was told to go ahead. A draft report

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was ready the 26th, following individual meetings between members and Gilpatric and Lansdale. Present files do not show whether there was another full meeting of the group before the first version of the report (dated April 26) was sent to the President on the 27th.

Here are the opening sections, which introduce the list of proposed actions which make up the program. 7/

A PROGRAM OF ACTION TO PREVENT COMMUNIST DOMINATION OF

SOUTH VIETNAM

APPRAISAL OF THE SITUATION

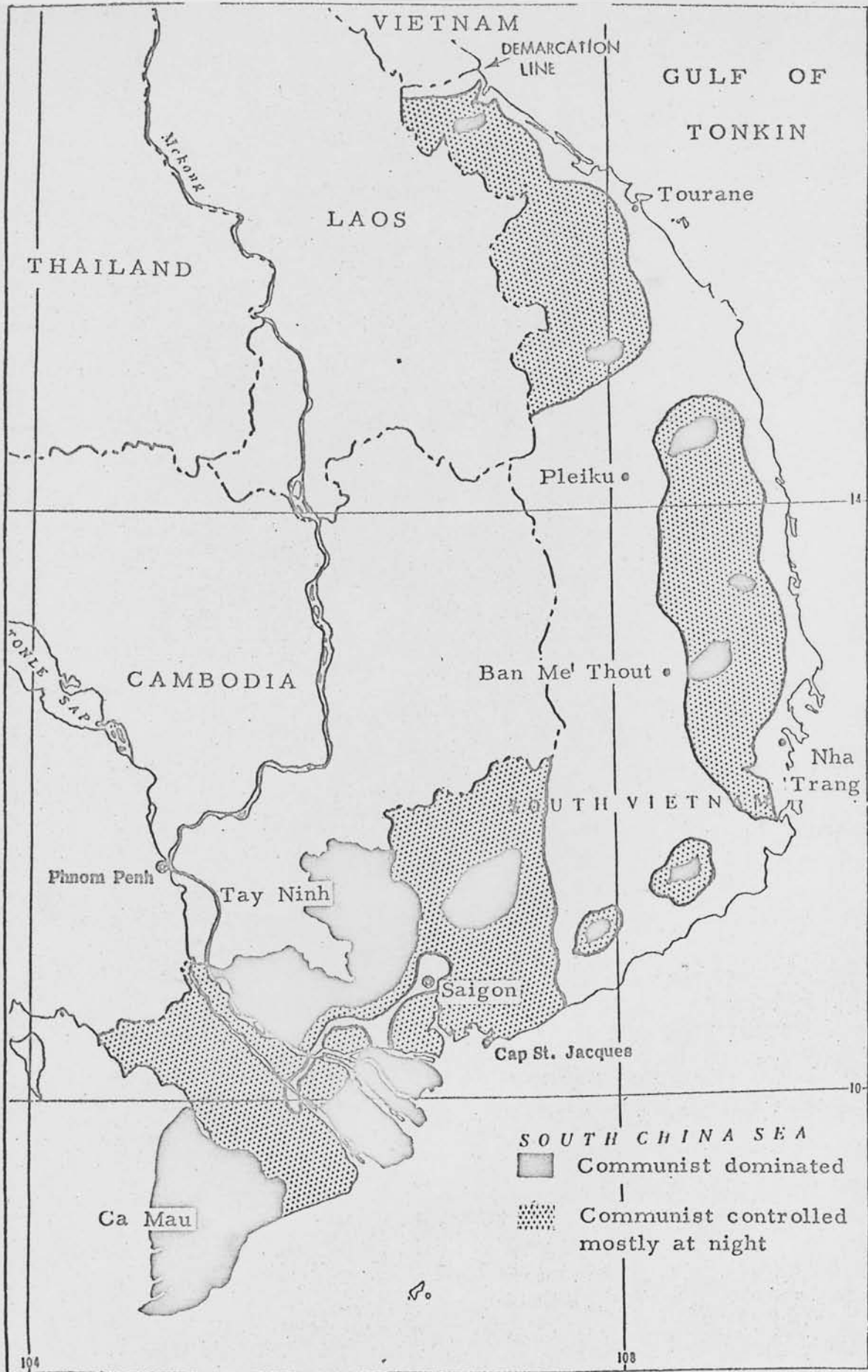
After meeting in Hanoi on 13 May 1959, the Central Committee of the North Vietnamese Communist Party publicly announced its intention "to smash" the government of President Diem. Following this decision, the Viet Cong have significantly increased their program of infiltration, subversion, sabotage and assassination designed to achieve this end.

At the North Vietnamese Communist Party Congress in September 1960, the earlier declaration of underground war by the Party's Control Committee was reaffirmed. This action by the Party Congress took place only a month after Kong Le's coup in Laos. Scarcely two months later there was a military uprising in Saigon. The turmoil created throughout the area by this rapid succession of events provides an ideal environment for the Communist "master plan" to take over all of Southeast Asia.

Since that time, as can be seen from the attached map, the internal security situation in South Vietnam has become critical. What amounts to a state of active guerrilla warfare now exists throughout the country. The number of Viet Cong hard-core Communists has increased from 4400 in early 1960 to an estimated 12,000 today. The number of violent incidents per month now averages 650. Casualties on both sides totaled more than 4500 during the first three months of this year. Fifty-eight percent of the country is under some degree of Communist control, ranging from harassment and night raids to almost complete administrative jurisdiction in the Communist "secure areas."

The Viet Cong over the past two years have succeeded in stepping up the pace and intensity of their attacks to the point where South Vietnam is nearing the decisive phase in its battle for survival. If the situation continues to deteriorate, the Communists will be able to press on to their strategic goal of establishing a rival "National Liberation Front" government in one of these "secure areas" thereby plunging the nation into open civil war. They have publicly announced that they will "take over the country before the end of 1961."

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This situation is thus critical, but is not hopeless. The Vietnamese Government, with American aid, has increased its capabilities to fight its attackers, and provides a base upon which the necessary additional effort can be founded to defeat the Communist attack. Should the Communist effort increase, either directly or as a result of a collapse of Laos, additional measures beyond those proposed herein would be necessary.

In short, the situation in South Vietnam has reached the point where, at least for the time being, primary emphasis should be placed on providing a solution to the internal security problem.

The US Objective: To create a viable and increasingly democratic society in South Vietnam and to prevent Communist domination of the country.

Concept of Operations: To initiate on an accelerated basis, a series of mutually supporting actions of a military, political, economic, psychological and covert character designed to achieve this objective. In so doing, it is intended to use, and where appropriate extend, expedite or build upon the existing US and Government of Vietnam (GVN) programs already underway in South Vietnam. There is neither the time available nor any sound justification for "starting from scratch." Rather the need is to focus the US effort in South Vietnam on the immediate internal security problem; to infuse it with a sense of urgency and a dedication to the overall US objective; to achieve, through cooperative inter-departmental support both in the field and in Washington, the operational flexibility needed to apply the available US assets in a manner best calculated to achieve our objective in Vietnam; and, finally, to impress on our friends, the Vietnamese, and on our foes, the Viet Cong, that come what may, the US intends to win this battle.

The program that followed this strongly worded introduction was very modest, not merely compared to current US involvement, but to the effort the US undertook following the Taylor Mission in the fall. The program is essentially simply a moderate acceleration of the CIP program approved in January, with a great deal of stress on vigor, enthusiasm, and strong leadership in carrying out the program.

In particular, the program proposes no increase in the Vietnamese army, and only a moderate (in hindsight, inconsequential) increase in the size of our MAAG mission. The main military measures were for the US to provide financial support for the 20,000-man increase in the RVNAF and to provide support for the full complement of counter-insurgency auxiliary forces (Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps) planned by Diem. Both were

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modest steps. For under the CIP we were already planning to pay support costs for 150,000 men of the RVNAF and 32,000 men of the Civil Guard. This Task Force proposal, which had been urged for some weeks by MAAG in Saigon, simply said that we would provide the same support for all the Vietnamese forces that we had already planned to provide for most of them.

For the rest, the Presidential Program in its final form, issued May 19, turned out (after a great deal of stirring around) to be close to that proposed in the April 26 draft.

Two comments are needed on this material. First, the program Lansdale and Gilpatric proposed was not so narrowly military as the repeated emphasis on priority for the internal security problem might suggest. Rather, the emphasis was on stabilizing the countryside, in contrast to pressing Diem on political and administrative reforms mainly of interest to Diem's urban critics. This reflected both Lansdale's judgments on counter-insurgency, which look good in hindsight, and his strongly pro-Diem orientation, which looks much less good.

Second, the reference to a communist "master plan" for Southeast Asia (and similar language is found in a number of other staff papers through the balance of 1961) suggests a view of the situation which has been much criticized recently by men like Galbraith and Kennan. Public comments by those who were closely involved (both those critical of policy since 1965, such as Sorenson and Hilsman, and those supporting the Administration, such as William Bundy) suggest a more sophisticated view of the problem. Here we simply note that the formal staff work available strongly supports Galbraith and Kennan, although this does not necessarily imply that the senior members of the Administration shared the view that North Vietnam was operating (in the words of another staff paper) as the "implementing agent of Bloc policy" rather than in fairly conventional, mainly non-ideological pursuit of its own national interest. 8/

III. LANSDALE'S ROLE

In his April 27 memorandum transmitting the Report to the President, Gilpatric noted that:

...in the short time available to the Task Force it was not possible to develop the program in complete detail. However, there has been prepared a plan for mutually supporting actions of a political, military, economic, psychological, and covert character which can be refined periodically on the basis of further recommendations from the field.

Toward this end, Brigadier General E.G. Lansdale, USAF, who has been designated Operations Officer for the Task Force, will proceed to Vietnam immediately after the program receives

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Presidential approval. Following on the spot discussions with US and Vietnamese officials, he will forward to the Director of the Task Force specific recommendations for action in support of the attached program.

This appears to have been the high point of Lansdale's role in Vietnam policy. Lansdale by this time had already sent (with Gilpatric's approval) messages requesting various people to meet him in Saigon, May 5. This is from a memorandum he sent to Richard Bissell, then still a Deputy Director of the CIA, requesting the services of one of his colleagues from the 1955-1956 experience in Vietnam:

I realize Redick is committed to an important job in Laos and that this is a difficult time in that trouble spot. I do feel, however, that we may yet save Vietnam and that our best effort should be put into it.

Redick, in my opinion, is now so much a part of the uninhibited communications between President Diem and myself that it goes far beyond the question of having an interpreter. His particular facility for appreciating my meaning in words and the thoughts of Diem in return is practically indispensable to me in the role I am assigned in seeking President Kennedy's goal for Vietnam. 9/

But none of this was to be. Present files contain a thermofax of McNamara's copy of the memorandum Gilpatric sent to the President. In McNamara's handwriting the words (Lansdale) "will proceed to Vietnam immediately" are changed to "will proceed to Vietnam when requested by the Ambassador." As we will see below, when the Task Force Report was re-drafted the next week, Lansdale's key role disappears entirely, at the request of the State Department, but presumably with the concurrence of the White House.

IV. KENNEDY'S APRIL 29 DECISIONS

Although our record is not clear, it appears that the cover memorandum was sent to the President as Gilpatric had signed it, and that McNamara's correction reflected a decision made after the paper went to the President, rather than a change in the language of the memo. In any event, at a meeting on April 29, President Kennedy approved only the quite limited military proposals of the draft report it transmitted. Decisions were deferred on the balance of the paper, which now included an annex issued April 28 on much more substantial additional military aid believed required by the situation in Laos. The military measures approved during this first go-around were:

- (1) Increase the MAAG as necessary to insure the effective implementation of the military portion of the program including the training of a 20,000-man addition to the present GVN armed

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forces of 150,000. Initial appraisal of new tasks assigned CHMAAG indicates that approximately 100 additional military personnel will be required immediately in addition to the present complement of 685.

(2) Expand MAAG responsibilities to include authority to provide support and advice to the Self Defense Corps with a strength of approximately 40,000.

(3) Authorize MAP support for the entire Civil Guard Force of 68,000. MAP support is now authorized for 32,000; the remaining 36,000 are not now adequately trained and equipped.

(4) Install as a matter of priority a radar surveillance capability which will enable the GVN to obtain warning of Communist over-flights being conducted for intelligence or clandestine air supply purposes. Initially, this capability should be provided from US mobile radar capability.

(5) Provide MAP support for the Vietnamese Junk Force as a means of preventing Viet Cong clandestine supply and infiltration into South Vietnam by water. MAP support, which was not provided in the Counterinsurgency Plan, will include training of junk crews in Vietnam or at US bases by US Navy personnel. 10/

The only substantial significance that can be read into these April 29 decisions is that they signalled a willingness to go beyond the 685-man limit on the size of the US military mission in Saigon, which, if it were done openly, would be the first formal breach of the Geneva Agreements. For the rest, we were providing somewhat more generous support to the Vietnamese than proposed in the CIP. But the overall size of the Vietnamese forces would be no higher than those already approved. (The 20,000-man increase was already part of the CIP.) No one proposed in this initial draft that the Administration even consider sending American troops (other than the 100-odd additional advisors). It was not, by any interpretation, a crisis response.

Indeed, even if Kennedy had approved the whole April 26 program, it would have seemed (in hindsight) most notable for the "come what may, we intend to win" rhetoric in its introduction and for the supreme role granted to Task Force (and indirectly to Lansdale as its operations officer) in control of Vietnam policy. Lansdale's memoranda leave no real doubt that he saw the Report exactly that way -- which presumably was why he made no effort to risk stirring up trouble by putting his more controversial views into the paper. For example, although Lansdale believed the key new item in Vietnam policy was a need for emphatic support for Diem, only the barest hint of this view appears in the paper (and it is not even hinted at in Lansdale's preliminary draft of the report distributed at the April 24th meeting of the Task Force). 11/

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That is when this opening phase of the Task Force effort has to be separated from what followed. As just noted, it was remarkable mainly for the strength of the commitment implied to South Vietnam, which the President never did unambiguously endorse, and for the organizational arrangement it proposed, with the key role for Lansdale and Gilpatric, which was eliminated from the later drafts. All of the factors behind the May reappraisal (cited at the beginning of this chapter) undoubtedly contributed to the decision to set up the Task Force. But Rostow's memorandum and the modest dimensions of the resulting proposals suggest the main idea really was to sharpen up existing policy and its administration, rather than to work out a new policy on the assumption that the existing program had become substantially obsolete. Immediately after April 27, this changes. Although Gilpatric and Lansdale continued to head up the Task Force through the Presidential decisions of May 11, their personal role became increasingly unimportant. The significance no longer was in putting new people in charge of a new style for running the program, but in developing a new program that would offset the impact of Laos.

V. THE LAOS ANNEX

On April 28, an annex had been issued to the basic report which went far beyond the modest military proposals in the original. The most reasonable assumption is that the annex was drawn up in response to comments at the April 27 NSC meeting at which the Report was to have been considered, but which turned out to be devoted to the by-then acute state of the crisis in Laos. On the grounds that the neutralization of Laos would solidify communists de facto control of eastern Laos (including the mountain passes which were the historic invasion route to southern Vietnam), the annex advocated U.S. support for a two-division increase in the RVNAF. To rapidly train these forces, there was now a recommendation on U.S. manpower commitments that dwarfed the previous recommendation for a MAAG increase: specifically, a 1600-man training team for each of the two new divisions, plus a 400-man special forces contingent to speed up counter-insurgency training for the South Vietnamese forces: a total of 3600 men, not counting the MAAG increase already authorized.

It is interesting that in the annex this force increase (and the bulk of the U.S. troop commitment) was specifically justified as insurance against a conventional invasion of South Vietnam. Some earlier drafts show the evolution of this concept. There is an alternate draft, apparently by Lansdale, which was not used but which recommended a U.S. troop commitment as reassurance to the Vietnamese of U.S. determination to stand by them. It did not recommend any increase in South Vietnamese forces. Instead, it stressed very heavily the damage to U.S. prestige and the credibility of our guarantees to other countries in Southeast Asia should we go through with the Laos settlement without taking some strong action to demonstrate that we were finally drawing a line in Southeast Asia.

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Contrasting sharply with Lansdale's draft was the first draft of the paper that was finally issued. This was by Gilpatric's military aide, Col. E.F. Black. It concludes that South Vietnamese forces would have to be increased by two divisions, mainly to deal with threat of increased infiltration. Black stressed that the President would have to decide that the US would no longer be bound by the limitations of the 1954 Geneva Agreements (which Defense had long been lobbying against). But his paper recommends no substantial troop commitment. The reference to the Geneva Agreements apparently referred to a relatively modest increase in manpower beyond the 685-man ceiling, and to the introduction of new types of equipment not in Vietnam in 1954.

So the record contains three versions of the Annex -- Black's first draft, Lansdale's alternate draft, and then Black's revised paper, which was finally issued as the annex to the Report. The effect of considering them all is an odd one. The initial Black paper recommends an increase in Vietnamese forces to deal with the infiltration problem, but no substantial US troop commitment. The Lansdale alternative recommends a substantial US troop commitment, but no increase in Vietnamese forces. The final paper recommends both the RVNAF increase and the US troop commitments, but changes the reason for each: the reason for the RVNAF increase became a need for better protection against overt invasion, not an increased infiltration threat. And the reason for the US troop commitment became a desire to rapidly train the new Vietnamese troops, not for political reassurance. 12/

If taken literally, all of this implies an extraordinarily rapid series of reappraisals and reversals of judgment. But surely, the only realistic interpretation is that in this case (because a series of rough drafts happens to be included in the available file) we are getting a glimpse at the way such staff paperwork really gets drafted, as opposed to the much more orderly impression that is given if we saw only the finished products. Gilpatric (undoubtedly in consultation with at least McNamara, although the files do not show any record of this) was presumably interested primarily in what recommendations to make to the President, and secondarily in providing a bureaucratically suitable rationale for those recommendations. This rationale may, or may not, have coincided with whatever more private explanation of the recommendations that McNamara or Gilpatric may have conveyed to the President or people like McGeorge Bundy and Rostow on the White House staff. The lesson in this, which will not come as a surprise to anyone who has ever had contact with the policy-making process, is that the rationales given in such pieces of paper (intended for fairly wide circulation among the bureaucracy, as opposed to tightly held memoranda limited to those closest to the decision-maker) do not reliably indicate why recommendations were made the way they were.

VI. THE MAY 1 REVIEW

Meanwhile, Kennedy, as noted earlier, did not act on the annex at the April 29 meeting when he approved the much more modest military proposals

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of the basic Report. But on that day, there was a cable alerting CINCPAC to be ready to move 5000-men task forces to Udorn, Thailand, and to Touraine, (Da Nang), South Vietnam. Classified records available for this study do not explain this alert. But the public memoirs indirectly refer to it, and as would be expected, the alert was intended as a threat to intervene in Laos if the communists failed to go through with the cease fire which was to precede the Geneva Conference. Here is the cable:

From: JCS
TO: CINCPAC
INFO: CHMAAG VIENTIANE
CHJUSMAAG BANGKOK THAILAND
CHMAAG SAIGON VIETNAM

TOP SECRET JCS DA 995131 From JCS.

1. Request you prepare plans to move brigade size forces of approximately 5,000 each into Udorn or vicinity and into Tourane or vicinity. Forces should include all arms and appropriate air elements. Plans should be based solely on US forces at this time.
2. Decision to make these deployments not firm. It is expected that decision as to Thailand will be made at meeting tentatively scheduled here on Monday. Decision regarding Vietnam will be even later due to consideration of Geneva Accords.
3. It is hoped that these movements can be given SEATO cover but such possibility must be explored before becoming a firm element of your planning. State is taking action to explore this aspect.
4. Decision was not repeat not reached today concerning implementation of SEATO Plan 5/60.

The crisis in Laos was now at its peak. According to Schlesinger's account, reports reached Washington April 26 that the Pathet Lao were attacking strongly, with the apparent intention of grabbing most of the country before the cease-fire went into effect. At 10 p.m. that night, the JCS sent out a "general advisory" to major commands around the world, and specifically alerted CINCPAC to be prepared to undertake airstrikes against North Vietnam, and possibly southern China.

The next day -- the day the Task Force Report came to the President-- there were prolonged crisis meetings in the White House. The President later called in Congressional leaders, who advised against putting troops into Laos. Schlesinger quotes Rostow as telling him the NSC meeting that day was "the worst White House meeting he had ever attended in the entire Kennedy administration." 12a/

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The Laos annex to the Gilpatric Report was issued on the 28th, in an atmosphere wholly dominated by the crisis in Laos. On the 29th, Kennedy's go-ahead on the Task Force's original military recommendations was squeezed into a day overwhelmingly devoted to Laos. This was the day of the cable, just cited, alerting CINCPAC for troop movements to Thailand and possibly Vietnam. The "SEATO Plan 5/60" referred to in the closing paragraph of the cable was the plan for moving major units into Laos.

On May 1 (the Monday meeting referred to in the cable), Kennedy again deferred any decision on putting troops into Laos. According to available accounts, there is a strong sense by now (although no formal decision) that the U.S. would not go into Laos: that if the cease-fire failed, we would make a strong stand, instead, in Thailand and Vietnam. (On the 28th, in a speech to a Democratic dinner in Chicago, the President had hinted at this:

We are prepared to meet our obligations, but we can only defend the freedom of those who are determined to be free themselves. We can assist them -- we will bear more than our share of the burden, but we can only help those who are ready to bear their share of the burden themselves.) 13/

Reasonable qualifications, undoubtedly, but ones that seemed to suggest that intervention in Laos would be futile. On Sunday (the 30th), another hint came in remarks by Senator Fulbright on a TV interview show: he opposed intervention in Laos, and said he was confident the government was seeking "another solution."

So the decision anticipated Monday, May 1, in the JCS cable to CINCPAC was not made that day after all. But that day a new draft of the Task Force Report was issued. It contained only one significant change (other than blending the April 28 annex into the basic paper). The original draft contained a paragraph (under "political objectives") recommending we "obtain the political agreement [presumably from the SEATO membership] needed to permit the prompt implementation of SEATO contingency plans providing for military intervention in South Vietnam should this become necessary to prevent the loss of the country to Communism."

In the May 1 revision, the following sentence was added to the paragraph: "The United States should be prepared to intervene unilaterally in fulfillment of its commitment under Article IV, 2. of Manila Pact, and should make its determination to do so clear through appropriate public statements, diplomatic discussions, troop deployments, or other means." 14/ (The cited clause in the Manila (SEATO) Pact, which the paper did not quote,

If, in the opinion of any of the Parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any Party in the treaty area or of any other State or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other

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than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense.)

The May 1 draft also cleared up, or papered over, part of the confusion described earlier regarding the rationale for the military measures recommended in the Laos annex: the increased RVNAF force levels were attributed now both to concern over increased infiltration and to concern over overt invasion. But the US troop commitments are still described solely as for training, with no mention of the original political rationale.

VII. STATE'S REDRAFT

Lansdale circulated the May 1 draft among the Task Force, with a note that comments should be in May 2, with a final Task Force review scheduled the morning of May 3, all in anticipation of an NSC meeting on the paper May 4.

George Ball, then Deputy Under Secretary of State, asked to postpone the meeting for a day. Lansdale sent Gilpatric a memorandum opposing the postponement. "It seems to me that George Ball could appoint someone to represent him at the meeting, and if he has personal or further comments they could come to us later in the day at his convenience." But Gilpatric delayed the meeting a day, and State produced a drastic revision of the paper. 15/

On the organizational issues, the State draft was brutally clearcut. It proposed a new version of the Gilpatric memorandum transmitting the Report, in which:

1. The paragraph (quoted earlier) describing Lansdale's special role is deleted.
2. A new paragraph is added to the end of the memorandum, in which Gilpatric is made to say: "Having completed its assignment...I recommend that the present Task Force be now dissolved."

Later sections of the paper were revised accordingly, giving responsibility for coordinating Vietnam policy to a new Task Force with George Ball as chairman. (In the final version, the Task Force has a State Department director, but no longer included Presidential appointees representing their departments. The whole Task Force idea had been downgraded to a conventional interagency working group. Although it continued to function for several years, there will be little occasion to mention it again in this paper.) 16/

State's proposal on organization prevailed. From the record available, the only thing that can be said definitely is that State objected,

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successfully, to having an Ambassador report to a Task Force chaired by the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and with a second defense official (Lansdale) as executive officer. There may have been more to it. We know Lansdale's experience and his approach to guerrilla warfare initially won him a good deal of favor at the White House. But his memoranda suggest that his ideas on a number of issues (support for Phoumi in Laos, liberation of North Vietnam, essentially unqualified support for Diem in South Vietnam) went well beyond what the Administration judged reasonable. So it is quite possible that the President would have had second thoughts on Lansdale, aside from State's objections on bureaucratic grounds.

In any event, Lansdale's reaction to State's proposal on organization was to advise McNamara and Gilpatric that:

My strong recommendation is that Defense stay completely out of the Task Force directorship as now proposed by State...Having a Defense officer, myself or someone else, placed in a position of only partial influence and of no decision permissibility would be only to provide State with a scapegoat to share the blame when we have a flop...The US past performance and theory of action, which State apparently desires to continue, simply offers no sound basis for winning, as desired by President Kennedy. 17/

But the final version of the Task Force Report, dated May 6, followed very closely the State revision submitted May 3, including the shift in control of the Task Force.

VIII. WIDENING THE OPTIONS

What is most striking about the revised drafts is that they excluded a tone of almost unqualified commitment to Vietnam, yet on the really important issues included qualifications which left the President a great deal of freedom to decide whatever he pleased without having to formally overrule the Task Force Report.

For example, the assertion (from the April draft) that the US should impress on friend and foe that "come what may, we intend to win" remained in the final paper. But this hortatory language is from the introduction; it described one of the effects the program in the balance of the paper was supposed to achieve, but did not ask the President to do or say anything not spelled out in the body of the paper. (We will see, when we come to the fall decisions, that the wisdom of an unqualified commitment to save Vietnam from Communism is treated afresh, with no suggestion that any such decision had already been made in May.)

On the other hand, the explicit recommendation in the Defense draft that we make clear our "determination...to intervene unilaterally...should this become necessary to save the country from communism..." was dropped. Instead, there is a recommendation for exploring a "new bilateral arrange-

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ment" which might (the text is not explicit) extend to fighting the guerrillas, if that should become necessary to save the country, but also might only cover overt North Vietnamese invasion. 18/

Further, the need for these arrangements was now tied to the "loss" of Laos. The May 3 draft suggests we "undertake military security arrangements which establish beyond doubt our intention to stand behind Vietnam's resistance to Communism..." since "it is doubtful whether the Vietnamese Government can weather the pressures which are certain to be generated from the loss of Laos without prompt, and dramatic support for its security from the U.S." 19/

In the May 6 final draft, "establish beyond doubt" was toned down to "emphasize" and the flat reference to the loss of Laos was changed to "if Laos were lost." 20/

Similarly, the recommendations on the two new South Vietnamese divisions, and the two 1600-man US combat units to train them was described as a firm recommendation in the military section of the May 3 draft (which State left untouched from the Defense version), but were indirectly referred to as something for study in State's re-drafted political section. In the final paper, they were still firm recommendations in a military annex, but not in the main paper, where Defense was only described as studying this and other uses for US troops short of direct commitment against the guerrillas. US troop commitments were no longer recommended, only referred to as something "which might result from an NSC decision following discussions between Vice President Johnson whose mission to Asia had been announced May 5/ and President Diem." 21/

Yet an interesting aspect of the State redraft is that, although its main impact was to soften the commitments implied in the Defense draft, a quick reading might give the contrary impression. We will see this same effect in the political sections to be discussed below. What seems to happen is that the very detail of the State treatment creates a strong impression, even though the actual proposals are less drastic and more qualified than those proposed by Defense. The contrast is all the sharper because the Defense draft leaned the other way. For example, the profoundly significant recommendation that the US commit itself to intervene unilaterally, if necessary, to prevent a Viet Cong victory in South Vietnam, is tossed into the Defense version most casually, with a reference to the Manila Treaty that makes it sound as if such a commitment, in fact, already existed.

In contrast, here is the State language referring to the proposed bilateral treaty (which in effect is a substitute for the Defense proposed unlimited unilateral commitment):

The Geneva Accords have been totally inadequate in protecting South Vietnam against Communist infiltration and insurgency. Moreover, with increased Communist success in Laos dramatic

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US actions in stiffening up its physical support of Vietnam and the remainder of Southeast Asia may be needed to bolster the will to continue to resist the Communists. The inhibitions imposed on such action by certain parts of the Geneva Accords, which have been violated with impunity by the Communists, should not prevent our action. We should consider joining with the Vietnamese in a clear-cut defensive alliance which might include stationing of US forces on Vietnamese soil. As a variant of this arrangement certain SEATO troops might also be employed.

Bilateral military assistance by the United States pursuant to a request by South Vietnam along the lines of that undertaken during 1958 in response to the request by Lebanon for military assistance, would be in keeping with international law and treaty provisions. The provisions of the Geneva Accords of 1954, which prohibited the introduction of additional military arms and personnel into Vietnam, would not be a bar to the measures contemplated. The obvious, large-scale and continuous violation of these provisions of the Geneva Accords by North Vietnam in introducing large numbers of armed guerrillas into South Vietnam would justify the corresponding non-observance of these provisions by South Vietnam. Indeed, authorization for changing PEO Laos into an ordinary MAAG was justified on this legal theory. It should be recognized that the foregoing proposals require careful and detailed consideration and preparation particularly with regard to the precise mission of US forces used.

In addition to the previously cited advantages such an action might have at least two other important political and military advantages:

(a) It could release a portion of the ARVN from relatively static military functions to pursue the war against the insurgents and

(b) It would place the Sino-Soviet Bloc in the position of risking direct intervention in a situation where US forces were already in place, accepting the consequence of such action. This is in direct contrast to the current situation in Laos.

Alternatively, there are several potential political and military disadvantages to such an action, principal among these being:

(a) Some of the neutrals, notably India, might well be opposed, and the attitude of the UK and France is uncertain.

(b) This would provide the Communists with a major propaganda opportunity.

(c) The danger that a troop contribution would provoke a DRV/CHICOM reaction with the risk of involving a significant

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commitment of US force in the Pacific to the Asian mainland. The French tied up some 200,000 troops during the unsuccessful Indo-China effort.

This might significantly weaken the Diem regime in the long run, having in mind the parallel of Rhee in Korea. 22/

This language is not solely the State Department's. In a Gilpatric memo to be cited shortly, we will see that the JCS, for example, had a hand in describing the role for US troops. Even so, the overall effect of the draft, as already noted, tones down very drastically the commitment implied by the May 1 Defense version:

1. The proposal is no longer for a unilateral, unlimited commitment to save Vietnam from communism. It only proposes consideration of a new treaty with South Vietnam (unlike the Defense draft which proposed reading a unilateral commitment into the existing Manila Treaty); and its purpose is to "bolster the will" of the South Vietnamese to resist the communists, not (as the Defense draft apparently meant) to guarantee that the US would join the war should the South Vietnamese effort prove inadequate.

2. It gives pro and con arguments for sending US troops, in contrast to the Defense draft which included a flat recommendation to send at least the 3600 men of the two division training teams and the special forces training team.

A reasonable judgment, consequently, is that State thought the Defense draft went too far in committing the US on Vietnam. (And in view of the positions he would take in 1965, George Ball's role as senior State representative on the Task Force obviously further encourages that interpretation.) But that is only a judgment. It is also possible to argue, in contrast, that perhaps State (or State plus whatever White House influence may have gone into the draft) simply was tidying up the Defense proposals: for example, that the redrafters felt that a new bilateral treaty would be a firmer basis for a commitment to save Vietnam than would reliance on a reinterpretation of the SEATO Treaty. Similar arguments can be made on the other points noted above.

Consequently, on any question about the intent of the redrafters, only a judgment and not a statement of fact can be provided.

But on the question of the effect of the redraft, a stronger statement can be made: for whatever the intent of the redrafters, the effect certainly was to weaken the commitments implied by the Defense draft, and leave the President a great deal of room for maneuver without having to explicitly overrule the recommendations presented to him.

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IX. THE TROOP ISSUE

To return to a question of judgement, it is difficult to assess how far this gradual hedging of proposals for very strong commitments to Vietnam simply reflected a desire (very probably encouraged by the White House) to leave the President freedom of action. To some extent it surely reflects a growing hope that perhaps the Laos cease-fire would come off; the country would not be flatly lost; and consequently, that the May 1 Defense draft, and even the May 3 State draft, reflected a somewhat panicky overestimate of how far we needed to go to keep Southeast Asia from falling apart. The two motives obviously overlapped.

There are indications that, as late as May 5, the estimate for saving something out of Laos remained bleak. On May 4, after a visit to the President, Senator Fulbright (who had opposed intervention in Laos along with other Congressional leaders) announced from the steps of the White House that he would support troop commitments to Thailand and Vietnam. An NSC meeting the following day (May 5) was devoted to discussing steps to reassure Vietnam and Thailand. Then in the afternoon, the President announced Vice President Johnson's visit to Asia at a press conference, which included this garbled exchange:

Q. Mr. President, there have been reports that you would be prepared to send American forces into South Vietnam if that became necessary to prevent Communist domination of that country. Could you tell us whether that is correct, and also anything else you have regarding plans for that country?

A. Well, we have had a group working in the government and we have had a Security Council meeting about the problems which are faced in Vietnam by the guerrillas and by the barrage which the present government is being subjected to. The problem of troops is a matter -- the matter of what we are going to do to assist Vietnam to obtain [retain?] its independence is a matter under consideration. There are a good many [issues?] which I think can most usefully wait until we have had consultations with the government, which up to the present time -- which will be one of the matters which Vice President Johnson will deal with; the problem of consultations with the Government of Vietnam as to what further steps could most usefully be taken. 23/

On May 8, the reconstituted International Control Commission (established by the Geneva Agreement of 1954) arrived in Laos, hoping to supervise a cease-fire. The cease-fire had been agreed to in principle by both sides as early as May 1. The question was whether the Pathet Lao

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would really stop advancing. Aside from American intervention, a cease-fire was the only hope of the larger, but less effective, pro-Western forces led by Phoumi. Certainly hopes were higher by the 8th than they were a week earlier, but this might not be saying much. The documentary record is ambiguous. The final draft of the letter Vice President Johnson would deliver to Diem was dated May 8, and in this letter Kennedy did not go much beyond the proposals in the April 27 version of the task force report. There was no mention of U.S. troop commitments, nor of a bilateral treaty. Even on the question of a further increase (beyond 170,000) in the RVNAF, Kennedy promised Diem only that this will be "considered carefully with you, if developments should so warrant." 24/

But the same day, Gilpatric sent a memo to the JCS asking their views on U.S. troops in Vietnam:

In preparation for the possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam, it is desired that you give further review and study of the military advisability of such action, as well as to the size and composition of such U.S. forces. Your views, which I hope could include some expression from CINCPAC, would be valuable for consideration prior to the NSC meeting this week (currently scheduled for Friday, May 12). 25/

This in turn was based on a statement in the May 6 Task Force draft, which said that such a study was being carried out, with particular consideration being given to deploying to South Vietnam

...two U.S. battle groups (with necessary command and logistics units), plus an engineer (construction-combat) battalion. These units would be located in the 'high plateau' region, remote from the major population center of Saigon-Cholon, under the command of the Chief, MAAG. To help accelerate the training of the G.V.N. army, they would establish two divisional field training areas. The engineer battalion would undertake construction of roads, air-landing strips and other facilities essential to the logistical support of the U.S. and Vietnamese forces there.

The purpose of these forces (again, from the May 6 draft) would be to

...provide maximum psychological impact in deterrence of further Communist aggression from North Vietnam, China, or the Soviet Union, while rallying the morale of the Vietnamese and encouraging the support of SEATO and neutral nations for Vietnam's defense;

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- release Vietnamese forces from advanced and static defense positions to permit their fuller commitment to counterinsurgency actions;
- provide maximum training to approved Vietnamese forces; and
- provide significant military resistance to potential North Vietnam Communist and/or Chinese Communist action. 26/

The JCS reply, dated May 10, deferred details on the composition of U.S. forces, but quite emphatically recommended that we do send them, "assuming the political decision is to hold Southeast Asia outside the communist sphere." Here is the JCS memo:

In considering the possible commitment of U.S. forces to South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have reviewed the overall critical situation in Southeast Asia with particular emphasis upon the present highly flammable situation in South Vietnam. In this connection the question, however, of South Vietnam should not be considered in isolation but rather in conjunction with Thailand and their overall relationship to the security of Southeast Asia. The views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the question regarding the deployment of U.S. forces into Thailand were provided to you by JCSM-311-61, dated 9 May 1961. The current potentially dangerous military and political situation in Laos, of course, is the focal point in this area. Assuming that the political decision is to hold Southeast Asia outside the Communist sphere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that U.S. forces should be deployed immediately to South Vietnam; such action should be taken primarily to prevent the Vietnamese from being subjected to the same situation as presently exists in Laos, which would then require deployment of U.S. forces into an already existing combat situation.

In view of the foregoing, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that the decision be made to deploy suitable U.S. forces to South Vietnam. Sufficient forces should be deployed to accomplish the following purposes:

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

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Release Vietnamese forces from advanced and static defense positions to permit their fuller commitment to counterinsurgency actions;

Assist in training the Vietnamese forces to the maximum extent possible consistent with their mission;

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

Indicate the firmness of our intent to all Asian nations.

In order to maintain U.S. flexibility in the Pacific, it is envisioned that some or all of the forces deployed to South Vietnam would come from the United States. The movement of these troops could be accomplished in an administrative manner and thus not tax the limited lift capabilities of CINCPAC.

In order to accomplish the foregoing the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that:

President Diem be encouraged to request that the United States fulfill its SEATO obligation, in view of the new threat now posed by the Laotian situation, by the immediate deployment of appropriate U.S. forces to South Vietnam;

Upon receipt of this request, suitable forces could be immediately deployed to South Vietnam in order to accomplish the above-mentioned purpose. Details of size and composition of these forces must include the views of both CINCPAC and CHMAAG which are not yet available. 27/

The NSC meeting that dealt with the Task Force Report was held the next day (the 11th, rather than the 12th as originally anticipated). The President avoided committing himself on the troop issue any further than he had already been committed by the time of his May 5 press conference. The resulting NSAM 52 (signed by McGeorge Bundy) states only that:

The President directs full examination by the Defense Department under the guidance of the Director of the

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continuing Task Force on Vietnam, of the size and composition of forces which would be desirable in the case of a possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam." 28/
(The Task Force Director at this point referred to Sterling Cottrell, a Foreign Service Officer, rather than to Gilpatric).

So the President went no further, really, than to take note of a study that was already well underway. The record does not help us judge what significance to attach to the qualification that the study be done under the guidance of the State Department officer now heading the Task Force.

On other issues relating to our military commitments the President again, with minor alterations, endorsed the proposals of the May 6 draft. On the question of a formal alliance with South Vietnam NSAM 52 reports that:

The Ambassador is authorized to begin negotiations looking toward a new bilateral arrangement with Vietnam, but no firm commitment will be made to such an arrangement without further review by the President.

The President also "confirmed" the decisions quoted earlier accepting the April 27 military recommendations, and accepted the following further recommendations (all from the May 6 report) "with the objective of meeting the increased security threat resulting from the new situation along the frontier between Laos and Vietnam."

1. Assist the G.V.N. armed forces to increase their border patrol and insurgency suppression capabilities by establishing an effective border intelligence and patrol system, by instituting regular aerial surveillance over the entire frontier area, and by applying modern technological area-denial techniques to control the roads and trails along Vietnam's borders. A special staff element (approximately 6 U.S. personnel), to concentrate upon solutions to the unique problems of Vietnam's borders, will be activated in MAAG, Vietnam, to assist a similar special unit in the RVNAF which the G.V.N. will be encouraged to establish; these two elements working as an integrated team will help the G.V.N. gain the support of nomadic tribes and other border inhabitants, as well as introduce advanced techniques and equipment to strengthen the security of South Vietnam's frontiers.

2. Assist the G.V.N. to establish a Combat Development and Test Center in South Vietnam to develop, with the help of

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modern technology, new techniques for use against the Viet Cong forces (approximately 4 U.S. personnel).

3. Assist the G.V.N. forces with health, welfare and public work projects by providing U.S. Army civic action mobile training teams, coordinated with the similar civilian effort (approximately 14 U.S. personnel).

4. Deploy a Special Forces Group (approximately 400 personnel) to Nha Trang in order to accelerate G.V.N. Special Forces training. The first increment, for immediate deployment to Vietnam, should be a Special Forces company (52 personnel).

5. Instruct JCS, CINCPAC, and MAAG to undertake an assessment of the military utility of a further increase in the G.V.N. forces from 170,000 to 200,000 in order to create two new division equivalents for deployment to the northwest border region. The parallel political and fiscal implications should be assessed. 29/

In general Kennedy did not seem to have committed the U.S., by these decisions, significantly further than the U.S. had already been committed by the President's public speeches and remarks at press conferences. In the expanded military aid program approved by the President, there was no item that committed the U.S. any further than we had gone in the case of Laos (that is, beyond providing advisors, materiel, and some covert combat assistance).

A debatable exception was the decision to send 400 special forces troops to speed training of their South Vietnamese counterparts. The idea of sending some Green Berets antedates the Task Force effort. Rostow mentioned it in his April 12 memo, quoted above. It can be argued whether it was really prudent to view this decision as separable from the "combat troops" issue (which also were being considered nominally, at least, for training, not necessarily combat). But obviously the President was sold on their going, and since the Vietnamese Special Forces were themselves supported by CIA rather than the regular military aid program, it was possible to handle these troops covertly. In any event, although there would eventually be 1200 Green Berets in Vietnam (before the first commitment of U.S. combat units) they were apparently never cited as a precedent for or a commitment to a more overt role in the war.

These, then, were the measures relating to military commitments undertaken as a result of the April/May review. The principal objective of these measures (together with the non-military elements of the program) as stated in the Task Force report, and formally adopted in the NSAM, was "to prevent Communist domination of Vietnam." There was no uncertainty about why these

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steps were taken: quite aside from the Administration's strong feelings that we had to deal with the challenge of wars of national liberation, the program adopted seems quite minimal as a response to what was -- even after the cease-fire was confirmed -- a serious setback in Laos. No one in the government, and no one of substantial influence outside it, questioned the need for some action to hold things together in Southeast Asia.

For the fact was that our stake in Vietnam had increased because of what had been happening in Laos, quite aside from anything that we did or said. Collapse in Vietnam would be worse after Laos than it might have seemed before. And to do nothing after Laos would not really have made the U.S. look better if Vietnam fell; it would only have increased the likelihood both that that would happen, and greatly increased the extent to which the U.S. (and within U.S. politics, the Kennedy Administration) would be blamed for the collapse.

The Laotian situation did not even provide, then, a precedent for seeking to settle the Vietnamese situation through the same coalition government route. For in Laos, the pro-U.S. faction was plainly being defeated militarily in open battle despite a good deal of U.S. aid. The only U.S. alternative to accepting the coalition solution was to take over the war ourselves. Further, there was a strong neutralist faction in Laos, which could provide a premier for the government and at least a veneer of hope that the settlement might be something more than a face-saving way of handing the country over to the communist faction.

Neither of these conditions held for Vietnam, aside from all the other factors reviewed in the introduction to this paper which left the Administration no realistic option in the neutralist direction, even assuming that there was any temptation at that time to move in that direction. To have simply given up on Vietnam at that point, before any major effort had been attempted to at least see if the situation could be saved at reasonable cost, seems to have been, even with the hindsight we now have, essentially out of the question.

That is why, in the context of the time, the commitments Kennedy actually made seem like a near-minimal response which avoided any real deepening of our stake in Vietnam.

There is far more of a problem with the things that we decided to talk about (troops, and a formal treaty with Vietnam) than with the measures Kennedy fully endorsed. Certainly putting troops into Vietnam would increase our stake in the outcome, rather than merely help protect the stake we already had. So, surely, would a formal treaty, even if the treaty nominally required U.S. support only in the case of overt invasion. How much so would depend on the nature of the troop commitments and the nature of the treaty. But, as we will see in the next chapter (in reviewing Vice President Johnson's visit) Diem turned out to want neither troops nor a treaty for the time being. And so these issues were deferred until the fall.

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Aside from questions relating to our commitments to Vietnam, there were also the parallel questions relating to our commitment, if any, to Diem. As noted in the introduction, discussions about Vietnam always had this dual aspect, and this part of the problem was treated with increasing explicitness as time went on (and as the Administration got to know Diem better). In the CIP, it was treated essentially by implication. In the Gilpatric/Lansdale draft of April 26, it was also handled that way: no explicit statement of a change in our relations with Diem was offered, although by implication it was there.

Where the CIP (by implication) saw our increased aid as contingent on Diem's performance, the April 26 program left out any suggestion of a quid pro quo. To the contrary, it simply states that "those portions of the plan which are agreed to by the G.V.N. will be implemented as rapidly as possible."

And where the CIP saw Diem's government as our best hope "at the present time" this note of limited commitment to Diem is dropped in the April 26 draft. Instead we have a bland statement that we will "assist the GVN under President Diem to develop within the country the widest consensus of public support for a government dedicated to resisting communist domination." [emphasis added] 30/

The May 3 State draft and the May 6 final draft dealt with this issue much as they had with the questions of military commitments: that is, these did not so much conspicuously weaken the proposals of the Gilpatric/Lansdale version, as to qualify and elaborate on them in ways that in effect (again, we cannot make a statement on intent) left the President a ready option to reconsider his position. State explicitly asserted that we were changing our policy on Diem, and spelled out some reasons for doing so.

Here are some extracts from the May 6 final draft; (the language is essentially the same in the May 3 draft).

...we must continue to work through the present Vietnamese government despite its acknowledged weakness. No other remotely feasible alternative exists at this point in time which does not involve an unacceptable degree of risk...Diem is not now fully confident of United States support. This confidence has been undermined partly by our vigorous efforts to get him to mend his ways, and partly by the equivocal attitude he is convinced we took at the time of the November 11, 1960, attempted coup. It is essential that President Diem's full confidence in and communication with the United States be restored promptly...Given Diem's personality and character and the abrasive nature of our recent

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relationships, success or failure in this regard will depend very heavily on Ambassador Nolting's ability to get on the same wavelength with Diem...

The chief threat to the viability of President Diem's administration is, without a doubt, the fact of communist insurgency and the government's inability to protect its own people. Thus military measures must have the highest priority. There is, nevertheless, strong discontent with the government among not only the elite but among peasants, labor, and business. Criticism focuses on the dynastic aspects of the Diem rule, on its clandestine political apparatus, and on the methods through which the President exercises his leadership. This is aggravated by Communist attempts to discredit the President and weaken his government's authority. All this is made the easier because of a communications void existing between the government and the people. For many months United States efforts have been directed toward persuading Diem to adopt political, social, and economic changes designed to correct this serious defect. Many of these changes are included in the Counterinsurgency Plan. Our success has been only partial. There are those who consider that Diem will not succeed in the battle to win men's minds in Vietnam.

Thus in giving priority emphasis to the need for internal security, we must not relax in our efforts to persuade Diem of the need for political social and economic progress. If his efforts are inadequate in this field our overall objective could be seriously endangered and we might once more find ourselves in the position of shoring a leader who had lost the support of his people. 31/

Although the paper expresses the hope that through "very astute dealings" ("a combination of positive inducements plus points at which discreet pressure can be exercised") Diem could be successfully worked with, the net effect of the State draft is hardly enthusiastic. The paper tells the President that his Task Force "believes" that the policy will work. But it is a large order: for the aim had been referred to as nothing less than "a major alteration in the present government structure or in its objectives."

In effect, the silence on Diem in the Gilpatric/Lansdale draft was replaced by a detailed statement which, in the course of reaffirming the need to take prompt steps to show confidence in Diem, nevertheless leaves the strong impression that we really did not have much confidence in him at all. Support for Diem became tactical: based explicitly on the hope that he might reform, and implicitly on the fact that trying to overthrow him would

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be terribly risky in the aftermath of Laos, even if the U.S. had someone to overthrow him with. Further, although the paper explicitly conceded first priority to military needs, there was a strong argument that military efforts alone will not be enough.

It was apparently this equivocal attitude toward Diem (aside from any personal considerations) that led to Lansdale's prediction that State could never "win this battle." Thus in the main paper of the May 6 draft the general political objective was stated as:

Develop political and economic conditions which will create a solid and widespread support among the key political groups and the general population for a Vietnam which has the will to resist Communist encroachment and which in turn stems from a stake in a freer and more democratic society. 32/

Lansdale, in a pencilled comment to Gilpatric, complained:

The elected President of Vietnam is ignored in this statement as the base to build upon in countering the communists. This will have the U.S. pitted against Diem as first priority, the communists as second. 33/

Nevertheless, it seems that the May program went a very long way in Lansdale's preferred direction: although the U.S. was expanding its contribution to the Vietnamese effort it was no longer asking for any quid pro quo. The U.S. envisioned "discreet pressure" but certainly not, for then anyway, any hint of withholding aid. The U.S. flatly asserted that it saw no "remotely acceptable alternative to Diem," for the time being, any way. The U.S. thought it vital that Diem do better, but increasing his confidence in the U.S. had top priority. The strongest guidance given the new Ambassador was to "get on Diem's wavelength." 34/

More of this tentative adoption of the Lansdale approach can be seen in the discussion of Vice President Johnson's trip (from the May 6 draft):

The Vice President's visit will provide the added incentive needed to give the GVN the motivation and confidence it needs to carry on the struggle. We believe that meetings between the Vice President and President Diem will act as a catalytic agent to produce broad agreement on the need for accelerated joint Vietnamese-U.S. actions to resist Communist encroachment in SEA. These meetings will also serve to get across to President Diem our confidence in him as a man of great stature and as one of the strong figures in SEA on whom we are placing our reliance. At the same time, these conferences should impress Diem with the degree of importance

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we attach to certain political and economic reforms in Vietnam which are an essential element in frustrating Communist encroachments. Recognizing the difficulties we have had in the past in persuading Diem to take effective action on such reforms, as specific an understanding as possible should be solicited from Diem on this point.

It was this sort of guidance (plus, perhaps, a memo from Lansdale describing President Diem in terms that bear comparison with those Jack Valenti would later use in connection with another President) that accounts for Johnson's famous reference to Diem as the Churchill of Asia. 35/

In sum, what emerges from the final version of the report is a sense that the U.S. had decided to take a crack at the Lansdale approach of trying to win Diem over with a strong display of personal confidence in him. What does not emerge is any strong sense that the Administration believed this new approach really had much hope of working, but undoubtedly this pessimistic reading is influenced by the hindsight now available. The drafters of the paper very probably saw themselves as hedging against the possible failure of the policy, rather than implying that it probably would not work.

If we go beyond the paperwork, and ask what judgments might be made about the intent of the senior decision-makers, and particularly the President, it seems that here, even more than in connection with the military commitments discussed earlier, the Administration adopted a course which, whether in hindsight the wisest available or not, probably seemed to have no practical alternative.

Presumably the top level of the Administration believed there was at least some chance that the new policy toward Diem might produce useful results.

But even to the extent this prospect seemed dim, there were political advantages (or at least political risks avoided) in giving this plan a try, and there must not have seemed (as even now there does not seem) to have been much cost in doing so.

Finally, whatever the President thought of the prospects and political advantages of this approach to Diem, it might have been hard at that time to see any drastically different alternative anyway. After all, the heart of the Laos embarrassment was that the U.S. was (with some face-saving cover) dropping an anti-communist leader who had come into power with the indispensable assistance of the U.S. This dropping of Phoumi in Laos in favor of support for the neutralist government Phoumi had overthrown with U.S. encouragement and assistance remained an essential part of whatever outcome developed in Laos. In the wake of this embarrassment, the U.S. was

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now trying to reassure other governments in Southeast Asia. Was it possible to carry out this reassurance while threatening Diem, another anti-communist leader totally dependent on U.S. support, with withdrawal of our support (our only available form of pressure) unless he reformed himself according to U.S. prescription? Was this a prudent time to risk a coup in South Vietnam, which was the widely predicted effect of any show of lack of confidence in Diem?

It is obviously impossible for us to strike a balance among these reasons (or perhaps some others) why the decisions were made the way they were. More interesting, though, is that it seems to have been unnecessary for even the decision-maker himself to strike such a balance. For it seems that whatever his view, the policy of trying to reassure Diem (rather than pressure him, or dissociating from him) seemed like a sensible tactic for the moment, and very possible the only sensible tactic for that particular moment.

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IV.B.

FROM MAY TO SEPTEMBER

CHAPTER IV

At the end of September, Admiral Harry Felt, Commander-in-Chief of U.S. forces in the Pacific, stopped off in Saigon on his way to a SEATO meeting in Bangkok. Felt, Ambassador Nolting, and several of their senior aides met with Diem at Independence Palace, on the evening of the 29th. According to Nolting's cable the following day:

In course of long discussion...Diem pointed the question. He asked for a bilateral defense treaty with the U.S. This rather large and unexpected request seemed to have been dragged in by the heels at the end of a far-ranging discussion, but we discovered upon questioning that it was seriously intended... 1/

Although the available record does not explicitly say so, this request presumably triggered the intensive attention to Vietnam planning that began early in October (Nolting's cable arrived October 1) and led to the decision on the 11th to send the Taylor Mission.

The balance of this chapter reviews the major developments between the Presidential decisions on the Task Force Report (May 11) and the arrival of Nolting's cable on the treaty request (October 1).

I. THE JOHNSON MISSION

The available record tells us almost nothing about the Vice President's visit to Saigon beyond what is described in the public memoirs. We know from Nolting's cables that Johnson brought up the possibility of U.S. troops in Vietnam and of a bilateral treaty after Diem (in an after-dinner conversation) began to talk about the problems that communist gains in Laos would create for him. We know that Diem replied that he wanted U.S. combat troops only in the event of open invasion and that he also did not show interest in a treaty. 2/

But we do not know what, if anything, Johnson was authorized to say if Diem had reacted affirmatively. And this could have ranged anywhere from attempting to discourage Diem if he did show interest, to offering some specific proposal and timetable. No strong inference can be drawn from the fact that Johnson, rather than Diem, raised the issue. Even if the President had decided against making troop commitments to Vietnam at that time, there would have been nothing outrageous about instructing Johnson to refer to such a possibility once Diem began to talk about his concerns due to Laos. After all, the whole point of the Johnson

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mission was to reassure Diem and other Asian leaders, that the U.S. could, despite Laos, be counted on in Asia. Simply reading the American newspapers would have told Diem that at least as of May 5, the Administration was seriously considering sending American troops to Vietnam, and that Johnson was expected to discuss this with Diem. A quite reasonable tactical judgment would have been that nothing would have been more likely to make Diem ask for U.S. troops than for Johnson to remain eerily silent on this issue.

Consequently, on the record available, we can do no more than guess what would have happened if Diem reacted affirmatively at the time of Johnson's visit. The most reasonable guess is probably that the Taylor Mission, or something equivalent, would have been undertaken in the spring, rather than in the fall, and nothing very much would have been different in the long run. But that is only a reasonable guess.

For the rest, here are some extracts from a report Johnson wrote after his return. Essentially, Johnson argued for prompt moves by the U.S. to show support for non-communist governments in Southeast Asia. He had in mind expanded conventional military and economic aid, and perhaps a new treaty to replace SEATO. But despite the shock of U.S. willingness to accept a coalition government in Laos, Johnson reported that U.S. troops were neither desired nor required. And although this might not always be the case, Johnson recommended that the U.S. "must remain master of this decision." 3/

The Impact of Laos

There is no mistaking the deep - and long lasting - impact of recent developments in Laos.

Country to country, the degree differs but Laos has created doubt and concern about intentions of the United States throughout Southeast Asia. No amount of success at Geneva can, of itself, erase this. The independent Asians do not wish to have their own status resolved in like manner in Geneva.

Leaders such as Diem, Chiang, Sarit and Ayub more or less accept that we are making "the best of a bad bargain" at Geneva. Their charity extends no farther.

The Impact of the Mission

Beyond question, your judgement about the timing of our mission was correct. Each leader -- except Nehru -- publicly congratulated you on the "timing" of this mission. Chiang said -- and all others privately concurred -- that the mission had the effect of "stabilizing" the situation in the Southeast Asian nations.

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What happened, I believe, was this: the leaders visited want -- as long as they can -- to remain as friends or allies of the United States. The public, or, more precisely, the political, reaction to Laos had drastically weakened the ability to maintain any strongly pro-US orientation. Neutrality in Thailand, collapse in Vietnam, anti-American election demagoguery in the Philippines were all developing prior to our visit. The show of strength and sincerity -- partly because you had sent the Vice President and partly, to a greater extent than you may believe, because you had sent your sister -- gave the friendly leaders something to "hang their hats on" for a while longer.

Our mission arrested the decline of confidence in the United States. It did not -- in my judgment -- restore any confidence already lost. The leaders were as explicit, as courteous and courtly as men could be in making it clear that deeds must follow words -- soon.

We didn't buy time -- we were given it.

If these men I saw at your request were bankers, I would know -- without bothering to ask -- that there would be no further extensions on my note.

* * * *

The Importance of Follow-Through

I cannot stress too strongly the extreme importance of following up this mission with other measures, other actions, and other efforts. At the moment -- because of Laos -- these nations are hypersensitive to the possibility of American hypocrisy toward Asia. Considering the Vienna talks with Khrushchev -- which, to the Asian mind, emphasize Western rather than Asian concerns -- and considering the negative line of various domestic American editorials about this mission, I strongly believe it is of first importance that this trip bear fruit immediately.

Personal Conclusions from the Mission

I took to Southeast Asia some basic convictions about the problems faced there. I have come away from the mission there -- and to India and Pakistan -- with many of those convictions sharpened and deepened by what I saw and learned. I have also reached certain other conclusions which I believe may be of value as guidance for those responsible in formulating policies.

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These conclusions are as follows:

1. The battle against Communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination to achieve success there -- or the United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores. Asian Communism is compromised and contained by the maintenance of free nations on the subcontinent. Without this inhibitory influence, the island outposts -- Philippines, Japan, Taiwan -- have no security and the vast Pacific becomes a Red Sea.
2. The struggle is far from lost in Southeast Asia and it is by no means inevitable that it must be lost. In each country it is possible to build a sound structure capable of withstanding and turning the Communist surge. The will to resist -- while now the target of subversive attack -- is there. The key to what is done by Asians in defense of Southeast Asian freedom is confidence in the United States.
3. There is no alternative to United States leadership in Southeast Asia. Leadership in individual countries -- or the regional leadership and cooperation so appealing to Asians -- rests on the knowledge and faith in United States power, will and understanding.
4. SEATO is not now and probably never will be the answer because of British and French unwillingness to support decisive action. Asian distrust of the British and French is outspoken. Success at Geneva would prolong SEATO's role. Failure at Geneva would terminate SEATO's meaningfulness. In the latter event, we must be ready with a new approach to collective security in the area.

We should consider an alliance of all the free nations of the Pacific and Asia who are willing to join forces in defense of their freedom. Such an organization should:

- a) have a clear-cut command authority
 - b) also devote attention to measures and programs of social justice, housing, land reform, etc.
5. Asian leaders -- at this time -- do not want American troops involved in Southeast Asia other than on training missions. American combat troop involvement is not only not required, it is not desirable. Possibly Americans -- fail to appreciate fully the subtlety that recently-colonial peoples would not look with favor upon governments which invited or accepted the return this soon of Western troops. To

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the extent that fear of ground troop involvement dominates our political responses to Asia in Congress or elsewhere, it seems most desirable to me to allay those paralyzing fears in confidence, on the strength of the individual statements made by leaders consulted on this trip. This does not minimize or disregard the probability that open attack would bring calls for U.S. combat troops. But the present probability of open attack seems scant, and we might gain much needed flexibility in our policies if the spectre of combat troop commitment could be lessened domestically.

6. Any help -- economic as well as military -- we give less developed nations to secure and maintain their freedom must be a part of a mutual effort. These nations cannot be saved by United States help alone. To the extent the Southeast Asian nations are prepared to take the necessary measures to make our aid effective, we can be -- and must be -- unstinting in our assistance. It would be useful to enunciate more clearly than we have -- for the guidance of these young and unsophisticated nations -- what we expect or require of them.
7. In large measure, the greatest danger Southeast Asia offers to nations like the United States is not the momentary threat of Communism itself, rather that danger stems from hunger, ignorance, poverty and disease. We must -- whatever strategies we evolve -- keep these enemies the point of our attack, and make imaginative use of our scientific and technological capability in such enterprises.
8. Vietnam and Thailand are the immediate-and most important-trouble spots, critical to the U.S. These areas require the attention of our very best talents -- under the very closest Washington direction -- on matters economic, military and political.

The basic decision in Southeast Asia is here. We must decide whether to help these countries to the best of our ability or throw in the towel in the area and pull back our defenses to San Francisco and [a] "Fortress America" concept. More important, we would say to the world in this case that we don't live up to treaties and don't stand by our friends. This is not my concept. I recommend that we move forward promptly with a major effort to help these countries defend themselves. I consider the key here is to get our best MAAG people to control, plan, direct and exact results from our military aid program. In Vietnam and Thailand, we must move forward together.

- a. In Vietnam, Diem is a complex figure beset by many problems. He has admirable qualities, but he is remote from the

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people, is surrounded by persons less admirable and capable than he. The country can be saved -- if we move quickly and wisely. We must decide whether to support Diem -- or let Vietnam fall. We must have coordination of purpose in our country team, diplomatic and military. The Saigon Embassy, USIS, MAAG and related operations leave much to be desired. They should be brought up to maximum efficiency. The most important thing is imaginative, creative, American management of our military aid program. The Vietnamese and our MAAG estimate that \$50 million of U.S. military and economic assistance will be needed if we decide to support Vietnam. This is the best information available to us at the present time and if it is confirmed by the best Washington military judgment it should be supported. Since you proposed and Diem agreed to a joint economic mission, it should be appointed and proceed forthwith.

b. In Thailand, the Thais and our own MAAG estimate probably as much is needed as in Vietnam -- about \$50 million of military and economic assistance. Again, should our best military judgment concur, I believe we should support such a program. Sarit is more strongly and staunchly pro-Western than many of his people. He is and must be deeply concerned at the consequence to his country of a communist-controlled Laos. If Sarit is to stand firm against neutralism, he must have -- soon -- concrete evidence to show his people of United States military and economic support. He believes that his armed forces should be increased to 150,000. His Defense Minister is coming to Washington to discuss aid matters.

* * * *

To recapitulate, these are the main impressions I have brought back from my trip.

The fundamental decision required of the United States -- and time is of the greatest importance -- is whether we are to attempt to meet the challenge of Communist expansion now in Southeast Asia by a major effort in support of the forces of freedom in the area or throw in the towel. This decision must be made in a full realization of the very heavy and continuing costs involved in terms of money, of effort and of United States prestige. It must be made with the knowledge that at some point we may be faced with the further decision of whether we commit major United States forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw should our other efforts fail. We must remain master in this decision. What we do in Southeast Asia should be part of a rational program to meet the threat we face in the region as a whole. It should include a clear-cut pattern of specific contributions to be expected by each partner according to his ability and resources. I recommend we proceed with a clear-cut and strong program of action.

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II. DIEM'S JUNE LETTER

During his visit Johnson, on behalf of Kennedy, invited Diem to prepare a set of proposals on South Vietnamese military needs for consideration by Washington. In a letter May 15, Diem told Kennedy that the definitive study would be ready in a few weeks. (He appreciated this invitation, Diem told Kennedy, "particularly because we have not become accustomed to being asked for our own views on our needs.)"

On June 9, Diem signed the promised letter. It was carried to Washington by a key Diem aide (Nguyen Dinh Thuan) and delivered on the 14th. (Thuan played a key role on the Vietnamese side throughout 1961. He was the man Durbrow, in the cable quoted in full earlier, suspected was the only cabinet member Diem had told about the CIP. In a memo to Gilpatric, Lansdale described him as Diem's "Secretary of Security, Defense, Interior, etc.") 4/

In the letter, Diem proposed an increase in the RVNAF to 270,000 men, or to double the 150,000 strength authorized at the start of 1961, and 100,000 men more than envisioned under the CIP. That was a large request: for up until the end of April, the U.S. and South Vietnamese were still haggling over the go-ahead for a 20,000-man increase. Further, Diem made it clear that he saw this force requirement as a semi-permanent increase in South Vietnamese strength, which would continue to be needed even should he eliminate the Viet Cong.

Here are some extracts from Diem's letter:

The situation...has become very much more perilous following the events in Laos, the more and more equivocal attitude of Cambodia and the intensification of the activities of aggression of international communism which wants to take the maximum advantage to accelerate the conquest of Southeast Asia. It is apparent that one of the major obstacles to the communist expansion on this area of the globe is Free Vietnam because with your firm support, we are resolved to oppose it with all our energies. Consequently, now and henceforth, we constitute the first target for the communists to overthrow at any cost. The enormous accumulation of Russian war material in North Vietnam is aimed, in the judgment of foreign observers, more at South Vietnam than at Laos. We clearly realize this dangerous situation but I want to reiterate to you here, in my personal name and in the name of the entire Vietnamese people, our indomitable will to win.

On the second of May, my council of generals met to evaluate the current situation and to determine the needs of the Republic of Vietnam to meet this situation. Their objective

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evaluation shows that the military situation at present is to the advantage of the communists and that most of the Vietnamese Armed Forces are already committed to internal security and the protection of our 12 million inhabitants. For many months the communist-inspired fratricidal war has taken nearly one thousand casualties a month on both sides. Documents obtained in a recent operation, along route No. 9 which runs from Laos to Vietnam, contain definite proof that 2,860 armed agents have infiltrated among us in the course of the last four months.* It is certain that this number rises each day. However, the Vietnamese people are showing the world that they are willing to fight and die for their freedom, not withstanding the temptations to neutralism and its false promises of peace being drummed into their ears daily by the communists.

In the light of this situation, the council of generals concluded that additional forces numbering slightly over 100,000 more than our new force level of 170,000 will be required to counter the ominous threat of communist domination...

After considering the recommendations of our generals and consulting with our American military advisors, we now conclude that to provide even minimum initial resistance to the threat, two new divisions of approximately 10,000 strength each are required to be activated at the earliest possible date. Our lightly held defensive positions along the demilitarized zone at our Northern border is even today being outflanked by communist forces which have defeated the Royal Laotian Army garrisons in Tchepone and other cities in Southern Laos. Our ARVN forces are so thoroughly committed to internal anti-guerrilla operations that we have no effective forces with which to counter this threat from Southern Laos. Thus, we need immediately one division for the First Army Corps and one for the Second Army Corps to provide at least some token resistance to the sizeable forces the communists are capable of bringing to bear against our Laotian frontier. Failing this, we would have no recourse but to withdraw our forces southward from the demilitarized zone and sacrifice progressively greater

* Diem's number implies an infiltration rate about 4 times as high as that estimated by U.S. intelligence in 1961, and twice as high as the hindsight revised 1961 estimates now in use.

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areas of our country to the communists. These divisions should be mobilized and equipped, together with initial logistic support units, immediately after completion of activation of the presently contemplated increase of 20,000 which you have offered to support.

Following the activation of these units, which should begin in about five months, we must carry on the program of activation of additional units until over a period of two years we will have achieved a force of 14 infantry divisions, an expanded airborne brigade of approximately division strength and accompanying (support?)... The mission of this total 270,000 man force remains the same, namely, to overcome the insurgency which has risen to the scale of a bloody, communist-inspired civil war within our borders and to provide initial resistance to overt, external aggression until free world forces under the SEATO agreement can come to our aid. The question naturally arises as to how long we shall have to carry the burden of so sizeable a military force. Unfortunately, I can see no early prospects for the reduction of such a force once it has been established; for even though we may be successful in liquidating the insurgency within our borders, communist pressure in Southeast Asia and the external military threat to our country must be expected to increase, I fear, before it diminishes. This means that we must be prepared to maintain a strong defensive military posture for at least the foreseeable future in order that we may not become one of the so-called "soft spots" which traditionally have attracted communist aggression. We shall therefore continue to need material support to maintain this force whose requirements far exceed the capacity of our economy to support....

To accomplish this 100,000 man expansion of our military forces, which is perfectly feasible from a manpower viewpoint, will require a great intensification of our training programs in order to produce, in the minimum of time, those qualified combat leaders and technical specialists needed to fill the new units and to provide to them the technical and logistic support required to insure their complete effectiveness. For this purpose a considerable expansion of the United States Military Advisory Group is an essential requirement. Such an expansion, in the form of selected elements of the American Armed Forces to establish training centers for the Vietnamese Armed Forces, would serve the dual purpose of providing an expression of the United States' determination to halt the tide of communist aggression and of preparing our forces in the minimum of time.

While the Government and people of Vietnam are prepared to carry the heavy manpower burden required to save our country,

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we well know that we cannot afford to pay, equip, train and maintain such forces as I have described. To make this effort possible, we would need to have assurances that this needed material support would be provided. 5/

The record is unclear on the immediate response to this letter. In particular, we have no record of the conversations Thuan had in Washington when he delivered the requests. The issue of the RVNAF increases somehow became part of the business of an economic mission then about to leave for Vietnam (the Staley Mission, discussed in the following section). The request for "selected elements of the American Armed Forces", raised in the next-to-last quoted paragraph, is left thoroughly obscure in the records we have--to the point where we are not at all sure either what Diem meant by it or how the Administration reacted to it. But, as will be seen in the section below on "U.S. Troops", nothing came of it.

III. THE STALEY MISSION

One of the continuing negotiating items through most of 1961 was the extent to which the South Vietnamese should finance their own effort. The U.S. view was that the South Vietnamese were not doing enough. The result was American pressure on Diem to undertake what was called tax "reform." Diem was most reluctant to move. It is pretty clear that a large part of Diem's reluctance to move flowed from the same (well-founded) sense of personal insecurity that made him avoid establishing a clear military chain of command. On the latter issue, the risk of weakening the war effort obviously struck him as less dangerous than the risk of making a coup easier by concentrating military authority in his generals instead of dividing it between the generals and the 38 province chiefs. Similarly, for a ruler so unsure of his hold on the country, a serious effort at imposing austerity looked more risky than holding out for the Americans to provide a few more millions out of their vast resources. But Diem, of course, was hardly likely to admit such reasons to the Americans, assuming he admitted them to himself. Consequently, on these issues (as on many others) the record is a long story of tediously extracted promises, excuses for inaction, and American complaints about Diem's administrative style.

On the economic issue, the substance of the argument was this:

The deficit between what Diem raised in taxes and what his budget required was made up by the U.S. through a commercial import program. The regime sold the goods provided by the U.S. to South Vietnamese businessmen, and used the piasters thus acquired mainly to meet the local currency costs (mostly food and pay) for the armed forces. U.S. dissatisfaction with the South Vietnamese effort showed clearly in the decision to ask the South Vietnamese themselves to provide the local currency costs for the 20,000 man force increase proposed in the CIP, although the U.S. had been paying these costs (through the import program) for the balance

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of the forces. The South Vietnamese insisted, for the outset, that they could not raise the piasters required.

The basic question of whether the South Vietnamese were bearing a reasonable share of the burden devolved into a number of technical issues, such as the effect of the program on inflation in South Vietnam, and the piaster/dollar exchange rate. The Gilpatric/Lansdale draft of the Task Force Report proposed that Diem be flatly assured that the U.S. would make up any deficit in the Vietnamese budget. But State objected from the start to giving any such assurance. Instead a joint commission of U.S. and South Vietnamese economic experts was proposed to work out a joint program dealing with these economic issues. This was one of the proposals Vice President Johnson carried with him on his mission. Diem accepted the proposal. And the U.S. team, headed by Eugene Staley (president of the Stanford Research Institute) was dispatched to South Vietnam in mid-June.

By the time the Staley Mission left, though, Diem had written the letter just quoted asking for U.S. support for a large further increase in his forces. Staley's group, with its Vietnamese counterpart, found themselves serving as the vehicle for the discussions on force levels. The report they issued is mostly about military issues, on which the economists stated they simply reflected instructions passed on by their respective governments. Here are some excerpts on the military issues (in addition, the report of course contained a discussion, rather vague as it turned out, of the economic issues which were nominally its purpose, and it also contained a good deal of very fine, vigorous language on the need for "crash programs" of economic and social development).

Viet Nam is today under attack in a bitter, total struggle which involves its survival as a free nation. Its enemy, the Viet Cong, is ruthless, resourceful, and elusive. This enemy is supplied, reinforced, and centrally directed by the international Communist apparatus operating through Hanoi. To defeat it requires the mobilization of the entire economic, military psychological, and social resources of the country and vigorous support from the United States.

The intensified program which we recommend our two countries adopt as a basis for mutual actions over the next several years is designed not just to hold the line but to achieve a real breakthrough. Our joint efforts must surpass the critical threshold of the enemy's resistance, thereby putting an end to his destructive attacks, and at the same time we must make a decisive impact on the economic, social, and ideological front.

The turn of events in Laos has created further serious problems with regard to the maintenance of the GVN as a free

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and sovereign non-Communist nation. In particular, the uncovering of the Laotian-Viet Nam border to DRV or DRV-supported forces creates a serious threat of increased covert infiltration of personnel, supplies, and equipment to the Viet Cong. With such increased support, the Viet Cong undoubtedly hope to seize firm military control of a geographic area and announce the establishment therein of a "rebel" government for South Viet Nam which would then be recognized by and receive military support from the DRV, Communist China, and Soviet Russia. (Example: The present situation in Laos.)

The joint VN-US group does not consider itself competent to make specific recommendations as to desired force levels for the defense of Viet Nam. They have, however, after consultation with their respective military authorities, adopted for economic planning purposes certain estimated strength figures for the GVN armed forces under two alternative assumptions. Alternative A assumes that the Communist-led insurgency effort remains at approximately its present level of intensity and the Government of Laos maintains sufficient independence from the Communist Bloc to deny authority for the transit of DVN or Communist Chinese troops across its borders. Alternative B assumes that the Viet Cong are able to significantly increase their insurgency campaign within Viet Nam and that the situation in Laos continues to deteriorate to the point where the Communists gain de facto control of that country.

Alternative A called for a build-up of Diem's forces to 200,000 (vs. 170,000 then authorized). Alternative B called for continuing the build-up to 270,000. On this basis, Kennedy agreed to provide support for the increase to 200,000. The 200,000-man approval was supposed to be contingent on South Vietnamese agreement to a plan for using the forces. The question of a further increase to 270,000 was deferred, since it did not need to be faced until the lower figure was being approached, sometime late in 1962. 6/

A consequence of the Staley Mission was the South Vietnamese troop levels needed little attention in the fall review: the U.S. simply decided to support the increase to 200,000 even though the agreed plan for using the forces did not yet exist (as in May the U.S. had agreed to support the increase to 170,000 which also, it will be recalled, was supposed to have been contingent on such a plan).

A few points about the Staley Mission seem useful to keep in mind in reviewing the fall process:

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1. It is another reminder of the prevailing (although not universal) over-optimism of U.S. appraisals of the Vietnam problem.
2. One of the follow-on actions to the report was supposed to be a Vietnamese announcement of a program of social reform. Producing this piece of paper (and in the end it was not much more than a piece of paper) took months. It was experiences such as this that gave questions about the viability of the Diem regime greater prominence in the fall review than they had received during April and May.
3. The U.S. was still continuing to deal with Diem most gently. Nothing more was asked of Diem as a quid pro quo than that he finally work up a plan for the counterinsurgency. The President explicitly accepted the assumptions of the Joint Plan worked out by the Staley Mission and their Vietnamese counterparts.

This is from the formal record of decision:

Joint Program of Action
With the Government of
Vietnam (Staley Report)

August 4, 1961

The President agrees with the three basic tenets on which the recommendations contained in the Joint Action Program are based, namely:

- a. Security requirements must, for the present, be given first priority.
- b. Military operations will not achieve lasting results unless economic and social programs are continued and accelerated.
- c. It is in our joint interest to accelerate measures to achieve a self-sustaining economy and a free and peaceful society in Viet-Nam. 7/

Similar language was used at the time of the May decisions. So it is not new. It is only that, in the light of Diem's inactivity, the phrases implying that non-military efforts are also important had come to sound a little hollow.

IV. U.S. COMBAT TROOPS

From the time of the Laos Annex to the original Gilpatric/Lansdale draft of the Task Force Report (April 28), the record shows persistent activity on some level or other on the issue of sending U.S. combat troops to Vietnam.

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At the time of the Task Force review, it will be recalled, Defense recommended sending two 1600-man combat units to Vietnam to set up two training centers for the Vietnamese in the highlands. In later drafts of the Task Force report, this proposal was broadened to consider sending American troops for wider purposes, short of direct combat against the Viet Cong. But the proposal was downgraded to a subject for study and was no longer a definite recommendation.

Here is a summary of the items (on the issue of U.S. combat troops) in the record available to this study following Kennedy's decisions on the Task Force Report (May 11).

On May 12 Vice President Johnson discussed the question with Diem, as described in an earlier section. This seems to have resolved the issue (negatively) so far as Johnson was concerned, and possibly as far as President Kennedy was concerned. But if it did, the President's view was not very emphatically passed on to subordinate members of the Administration. For a week later, Lansdale sent a memo to Gilpatrick noting that Diem did not want U.S. combat units as such, but that he might accept these units if they had a mission of training South Vietnamese forces:

Ambassador Nolting [said] that President Diem would welcome as many U.S. military personnel as needed for training and advising Vietnamese forces. [MAAG Chief] General McGarr, who was also present at this discussion [between Johnson and Diem], reported that while President Diem would not want U.S. combat forces for the purpose of fighting Communists in South Vietnam, he would accept deployment of U.S. combat forces as trainers for the Vietnamese forces at any time. 8/

This language leaves it unclear whether McGarr was merely stating his opinion (which supported his own desire to bring in U.S. combat units), or reporting what he understood Diem to have said.

(About the same day of Lansdale's memo--May 18--the JCS had restated its recommendation of May 10 that combat troops should be sent to Vietnam; and McGarr, from Saigon, had recommended sending a 16,000 man force, or if Diem would not accept that, a 10,000 man force with the nominal mission of establishing training centers for the Vietnamese. The similar recommendation made in the Task Force drafts had suggested 3200 men for the force.) 9/

In any event, Lansdale's memo makes it quite clear that he (along with McGarr and the JCS) were primarily interested in getting U.S. combat units into Vietnam, with the training mission a possible device for getting Diem to accept them. After a discussion of JCS and CINCPAC planning and of alternative locations for the troops, Lansdale comments:

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...any of the above locations have good areas for training of Vietnamese forces, if this were to be a mission of the U.S. forces.

In the available papers, no one at this time talked about using American units to directly fight the Viet Cong. Rather it was mainly in terms of relieving Vietnamese units to undertake offensive action. We can only guess what people were really thinking. As the training-the-Vietnamese rationale seems essentially a device for getting Diem to accept the units, the non-combatant role for U.S. troops may have been (and probably was in the minds of at least some of the planners) mainly a device for calming those members of the Administration who were reluctant to involve American units in fighting the Viet Cong. Certainly in hindsight, it seems most unrealistic to suppose that American combat units could have been stationed in a center of Viet Cong activity (a number of papers postulate the insurgents were attempting to establish a "liberated area" in the high plateau, which was the principal locale discussed) without themselves becoming involved in the fighting.

Lansdale concluded his memo by reminding Gilpatric that Diem was sending Thuan ("Secretary of Security, Defense, Interior, etc.") to Washington to deliver his letter on Vietnam's "definitive military needs." Lansdale recommended that Gilpatric take up the question of whether Diem would accept U.S. troops with Thuan. "With concrete information, you will then have a firm position for further decisions."

But apparently someone did not want to wait for Thuan. For on May 27, Nolting reported that he had brought up the question of what Diem meant in his conversation with Johnson directly with Diem, and that Diem did not then want U.S. combat units "for this or any other reason." 10/

Nevertheless, on June 9, Diem signed the letter to Kennedy that, as quoted above, asked for:

...selected elements of the American Armed Forces to establish training centers for the Vietnamese Armed Forces, ...

a move which Diem stated:

...would serve the dual purpose of providing an expression of the United States' determination to halt the tide of communist aggression and of preparing our forces in the minimum of time. 11/

This certainly sounded very much like the recommendation of the Task Force draft, or McGarr's later expanded version of that proposal; particularly since Diem explicitly stated that he had McGarr's advice in

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drafting the proposals. But where the American proposals were for training whole South Vietnamese divisions, Diem said the training centers would be for combat leaders and technical specialists. Consequently, it seems that Diem did not have the same thing in mind in referring to "selected elements of the American Armed Forces" as did McGarr and others interested in bringing in American combat units. It may be that Diem agreed to put in this request that sounded like what McGarr wanted as a concession to the Americans in return for support of the large increase in the RVNAF he was asking.

Presumably this was clarified during the discussions Thuan had after delivering the letter. But, as noted earlier, we have no record of the conversations. In any event, nothing came of the proposal.

(A summary of Diem's letter, cabled to the American mission in Saigon the day after the letter was received in Washington, did not use the phrase "selected elements of the American Armed Forces." Instead it said that Diem asked for an increase of "American personnel" to establish the training centers. The crucial issue, of course, was whether Americans would be sent to Vietnam in the form of organized combat units, capable of, if not explicitly intended, for conducting combat operations. We do not know whether the wording of the summary reflected Thuan's clarification of the proposal when he arrived in Washington, or a high level Administration decision to interpret Diem's letter as not asking for combat units, or merely sloppy drafting of the cable.)

It seems clear that either Diem (despite the language of the letter he signed) really did not want American units, or that Kennedy (despite the activity of his subordinates) did not want to send those units, or both.

Sorenson, in his memoir, says that in May Kennedy decided against sending combat units despite the recommendations he received at the time of the Task Force Report. But his account of the Task Force is in error on a number of details, and so it is hard to know how much to credit his recollection. 12/

But there is a final item apparently from this period that seems to support Sorenson. It is a handwritten undated note on a piece of scratch paper from Rostow to McNamara. It looks like a note passed at a meeting. From its location in the file, it was probably written about June 5, that is, a few days before Thuan arrived with Diem's letter. It reads:

Bob:

We must think of the kind of forces and missions for Thailand now, Vietnam later.

We need a guerrilla deterrence operation in Thailand's northeast.

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We shall need forces to support a counter-guerrilla war in Vietnam:

aircraft
helicopters
communications men
special forces
militia teachers
etc.

WWR 13/

Two things are striking about this note: first, it is a quite exact description of the sort of military assistance Kennedy finally dispatched to Vietnam (i.e., combat support and advisors but not American units capable of independent combat against the guerrillas). Second, it certainly suggests that despite what Lansdale, McGarr, and others were doing, those close to the President were not at this time thinking about sending American combat units to Vietnam (or any American forces, for even the units Rostow lists are for "later" in contrast to "Thailand now"). Nevertheless on July 20, McGarr again raised the question of combat units for training with Diem, and reported again that he did not want them.

In general, we seem to be seeing here a pattern that first began to emerge in the handling of the Task Force Report and which will be even more strikingly evident in the President's handling of the Taylor Report.

Someone or other is frequently promoting the idea of sending U.S. combat units. Kennedy never makes a clear-cut decision but some way or other action is always deferred on any move that would probably lead to engagements on the ground between American units and the Viet Cong.

We have no unambiguous basis for judging just what had really happened in each case. But we do see a similar pattern at least twice and possibly three different times: in May, perhaps again in June (depending on details of Thuan's talks in Washington not available to this study), and as we will report shortly, again in November. In each case, the record seems to be moving toward a decision to send troops, or at least to a Presidential decision that, in principal, troops should be sent if Diem can be persuaded to accept them. But no such decision is ever reached. The record never shows the President himself as the controlling figure. In June, there does not seem to be any record of what happened, at least in the files available to this study. In May and, as we will see, in November, the President conveniently receives a revised draft of the recommendations which no longer requires him to commit himself.

No reliable inference can be drawn from this about how Kennedy would have behaved in 1965 and beyond had he lived. (One of those who had advised retaining freedom of action on the issue of sending U.S. combat

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troops was Lyndon Johnson.) It does not prove that Kennedy behaved soundly in 1961. Many people will think so; but others will argue that the most difficult problem of recent years might have been avoided if the U.S. had made a hard commitment on the ground in South Vietnam in 1961.

V. THE TREATY REQUEST

As to Diem, we have, of course, even less in the way of a record from which to judge what he really thought he was doing. But it is not hard to understand why he should be reluctant to accept U.S. combat troops. His stated reason was always that sending U.S. combat units would signal the end of the Geneva Accords. But this explanation explains little. Diem thought the Geneva Accords were betrayal of Vietnam in 1954, and a farce, freely violated by the communists, later. Consequently, he would be concerned about their demise only if North Vietnam could use this as a pretext for an overt invasion. But North Vietnam had long had a suitable pretext for an invasion in Diem's refusal to discuss the elections called for under the Geneva Accords. Diem's shield was the threat of U.S. intervention, not the Geneva Accords, and it is mighty hard to see how this shield could be weakened by putting American troops on the ground in South Vietnam.

But there were other reasons for Diem to be wary of U.S. troops. For one thing, not even Diem's severest critics questioned his commitment to Vietnamese nationalism. The idea of inviting foreign troops back into Vietnam must surely have been distasteful even once he decided it was unavoidable. Further, the presence of American troops in Vietnam had a very ambivalent effect on the risk to Diem of a military coup. To the extent American troops increased the sense of security, they would lessen the likelihood of a coup, which the military rationalized mainly on the grounds that they could not win the war under Diem. But the larger the American military presence in the country, the more Diem would have to worry about American ability and temptation to encourage a coup if Diem incurred American displeasure.

The net impact of these conflicting effects would depend on the security situation in Vietnam. If Diem felt strong, he would probably not want American troops; if he felt weak, he might see no choice but to risk inviting the Americans in. Even at the time of the Taylor mission, we will see Diem is most erratic on this issue.

Against this background, it is easy to understand why Diem, when the situation got worse in September, should have "pointed the question" at whether the U.S. would give him a treaty, rather than whether the U.S. would send in troops. As far as we can see, he was mostly concerned about what the latest VC attacks were doing to confidence in his regime, rather than any fear that the VC, still estimated at fewer than 20,000 strong, were going to defeat the quarter million regulars and auxiliaries in his own forces. What he probably wanted was an unambiguous public commitment

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that the Americans would not let Vietnam fall. For this would meet his immediate concern about confidence in his regime, perhaps even more effectively than the dispatch of American troops, and without the disadvantages that would come with accepting American troops. For Diem, a clear-cut treaty probably seemed the best possible combination of maximizing the American commitment while minimizing American leverage. And that, of course, would help explain why the Administration was not terribly attracted to such a proposal.

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VI. THE SITUATION IN SEPTEMBER

So far as the available record shows, there was no sense of imminent crisis in the official reporting to Washington as fall of 1961 began. An NIE published in mid-August concluded that Diem faced a "prolonged and difficult struggle" against the insurgency, and noted that "the French with their memories of the Indochina that was and the British with their experience in Malaya tend to be pessimistic regarding GVN prospects for combating the insurgency." 14/ But the NIE also reported that Diem's army had been performing better in 1961 than in 1960. Warning of possible trouble looked months, rather than weeks, ahead. The danger foreseen was a coup: "if the fight against the Viet Cong goes poorly during the next year or the South Vietnamese Army suffers heavy casualties, the chances of a military coup would substantially increase." 15/

The judgment of the NIE on the effects of such a coup was entirely negative:

If there is a serious disruption of GVN leadership as a result of Diem's death or as the result of a military coup, any momentum of GVN's counterinsurgency efforts had achieved will be halted or reversed, at least for a time. The confusion and suspicion attending a coup effort could provide the communists with an opportunity to seize control of the government. 16/

There is no mention of any offsetting hope for a coup leading to more effective prosecution of the war. The overall impression left by the NIE is that Diem is not a very effective leader, but that he is getting along well enough to make the risks of a coup look more dangerous than the risks of the war being unwinnable under his leadership. In particular, a coup (or Diem's death) were seen as the only thing that could bring a quick collapse of the Saigon regime, as opposed to the loss over time of a "prolonged and difficult" struggle.

MAAG Chief McGarr, in a report dated September 1, spoke of the "enhanced sense of urgency and offensive spirit now present within both the RVNAF and the Government of Vietnam..." Under the heading "Outlook for Next Year," he reported:

With the increased effectiveness of the Armed Forces beginning to be demonstrated by the recent operations in the Delta Region and the manifest intent of the U.S. to continue and even step up its vital support of the Vietnamese in their struggle against Communism, there is a spirit of renewed confidence beginning to permeate the people, the GVN, and the Armed Forces. 17/

The political reporting from Saigon was less optimistic. Generally, these reports argued that Diem was not doing much to strengthen his support.

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But there was no disagreement with McGarr's fairly optimistic assessment of the military situation and no sense of crisis.

Through unofficial channels, though, the White House was receiving a far bleaker view of the situation. Schelsinger reports:

'The situation gets worse almost week by week,' Theodore H. White wrote us in August. '...The guerrillas now control almost all the southern delta - so much so that I could find no American who would drive me outside Saigon in his car even by day without military convoy.' He reported a 'political breakdown of formidable proportions: ...what perplexes hell out of me is that the Commies, on their side, seem to be able to find people willing to die for their cause...I find it discouraging to spend a night in a Saigon night-club full of young fellows of 20 and 25 dancing and jitterbugging (they are called 'la jeunesse cowboy') while twenty miles away their Communist contemporaries are terrorizing the countryside.' An old China hand, White was reminded of Chungking in the Second World War, complete with Madame Nhu in the role of Madame Chiang Kai-shek. 'If a defeat in South Vietnam is to be considered our defeat, if we are responsible for holding that area, then we must have authority to act. And that means intervention in Vietnam politics...If we do decide so to intervene, have we the proper personnel, the proper instruments, the proper clarity of objectives to intervene successfully?' 18/

It did not take long to confirm White's pessimism, although this must have made the dilemma of what to do about it seem all the more acute. In September, the number of VC attacks jumped to nearly triple the level (about 450 vs. 150) that had prevailed for some months previously. The most spectacular attack, which seems to have had a shattering effect in Saigon, was the seizure of Phuoc Thanh, a provincial capital only 55 miles from Saigon. The insurgents held the town a good part of the day, publicly beheaded Diem's province chief, and departed before government troops arrived. The official reporting to Washington by the end of the month pictured the situation as stagnating, if not dangerously deteriorating, although there continued to be no sense of the imminent crisis that Theodore White foresaw.

Here is an end-of-month report that Nolting sent just prior to the meeting at which Diem asked for the treaty:

Status report on political items as of Sept 28:

General: Governmental and civil situation at end of month much same as at beginning. While neither of these gave open signs of deterioration, Diem government did not significantly improve its political position among people or substantially further national unity. On positive side several fifty-man district level reconstruction teams were sent to each of 4 provinces, and there was

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commendable amount country-side travel by ministers. On other hand, report was received of high-level bickering over powers and authority of new central intelligence organization (FVS-6487), and Diem expressed dissatisfaction with pace of field command's planning of counter-insurgency operations, but he has still not delegated sufficient authority to field command. All in all we unable report that Sept saw progress toward attainment task force goals of creating viable and increasingly democratic society. Some such 'shot in arm' as proposed joint communique seems desirable.

Series large scale VC attacks in various areas central Vietnam during month highlighted increased VC infiltrations through Laos and underscored urgency of free world policy toward Laos which would bring this situation under control. These VC actions plus temporary VC seizure of provincial capital of Phuoc Thanh demonstrated that tide not yet turned in guerrilla war... 19/

The "shot in the arm" Nolting referred to was the communique on social reforms that was agreed to some weeks earlier at the time of the Staley Mission; it would finally be issued, in a watered down form, early in January. The contrast between White's and Nolting's reporting is sharp: White obviously would not have seen the issuing of a communique as a significant "shot in the arm," or commented on the VC show of strength in such mild terms as demonstrating "that tide not yet turned." Consequently, although Diem's request for a treaty (a day after this cable was sent) surprised Nolting, its effect at the White House was presumably to confirm the warning that had already been received through White.

The State Department's view of the situation seems also to have been graver than that of the Embassy in Saigon. We have a situation summary on Southeast Asia that refers to Nolting's cable but not to Diem's treaty request, and which consequently must have been distributed about October 1. On the political situation in South Vietnam, the summary quotes Nolting's "no progress" comments. But the military situation is described more bleakly than Nolting did.

SOUTH VIET-NAM - MILITARY

1. Although GVN military capabilities have increased, Viet Cong capabilities are increasing at more rapid rate and Viet Cong attacks have increased in size.
2. Viet Cong 'regular' forces have increased from about 7,000 at beginning of year to approximately 17,000.
3. Viet Cong have moved from stage of small hands to large units. During September Viet Cong mounted three attacks with over 1,000 men in each. Viet Cong strategy may be directed at 'liberating' an area in which a 'government' could be installed.
4. Although vast majority of Viet Cong troops are of local origin, the infiltration of Viet Cong cadres from North Viet-Nam via

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Laos, the demilitarized zone, and by sea appears to be increasing. However, there is little evidence of major supplies from outside sources, most arms apparently being captured or stolen from GVN forces or from the French during the Indo-China war. 20/

On Laos, the situation summary showed no such pessimism. But, overall the absence of bad news from Laos only added to the worry about South Vietnam. For the paper reported:

There probably have been some Viet Minh withdrawals from northern Laos but Viet Minh movement into Southern Laos bordering on South Vietnam has increased. Thus it appears enemy may be accepting stalemate for time being within Laos and giving priority to stepping up offensive action against South Vietnam. 21/

Two final items are worth bearing in mind in trying to see the Vietnamese problem as it might have appeared to the White House in the fall of 1961. First, this warning of the effect of U.S. policy in Vietnam, from the August 15 NIE quoted earlier:

International Attitudes. In providing the GVN a maximum of encouragement and extensive support in its struggle against the Communists, the US will inevitably become identified with the GVN's success or failure. The US will be under heavy pressure from other members of the non-Communist world, many of whom view the Vietnam struggle in differing terms. For example, the neighboring countries, such as Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Nationalist China, have all to some extent viewed developments in Laos as a gauge of US willingness and ability to help an anti-Communist Asian government stand against a Communist 'national liberation' campaign. They will almost certainly look upon the struggle for Vietnam as a critical test of such US willingness and ability. All of them, including the neutrals, would probably suffer demoralization and loss of confidence in their prospects for maintaining their independence if the Communists were to gain control of South Vietnam. This loss of confidence might even extend to India. 22/

Second, a couple of newspaper quotes may serve as a reminder of the extent to which the Kennedy Administration had been under a constant sense of foreign policy crisis throughout its first year, with every evidence of more to come. In late September, in a review piece on Congressional appraisals of Kennedy's first year, Russell Baker comments that not even Congress seems much interested in debate about Kennedy's effectiveness in pushing through legislation:

What makes it particularly irrelevant this autumn is that Congress itself has been far more concerned ever since January

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with the President's performance as guardian of the national security than with how he came out as chief warrior for a legislative program.

From Laos to Cuba to Vienna to Berlin to the Soviet nuclear testing site at Semipalatinsk to New York's East River, crisis after crisis has fallen across the White House with a rapidity and gravity that has absorbed Mr. Kennedy's energy since his inauguration and reduced the Congressional program to secondary importance. 23/

And a couple of days later, James Reston, describing the imminent risk of a nuclear crisis over Berlin, reported:

Specifically, Khrushchev told one of Mr. Kennedy's political emissaries that once Khrushchev signs a separate peace treaty with the Communist East Germans, not only all of the West's rights in Berlin will cease, but all traffic to Berlin will cease until the West negotiates new rights of access with the East German regime.

Khrushchev was questioned minutely on this key point. His reply was unequivocal: Not one truck, or barge, or train, or plane would leave from West Germany for West Berlin after the separate peace treaty until the new arrangements with the East Germans were negotiated.

Now, this is not precisely the same as Mr. Gromyko's bland assurances. This is blockade, and blockade is an act of war. Washington has made clear that it is not going to get stirred up if the East Germans merely replace the Russians on the borders between East and West Germany and approve the flow of adequate supplies. But Mr. Khrushchev did not support this procedure, and went on to threaten that any effort to break his blockade by force would lead to war. 24/

Since Khrushchev had repeatedly pledged to sign the East German treaty by the end of the year, the showdown was not far off.

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THE FALL DECISIONS - I

IV.B.

CHAPTER V

I. THE DECISION TO SEND TAYLOR

As of early October, there were several proposals for more active intervention in Southeast Asia on the table. One was the JCS-favored plan to intervene on the ground in Laos to seize and hold major portions of the country, principally to protect the borders of South Vietnam and Thailand. A second plan (referred to in a staff paper as the "Rostow proposal") would have put a SEATO force of about 25,000 men into Vietnam to try to mount a guard on the Vietnam/Laos border between the DMZ and Cambodia. Finally, there were various schemes, dating from the Task Force review, for putting a U.S. force into the highlands, or at DaNang with or without a nominal mission of training South Vietnamese troops.

Except for the Rostow proposal all these plans pre-dated the spurt of Viet Cong activity in September and Diem's subsequent request for a treaty. The record does not tell when and why the Rostow proposal was drawn up. It was probably a direct response to Diem's request, but it may have been simply a part of the on-going Laos contingency planning. In any event, Rostow's proposal was submitted to the JCS for Comment October 5. On the 9th, the JCS responded with a counter-proposal for a substantial (initially about 20,000 men, but expected to grow) commitment of U.S. forces in Vietnam, centered on Pleiku in the highlands. 1/

In hindsight, the JCS reasoning in rejecting the Rostow proposal looks unchallengeable. The JCS stated:

a. SEATO forces will be deployed over a border of several hundred miles, and will be attacked piecemeal or by-passed at the Viet Cong's own choice.

b. It may reduce but cannot stop infiltration of Viet Cong personnel and material.

c. It deploys SEATO forces in the weakest defense points should DRV or CHICOM forces intervene.

d. It compounds the problems of communications and logistical support.

The Chiefs also argued against an alternative border proposal to put the SEATO force along the 17th parallel. Their first preference, very emphatically, was to go into Laos:

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As stated in your [Gilpatric's] memorandum, the proposed concept set forth must be analyzed in the total context of the defense of Southeast Asia. Any concept which deals with the defense of Southeast Asia that does not include all or a substantial portion of Laos is, from a military standpoint, unsound. To concede the majority of northern and central Laos would leave three-quarters of the border of Thailand exposed and thus invite an expansion of communist military action. To concede southern Laos would open the flanks of both Thailand and South Vietnam as well as expose Cambodia. Any attempt to combat insurgency in South Vietnam, while holding areas in Laos essential to the defense of Thailand and South Vietnam and, at the same time, putting troops in Thailand, would require an effort on the part of the United States alone on the order of magnitude of at least three divisions plus supporting units. This would require an additional two divisions from the United States.

What is needed is not the spreading out of our forces throughout Southeast Asia, but rather a concentrated effort in Laos where a firm stand can be taken saving all or substantially all of Laos which would, at the same time, protect Thailand and protect the borders of South Vietnam.

But, if the Laos plan was "politically unacceptable at this time," the Chiefs "provided" (but did not explicitly recommend) "a possible limited interim course of action" which could...

provide a degree of assistance to the Government of South Vietnam to regain control of its own territory, and could free certain South Vietnamese forces for offensive actions against the Viet Cong. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff agree that implementation of this limited course of action would not provide for the defense of Thailand or Laos, nor contribute substantially or permanently to solution of the overall problem of defense of Southeast Asia, they consider the Plan preferable to either of the two military possibilities described in referenced memorandum. 2/

The following day, there appeared a new paper called "Concept of Intervention in Vietnam." The paper, according to a pencilled note on the available copy, was drafted mainly by Alexis Johnson, who was then a Deputy Under Secretary of State. We know from a note William Bundy (then principal Deputy to Paul Nitze, who was then Assistant Secretary of Defense, ISA) sent to McNamara that a "talking paper" by Johnson was to be discussed at a meeting that included, at least, Rusk and McNamara on the afternoon of the 10th. But we do not know whether the draft we have available is the "talking paper" or a revision put together later in the day, after the meeting.

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The proposal ("an effort to arrest and hopefully reverse the deteriorating situation in Vietnam") was a blend of Rostow's border force and the Chief's "possible limited interim course of action." Johnson's paper listed both the Rostow mission of the force (attempt to close the border) and that of the Chiefs (win control of the central highlands); otherwise the paper followed the JCS plan. What probably happened, considering the haste with which the paper must have been drafted, was that Johnson simply blended the two proposals together and assumed the fine points could be worked out later. For if the paper is somewhat confusing on the immediate military proposal, it is clear on the long-run thinking that underlays the proposal. And this long-run thinking made the immediate military mission relatively inconsequential, since as with the earlier combat-troops-for-training proposals, it was pretty clear that the main idea was to get some American combat troops into Vietnam, with the nominal excuse for doing so quite secondary.

The plan was described under the heading "Initial Phase." A subsequent section, titled "Anticipated Later Phases" states:

This initial action cannot be taken without accepting as our real and ultimate objective the defeat of the Viet Cong, and making Vietnam secure in the hands of an anti-Communist government. Thus supplemental military action must be envisaged at the earliest stage that is politically feasible. The ultimate force requirements cannot be estimated with any precision. JCS are now considering. Three divisions would be a guess...

Earlier the paper, in a similar vein, had remarked:

While a satisfactory political settlement in Laos would considerably reduce Viet Minh infiltration through Laos into South Vietnam, it would not entirely eliminate it. While such a reduction would materially assist the GVN in meeting the Viet Cong threat, there is no assurance that, even under these circumstances, the GVN will in the foreseeable future be able to defeat the Viet Cong. Under these circumstances, although the need of South Vietnam for outside assistance such as proposed in this plan would probably still be very strong, it would be much more difficult to find a political base upon which to execute this plan. 3/

This judgment was probably influenced by a special NIE issued October 5th, which stated that 80-90% of the estimated 17,000 VC had been locally recruited, and that there was little evidence that the VC relied on external supplies.

The relation of this paper to Diem's request for treaty can only be guessed at. The paper never mentions Diem, or any South Vietnamese request for further assistance. But the paper supplemented one published about a

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week or so earlier (probably prior to Diem's request) titled "Limited Holding Actions in Southeast Asia." This earlier paper discussed various steps short of major troop deployments. 4/

The impression is that both papers were part of contingency planning (short of major intervention in Laos) for saving something in Southeast Asia should the Laos negotiations continue to drag on with no satisfactory resolution. Thus although the timing of the Vietnam paper was surely influenced and probably triggered by Diem's request for a treaty, it looks essentially like a suggestion (but not a formal recommendation) to the President that if he is unwilling to intervene to try to save Laos, he should at least take strong and unambiguous action to make sure that Vietnam would not also be lost. In this interpretation it is easy to make sense of the emphasis on a deteriorating situation in Vietnam, and the implied warning that it might be best to set this plan in motion before a settlement is reached in Laos, when it seemed relatively easy to provide a politically plausible basis for the action.

(In a recent column, Joseph Alsop quoted Averill Harriman as telling him that Kennedy had told Harriman to get whatever settlement he could on Laos, but that the U.S. really intended to make its stand in Vietnam.) 5/

At the end of the Vietnam paper there is a list of "Specific Actions to be Taken Now" which goes no further (on Vietnam) than to list:

Use of U.S. naval aircraft and ships to assist GVN in interdiction of sea traffic, to assist self defense of GVN. This is to some extent camouflagable.

If necessity arises, use of U.S. military aircraft for logistic support, including troop lift within Laos and South Vietnam.

Further, there is a long list of pros and cons, with no judgment stated on the balance.

This (and other statements to be cited below) suggests, again, that the paper was prepared for a discussion on Southeast Asia planning in the NSC, rather than in response to a request for a set of recommendations.

Three other points need to be mentioned:

1. The paper, although nominally presenting a SEATO plan, explicitly assumes that "planning would have to be on the basis of proceeding with whichever SEATO Allies would participate."

2. The paper warns (in the balance of the paragraph quoted earlier) that the ultimate force requirements would "much depend" on the capabilities and leadership of the SEATO forces...

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and above all on whether the effort leads to much more better fighting by Diem's forces. They alone can win in the end.

3. Very clearly foreshadowing the Taylor mission (and perhaps indicating a White House hand in the drafting) the paper states:

The viability of this plan would be dependent on the degree to which it could and would also result in the GVN accelerating political and military action in its own defense. A judgment on this can only be reached after thorough exploration on the spot with the country team and the GVN.

Finally, here is the list of pros and cons presented (but not evaluated) in the paper.

"Cons

"1. The plan would not in itself solve the underlying problem of ridding SVN of communist guerrillas.

"2. It would not seal off the borders of SVN except for the limited area of operations.

"3. It breaks the Geneva Accords and puts responsibility on the U.S. for rationalizing the action before the U.N. and the world.

"4. It raises questions of U.S. troop relationships with the Vietnamese peasants, montagnards, GVN and its army.

"5. The use of SEATO forces in SVN distorts Plan Five [For major intervention in Laos] although these forces are not a net subtraction.

"6. The risk of being regarded as interlopers à la the French must be considered.

"7. Communist change of tactics back to small-scale operations might leave this force in a stagnant position.

"Pros

"1. The effect on GVN morale of SEATO engagement in their struggle could be most heartening.

"2. It could prevent the Viet Cong move to the next stage of battalion-size, formal organization to challenge the ARVN.

"3. The relatively sophisticated SEATO arms, air power, communications and intelligence might spark a real transformation in ARVN tactics and action.

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"4. Capitalizing on U.S. intelligence sources now unavailable to the GVN could lead to effective attacks on Viet Cong nerve centers of command and communications.

"5. The SEATO force commitment could be used to get from Diem a package of actions McGarr feels are needed to step up the GVN effort mainly the familiar items of clarifying the chain of command and establishing an overall plan⁷.

"6. Introducing SEATO forces would give us for the first time some bargaining position with the Russians for a settlement in Vietnam.

"7. If we go into South Vietnam now with SEATO, the costs would be much less than if we wait and go in later, or lose SVN.

The available record shows three other papers prepared prior to the NSC meeting, October 11, at which this paper was considered:

1. A special NIE commented on the plan in terms that were a lot less than encouraging:

In the situation assumed, we believe that the DRV would seek at first to test the seriousness and effectiveness of the SEATO effort by subjecting the SEATO forces and their lines of communication to harassment, ambush, and guerrilla attack. The Communists would probably estimate that by using their Viet Cong apparatus in South Vietnam, and by committing experienced guerrilla forces from North Vietnam in guerrilla operations in territory long familiar to them, and by exploiting the opportunities offered by the sizable junk traffic in coastal waters, they could severely harass the SEATO land forces and penetrate the SEATO blockade. The Communists would expect worthwhile political and psychological rewards from successful harassment and guerrilla operations against SEATO forces, including lowered GVN morale and increased tensions among the SEATO members.

While seeking to test the SEATO forces, the DRV would probably not relax its Viet Cong campaign against the GVN to any significant extent. Meanwhile, Communist strength in south Laos would probably be increased by forces from North Vietnam to guard against an effort to partition Laos or an attack against the Pathet Lao forces. The Soviet airlift would probably be increased with a heavier flow of military supply into south Laos, and the Communists would probably intensify their efforts to establish a secure route for motor traffic into the south. The establishment of a coalition government in Laos under Souvanna Phouma probably would not significantly reduce Communist infiltration of men and equipment from North to South Vietnam through Laos.

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If the SEATO action appeared to be proving effective in reducing the present scale of infiltration the Communist probably would increase their use of the mountain trail system through Cambodia. This is a longer and more difficult route but its use could keep at least minimum support flowing to the Viet Cong. At the same time, in order to reduce the apparent success of the SEATO action, they could intensify small unit attacks, assassinations, and local terrorism in South Vietnam; they could also commit more DRV irregular personnel for the harassment of the SEATO forces. In any event, the SEATO commitment in South Vietnam would probably have to be continued over a prolonged period. It might be part of Communist tactics to play upon possible SEATO weariness over maintaining substantial forces and accepting losses, in South Vietnam over a long period of time...

The reaction to the assumed SEATO action among concerned non-Communist governments would vary widely. The Asian members of SEATO would find renewed confidence in the organization and the US, if the plan were to go well. If, on the other hand, the SEATO action were to become costly, prolonged, or to involve heavy casualties, the Asian members would soon become disenchanted and look to the US to 'do something' to lessen the burden and to solve the problem. The UK and France would be likely to oppose the assumed SEATO action, and their reluctance to participate could be overcome only with great difficulty, if at all.

In this instance, and as we will see, later, the Intelligence Community's estimates of the likely results of U.S. moves are conspicuously more pessimistic (and more realistic) than the other staff papers presented to the President. This SNIE was based on an assumption that the SEATO force would total about 25,000 men. It is hard to imagine a more sharp contrast than between this paper, which foresees no serious impact on the insurgency from proposed intervention, and Supplemental Note 2, to be quoted next.

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2. "Supplemental Note 2" to the paper, issued the day of the NSC meeting, contained, among other comments, a JCS estimate of the size of the American force needed "to clean up the Viet Cong threat." It reads:

Wider Military Implications. As the basic paper indicates, the likelihood of massive DRV and Chicom intervention cannot be estimated with precision. The SNIE covers only the initial phase when action might be limited to 20-25,000 men. At later stages, when the JCS estimate that 40,000 US forces will be needed to clean up the Viet Cong threat, the chances of such massive intervention might well become substantial, with the Soviets finding it a good opportunity to tie down major US forces in a long action, perhaps as part of a multi-prong action involving Berlin and such additional areas as Korea and Iran.

Because of this possibility of major Bloc intervention, the maximum possible force needs must be frankly faced. Assuming present estimates of about 40,000 US forces for the stated military objective in South Vietnam, plus 128,000 US forces for meeting North Vietnam and Chicom intervention, the drain on US-based reserve forces could be on the order of 3 or 4 divisions and other forces as well. The impact on naval capabilities for blockade plans (to meet Berlin) would also be major. In light of present Berlin contingency plans, and combat attrition, including scarce items of equipment, the initiation of the Vietnam action in itself should dictate a step up in the present mobilization, possibly of major proportions. 7/

3. Finally, there is the following memo from William Bundy (then acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, ISA) to McNamara. It is of interest because it is the only piece of paper available for this period that gives anyone's candid recommendations to his boss, as opposed to the more formal staff papers:

Even if the decision at tomorrow's meeting is only preliminary -- to explore with Diem and the British, Australians, and New Zealanders would be my guess -- it is clearly of the greatest possible importance. Above all, action must proceed fast.

For what one man's feel is worth, mine -- based on very close touch with Indochina in the 1954 war and civil war afterwards till Diem took hold -- is that it is really now or never if we are to arrest the gains being made by the Viet Cong. Walt Rostow made the point yesterday that the Viet Cong are about to move, by every indication, from the small unit basis to a moderate battalion-size basis. Intelligence also suggests that they may try to set

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up a 'provisional government' like Xieng Khuang (though less legitimate appearing) in the very Kontum area into which the present initial plan would move SEATO forces. If the Viet Cong movement 'blooms' in this way, it will almost certainly attract all the back-the-winner sentiment that understandably prevails in such cases and that beat the French in early 1954 and came within an ace of beating Diem in early 1955.

An early and hard-hitting operation has a good chance (70% would be my guess) of arresting things and giving Diem a chance to do better and clean up. Even if we follow up hard, on the lines the JCS are working out after yesterday's meeting, however, the chances are not much better that we will in fact be able to clean up the situation. It all depends on Diem's effectiveness, which is very problematical. The 30% chance is that we would wind up like the French in 1954; white men can't win this kind of fight.

On a 70-30 basis, I would myself favor going in. But if we let, say, a month go by before we move, the odds will slide (both short-term shock effect and long-term chance) down to 60-40, 50-50 and so on. Laos under a Souvanna Phouma deal is more likely than not to go sour, and will more and more make things difficult in South Viet-Nam, which again underscores the element of time. 8/

Minutes of the NSC meeting of October 11 were not available for this study. But we have the following Gilpatric memorandum for the record. (The JUNGLE JIM squadron -- 12 planes -- was an Air Force unit specially trained for counter-insurgency warfare. Short of engaging in combat itself, presumably it would be used to train Vietnamese pilots):

At this morning's meeting with the President the following course of action was agreed upon with relation to South Vietnam:

1. The Defense Department is authorized to send the Air Force's Jungle Jim Squadron into Vietnam to serve under the MAAG as a training mission and not for combat at the present time.

2. General Maxwell Taylor accompanied by Dr. Rostow from the White House, General Lansdale, a representative of JCS, Mr. Cottrell from State and probably someone from ISA will leave for Vietnam over the weekend on a Presidential mission (to be announced by the President at this afternoon's press conference as an economic survey) to look into the feasibility from both political and military standpoints of the following:

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(a) the plan for military intervention discussed at this morning's meeting on the basis of the Vietnam task force paper entitled 'Concept for Intervention in Vietnam';

(b) an alternative plan for stationing in Vietnam fewer U.S. combat forces than those called for under the plan referred to in (a) above and with a more limited objective than dealing with the Viet Cong; in other words, such a small force would probably go in at Tourane [DaNang] and possibly another southern port principally for the purpose of establishing a U.S. 'presence' in Vietnam;

(c) other alternatives in lieu of putting any U.S. combat forces in Vietnam, i.e. stepping up U.S. assistance and training of Vietnam units, furnishing of more U.S. equipment, particularly helicopters and other light aircraft, trucks and other ground transport, etc.

3. During the two or three weeks that will be required for the completion of General Taylor's mission, State will push ahead with the following political actions:

(a) protest to the ICC on the step-up in North Vietnamese support of Viet Cong activities,

(b) tabling at the UN a white paper based on Mr. William Jordan's report concerning Communist violations of the Geneva Accords, and

(c) consultation with our SEATO allies, principally the British and Australians, regarding SEATO actions in support of the deteriorating situation in Vietnam. 9/

That afternoon, the President announced the Taylor Mission, but he did not make the hardly credible claim that he was sending his personal military advisor to Vietnam to do an economic survey. He made a general announcement, and was non-committal when asked whether Taylor was going to consider the need for combat troops (there had been leaked stories in the newspapers a few days earlier that the Administration was considering such a move.) Nevertheless, the newspaper stories the next day flatly asserted that the President had said Taylor was going to study the need for U.S. combat troops, which was, of course, true, although not exactly what the President had said. 10/

II. THE NEWSPAPERS AND THE CABLES

The day after Kennedy's announcement of the Taylor mission, Reuters sent this dispatch from Saigon:

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Saigon, Vietnam, Oct 12 (Reuters) -- South Vietnamese military sources welcomed today President Kennedy's decision to send his military adviser, General Taylor, here this week.

Sources close to President Ngo Dinh Diem said he did not feel there was a need here yet for troops of the United States or Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

The sources said the South Vietnamese President was convinced that Vietnam's Army increased in size and better equipped by increased United States aid can defeat the Communists. 11/

But a day later, the public position of the Vietnamese had shifted noticeably. From a New York Times dispatch from Saigon:

One question receiving considerable attention here in the light of the Taylor mission is the desirability of sending United States troops to South Vietnam.

The prospect of United States troop involvement is understood to have advanced a step here in the sense that the South Vietnamese Government is reported to be willing to consider such involvement which it had formerly rejected.

However, it is understood that South Vietnamese deliberations still fall far short of the stage wherein Saigon would be ready to request United States forces. 12/

But in private discussions with the U.S. ambassador, Diem had turned around completely. From Nolting's cable:

Following major requests:

- (1) An additional squadron of AD-6 fighter bombers (in lieu of programmed T-28's) and delivery as soon as possible.
- (2) The sending of US civilian contract pilots for helicopters and transport planes (C-47s), for 'non-combat' operations.
- (3) US combat unit or units to be introduced into SVN as 'combat-trainer units'. Proposed use would be to station a part of this force in northern part of SVN near 17th parallel to free ARVN forces presently there for anti-guerrilla combat in high plateau. Thuan also suggested possibility stationing some US forces in several provincial seats in highlands of central Vietnam.

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(4) US reaction to proposal to request govt Nationalist China to send one division of combat troops for operations in southwest provinces.

* * * * *

When Thuan raised question of US combat-trainer units, I asked specifically whether this was President's considered request, mentioning his oft-repeated views re US combat forces here. Thuan confirmed that this was considered request from President; confirmed that Diem's views had changed in light of worsening situation. Idea was to have 'symbolic' US strength near 17th parallel, which would serve to prevent attack there and free up GVN forces now stationed there for combat operations; Thuan said President Diem also thought similar purpose could be achieved by stationing US combat units in several provincial seats in highlands, thus freeing ARVN guard forces there. I told him this represented major request coming on heels of President Diem's request for bilateral security treaty with United States. I asked whether this request was in lieu of the security treaty. Thuan first said that it represented a first step, which would be quicker than a treaty, and that time was of essence. After some discussion of the pro's and con's of a possible defense treaty (effect on SEATO, ICC, ratification procedures, etc.), Thuan said he felt that proposal for stationing token US forces in SVN would satisfy GVN and would serve the purpose better than a mutual defense treaty. (He had evidently not thought through this nor discussed it with Diem.)

* * * * *

Nolting then indicated he reacted skeptically to Diem's suggestion of bringing in Chiang's forces, and comments to Washington that he thought "this was a trial balloon only." He concluded the cable:

The above questions will undoubtedly be raised with Gen Taylor. While it is obvious that GVN is losing no opportunity to ask for additional support as result our greater interest and concern this area, situation here, both militarily and psychologically, has moved in my judgment to point where serious and prompt consideration should be given to these requests. 13/

This cable arrived in Washington the night of October 13. The following day an unidentified source provided the New York Times with a detailed explanation of what the Taylor Mission was to do. From the way the Times handled the story it is plain that it came from a source authorized to speak for the President, and probably from the President himself. The gist of the story was that Taylor was going to Saigon to look into all sorts of things, one of which, near the bottom of the list, was the question of U.S. troops at some time in the indefinite future. Along with a lot of more

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immediate questions about intelligence and such, Taylor was expected to "...recommend long-range programs, including possible military actions, but stressing broad economic and social measures." Furthermore, the Times was told,

Military leaders at the Pentagon, no less than General Taylor himself are understood to be reluctant to send organized U.S. combat units into Southeast Asia. Pentagon plans for this area stress the importance of countering Communist guerrillas with troops from the affected countries, perhaps trained and equipped by the U.S., but not supplanted by U.S. troops. 14/

In the light of the recommendations quoted throughout this paper, and particularly of the staff papers just described that led up to the Taylor Mission, most of this was simply untrue. It is just about inconceivable that this story could have been given out except at the direction of the President, or by him personally. It appears, consequently, the President was less than delighted by Diem's request for troops. He may have suspected, quite reasonably, that Diem's request was prompted by the stories out of Washington that Taylor was coming to discuss troops; or he may have wished to put a quick stop to expectations (and leaks) that troops were about to be sent, or both. This does not mean the President had already decided not to send combat units. Presumably he had not. But he apparently did not want to have his hands tied.

The Times story had the apparently desired affect. Speculation about combat troops almost disappeared from news stories, and Diem never again raised the question of combat troops: the initiative from now on came from Taylor and Nolting, and their recommendations were very closely held.

III. CINCPAC RECOMMENDS "NOT NOW"

On the way to Saigon, Taylor stopped off in Hawaii to talk to Admiral Felt at CINCPAC. Felt did not give Taylor a flat recommendation on combat troops at the time. But a couple of days later he cabled Washington a list of pros and cons:

A. Pro

(1) Presence of U.S. forces in SVN, particularly if deployed to important defensive areas such as plateau region, would mean to Communists that overt aggression against SVN will involve US forces from the outset. This eliminates possibility of sudden victory by overt aggression in SVN before US could react. This would settle the question for SVN, and SE Asians as a whole, as to whether we would come to their help. Further, agreement by SEATO to principle of force introduction would strengthen SEATO in world eyes.

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(2) Presence of strong U.S. combat forces will influence greatly South Vietnamese will to eliminate the Viet Cong.

(3) If we use U.S. engineers with U.S. military protection to finish Dakto-Ban Net-Attapeu Road in order to enable US to operate near plateau border area, a military corridor of sorts will cut an important part of VC pipeline from north.

(4) U.S. forces will make available larger number ARVN forces for employment against VC. RVNAF tasks accomplished by U.S. forces will decrease proportionately certain RVNAF deficiencies, particularly in logistics, communications, and air support.

(5) U.S. forces in SVN would tend to strengthen Diem's government against pro-Red coup, but would not necessarily preclude non-Communist coup attempts.

(6) Dividends would accrue from fact our troops could provide variety training for ARVN forces, broadening base now provided by MAAG.

B. Con

(1) Would stir up big fuss throughout Asia about reintroduction of forces of white colonialism into SE Asia. Little question that a propaganda issue will be made of this in all world forums including UN.

(2) Action could trigger intensification of Commie aggression against SE Asia. This may not be all-out overt aggression, but could consist, for example, of the DRV moving full blown combat units through the mountain passes into southern Laos under excuse that we initiated invasion of SE Asia and they are protecting the flank of North Vietnam.

(3) Politically, presence of U.S. forces could hasten Commies to establish so called "representative government" in South Vietnam.

(4) Aside from offering Viet Cong a political target, US troops would constitute provocative military one, inducing VC to attack/harass it in manner/degree where issue might ultimately force American units active military campaign, or suffer defensive alternative of being pot-shot at to point of embarrassment.

(5) Presence of US troops could induce Commies to resort to related actions such as introduction of Red Air Force elements

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in North Vietnam and accelerate modernization of DRV military forces.

(6) This would probably mean garrisoning a U.S. division in SE Asia for an extended period of time in same sense as Army divisions in Korea. However, circumstances differ from Korea. For example, nature of VC warfare such that US units cannot remain long in isolation from conflict realities. Ultimately, they likely to be forced into varying forms of military engagement with VC if only for security against attacks ranging from assassination/sabotage to tactical harassment. In short, we should accept fact that likelihood our troops becoming combat engaged increases in proportion to duration of their stay.

2. A summary of the above appears to me to add up in favor of our not introducing U.S. combat forces until we have exhausted other means for helping Diem. 15/

IV. TAYLOR IN SAIGON

The Taylor Mission arrived in Saigon on the 18th. They had barely arrived when Diem went before his National Assembly to declare that the increasing gravity of the Viet Cong threat now required a formal proclamation of a State of Emergency. Diem then went off to meet with the Americans, and after such a spectacular opening shot must have then astonished his visitors by indicating that he did not want American combat troops after all. What he wanted, he said, was the treaty, American support for larger GVN forces, and a list of combat support items that nicely paralleled those Rostow listed in the note to McNamara quoted earlier. It was Taylor (according to Nolting's cable 516, 20 October) who brought up the question of American combat troops.

Taylor said he understood there had been recent discussions of introduction of American or SEATO forces into Viet-Nam and asked why change had occurred in earlier GVN attitude. Diem succinctly replied because of Laos situation. Noting it will take time to build up GVN forces he pointed to enemy's reinforcements through infiltration and increased activities in central Viet-Nam and expressed belief that enemy is trying to escalate proportionally to increase in GVN forces so that GVN will not gain advantage. He asked specifically for tactical aviation, helicopter companies, coastal patrol forces and logistic support (ground transport).

Diem indicated he thought there would be no particular adverse psychological effect internally from introducing American forces since in his view Vietnamese people regard Communist attack on Viet-Nam as international problem. Rostow inquired whether internal and external political aspects such move could

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be helped if it were shown clearly to world that this is international problem. Diem gave no direct comment on this suggestion. He indicated two main aspects of this problem: (1) Vietnamese people are worried about absence formal commitment by US to Viet-Nam. They fear that if situation deteriorates Viet-Nam might be abandoned by US. If troops are introduced without a formal commitment they can be withdrawn at any time and thus formal commitment is even more important in psychological sense. (2) Contingency plan should be prepared re use American forces in Viet-Nam at any time this may become necessary. In this connection Diem seemed to be talking about combat forces. While it was not completely clear what Diem has in mind at present time he seemed to be saying that he wants bilateral defense treaty and preparation of plans for use American forces (whatever is appropriate) but under questioning he did not repeat his earlier idea relayed to me by Thuan that he wanted combat forces. 16/

Here, as earlier, we get no explicit statement on Washington's attitude toward a treaty. Further, no strong conclusion can be drawn from the fact that Taylor took the initiative in raising the issue of troops, since it might have been awkward not to mention the issue at all after Thuan's presentation to Nolting a few days previous.

But on the 23rd, we find this in a cable from MAAG Chief McGarr:

Serious flood in Mekong delta area...(worst since 1937) raises possibility that flood relief could be justification for moving in US military personnel for humanitarian purposes with subsequent retention if desirable. Gen. Taylor and Ambassador evaluating feasibility and desirability. 16a/

Taylor met with Diem and Thuan again the following day, the 24th. Taylor provided the Vietnamese a written summary of items he described as "personal ideas to which I was seeking their reaction." Item E was headed "Introduction of U.S. Combat troops." It proposed "a flood relief task force, largely military in composition, to work with GVN over an extended period of rehabilitation of areas. Such a force might contain engineer, medical, signal, and transportation elements as well as combat troops for the protection of relief operations." Diem now seems to have changed his mind again on combat troops. Here is the cable:

1. The essential conclusions which we have reached at the end of a week of briefings, consultations, and field trips follow:

A. There is a critical political-military situation in SVN brought on by western policy in Laos and by the continued build-up of the VC and their recent successful attacks. These circumstances coupled

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with the major flood disaster in the southwestern provinces have combined to create a deep and pervasive crisis of confidence and a serious loss in national morale.

B. In the field, the military operations against the VC are ineffective because of the absence of reliable intelligence on the enemy, an unclear and unresponsive channel of command responsibility in the Armed Forces, and the tactical immobility of the VN ground forces. This immobility leads to a system of passive, fragmented defense conceding the initiative to the enemy and leaving him free to pick the targets of attack. The harassed population exposed to these attacks turn to the government for better protection and the latter responds by assigning more static missions to the Army units, thus adding to their immobility. In the end, the Army is allowed neither to train nor to fight but awaits enemy attacks in relative inaction.

C. The situation in the Saigon is volatile but, while morale is down and complaints against the government are rife, there is not hard evidence of a likely coup against Diem. He still has no visible rival or replacement.

2. To cope with the foregoing situation, we are considering recommending a number of possible forms of GVN-US cooperation to reverse the present downward trend, stimulate an offensive spirit and buildup morale. In company with Ambassador Nolting, Dr. Rostow and Mr. Mendenhall, I discussed some of these Oct 24 with Diem and Thuan, advancing them as personal ideas to which I was seeking their informal reaction. The following outline, distributed in French translation at the start of the interview, indicates the scope of the discussion.

A. Improvement of intelligence on V.C.: the available intelligence on V.C. insurgency is inadequate both for tactical requirements and for basis of judgment of situation at governmental levels. A joint GVN-US effort should be able to improve organization, techniques and end product to mutual advantage both parties.

B. Joint survey of security situation at provincial level: The current situation can best be appraised at provincial level where the basic intelligence is found, the incidents occur, and the defenses are tested. The problems vary from province to province and hence require local analysis on the spot. Such a survey should result in better understanding of such important matters as quality of basic intelligence on V.C., needs of civil guard and self defense corps, command relationships between provincial and Army officials and conditions under which assumption of offensive might be possible.

C. Improvement of Army mobility: it appears that size of ARVN can not be much increased before end 1962; to make it more

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effective and allow it to cope with increasing number of V.C., it must be given greater mobility. Such mobility can come from two sources, (1) freeing Army from static missions and (2) making available to it improved means of transport, notably helicopters and light aircraft. Both methods should be considered.

D. Blocking infiltration into high plateau: increase in enemy forces in high plateau requires special measures for defense and for counter-guerrilla actions. It is suggested that a carefully tailored "border ranger force" be organized from existing ranger units and introduced into the difficult terrain along the Laos/Vietnam frontier for attack and defense against the Viet Cong. This force should be trained and equipped for extended service on the frontier and for operations against the communications lines of the VC who have infiltrated into the high plateau and adjacent areas.

E. Introduction of U.S. Military Forces: GVN is faced with major civil problem arising from flood devastation in western provinces. Its allies should offer help to GVN according to their means. In the case of U.S., two ways of rendering help should be considered. One is of emergency type, such as offer of U.S. military helicopters for reconnaissance of conditions of flooded areas and for emergency delivery medical supplies and like. A more significant contribution might be a flood relief task force, largely military in composition, to work with GVN over an extended period for rehabilitation of area. Such a force might contain engineer, medical, signal, and transportation elements as well as combat troops for the protection of relief operations. Obviously, such a military source would also provide U.S. military presence in Viet Nam and would constitute military reserve in case of heightened military crisis.

F. Actions to emphasize national emergency and beginning of a new phase in the war: we should consider jointly all possible measures to emphasize turning point has been reached in dealing with Communist aggression. Possible actions might include appeal to United Nations, an announcement by GVN of governmental changes to cope with crisis and exchange of letters between the two heads of State expressing their partnership in a common cause.

3. Diem's reaction on all points was favorable. He expressed satisfaction with idea of introducing U.S. forces in connection with flood relief activities, observing that even the opposition elements in this Congress had joined with the majority in supporting need for presence of U.S. forces. In the course of the meeting, nothing was formally proposed or approved but the consensus was that the points considered might form framework for a program of increased GVN-US cooperation offering promise of overcoming many of the current difficulties of GVN. There were no specific figures discussed with regard to such matters as troop strengths, additional equipment, or flood relief...

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5. Because of the importance of acting rapidly once we have made up our minds, I will cable my recommendations to Washington enroute home. 17/

Simultaneously with this cable, Taylor sent a second "eyes only" for the President, Chairman of the JCS, Director of CIA, McNamara, and Rusk and Alexis Johnson at State. The cable is a little confusing; for although it sets out to comment on "U.S. military forces" it concerns only the flood Task Force, not mentioning the various other types of military forces (helicopter companies, etc.) which were envisioned. The same slight confusion appears in the "eyes only for the President" cable on this issue to be quoted shortly. The impression Taylor's choice of language leaves is that the support forces (helicopter companies, expanded MAAG, etc.) he was recommending were essentially already agreed to by the President before Taylor left Washington, and consequently his detailed justification went only to the kind of forces on which a decision was yet to be made -- that is, ground forces liable to become involved in direct engagements with the Viet Cong.

Here is the cable from Saigon, followed by the two "Eyes only for the President" from the Philippines which sum up his "fundamental conclusions."

FROM SAIGON

WHITE HOUSE EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT
STATE EYES ONLY FOR RUSK AND UNDER SECRETARY JOHNSON
DEFENSE EYES ONLY SECRETARY MCNAMARA
JCS EYES ONLY GENERAL LEMNITZER
FROM GENERAL TAYLOR

* * * * *

With regard to the critical question of introducing U.S. military forces into VN:

My view is that we should put in a task force consisting largely of logistical troops for the purpose of participating in flood relief and at the same time of providing a U.S. military presence in VN capable of assuring Diem of our readiness to join him in a military showdown with the Viet Cong or Viet Minh. To relate the introduction of these troops to the needs of flood relief seems to me to offer considerable advantages in VN and abroad. It gives a specific humanitarian task as the prime reason for the coming of our troops and avoids any suggestion that we are taking over responsibility for the security of the country. As the task is a specific one, we can extricate our troops when it is done if we so desire. Alternatively, we can phase them into other activities if we wish to remain longer.

The strength of the force I have in mind on the order of 6-8000 troops. Its initial composition should be worked out here after study of the

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possible requirements and conditions for its use and subsequent modifications made with experience.

In addition to the logistical component, it will be necessary to include some combat troops for the protection of logistical operations and the defense of the area occupied by U.S. forces. Any troops coming to VN may expect to take casualties.

Needless to say, this kind of task force will exercise little direct influence on the campaign against the V.C. It will, however, give a much needed shot in the arm to national morale, particularly if combined with other actions showing that a more effective working relationship in the common cause has been established between the GVN and the U.S. 18/

FROM THE PHILIPPINES

EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM GENERAL TAYLOR

1. Transmitted herewith are a summary of the fundamental conclusions of my group and my personal recommendations in response to the letter of the President to me dated 13 October 1961. * * * * *

2. It is concluded that:

a. Communist strategy aims to gain control of Southeast Asia by methods of subversion and guerrilla war which by-pass conventional U.S. and indigenous strength on the ground. The interim Communist goal -- en route to total take-over -- appears to be a neutral Southeast Asia, detached from U.S. protection. This strategy is well on the way to success in Vietnam.

b. In Vietnam (and Southeast Asia) there is a double crisis in confidence: doubt that U.S. is determined to save Southeast Asia; doubt that Diem's methods can frustrate and defeat Communist purposes and methods. The Vietnamese (and Southeast Asians) will undoubtedly draw -- rightly or wrongly -- definitive conclusions in coming weeks and months concerning the probable outcome and will adjust their behavior accordingly. What the U.S. does or fails to do will be decisive to the end result.

c. Aside from the morale factor, the Vietnamese Government is caught in interlocking circles of bad tactics and bad administrative arrangements which pin their forces on the defensive in ways which permit a relatively small Viet-Cong force (about one-tenth the size of the GVN regulars) to create conditions of frustration and terror certain to lead to a political crisis, if a positive turning point is

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not soon achieved. The following recommendations are designed to achieve that favorable turn, to avoid a further deterioration in the situation in South Vietnam, and eventually to contain and eliminate the threat to its independence.

3. It is recommended:

General

a. That upon request from the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to come to its aid in resisting the increasing aggressions of the Viet-Cong and in repairing the ravages of the Delta flood which, in combination, threaten the lives of its citizens and the security of the country, the U.S. Government offer to join the GVN in a massive joint effort as a part of a total mobilization of GVN resources to cope with both the Viet-Cong (VC) and the ravages of the flood. The U.S. representatives will participate actively in this effort, particularly in the fields of government administration, military plans and operations, intelligence, and flood relief, going beyond the advisory role which they have observed in the past.

Specific

b. That in support of the foregoing broad commitment to a joint effort with Diem, the following specific measures be undertaken:

(1) The U.S. Government will be prepared to provide individual administrators for insertion into the governmental machinery of South Vietnam in types and numbers to be worked out with President Diem.

(2) A joint effort will be made to improve the military-political intelligence system beginning at the provincial level and extending upward through the government and armed forces to the Central Intelligence Organization.

(3) The U.S. Government will engage in a joint survey of the conditions in the provinces to assess the social, political, intelligence, and military factors bearing on the prosecution of the counter-insurgency in order to reach a common estimate of these factors and a common determination of how to deal with them. As this survey will consume time, it should not hold back the immediate actions which are clearly needed regardless of its outcome.

(4) A joint effort will be made to free the Army for mobile, offensive operations. This effort will be based upon improving the training and equipping of the Civil Guard and the

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Self-Defense Corps, relieving the regular Army of static missions, raising the level of the mobility of Army Forces by the provision of considerably more helicopters and light aviation, and organizing a Border Ranger Force for a long-term campaign on the Laotian border against the Viet-Cong infiltrators. The U.S. Government will support this effort with equipment and with military units and personnel to do those tasks which the Armed Forces of Vietnam cannot perform in time. Such tasks include air reconnaissance and photography, airlift (beyond the present capacity of SVN forces), special intelligence, and air-ground support techniques.

(5) The U.S. Government will assist the GVN in effecting surveillance and control over the coastal waters and inland waterways, furnishing such advisors, operating personnel and small craft as may be necessary for quick and effective operations.

(6) The MAAG, Vietnam, will be reorganized and increased in size as may be necessary by the implementation of these recommendations.

(7) The U.S. Government will offer to introduce into South Vietnam a military Task Force to operate under U.S. control for the following purposes:

(a) Provide a U.S. military presence capable of raising national morale and of showing to Southeast Asia the seriousness of the U.S. intent to resist a Communist take-over.

(b) Conduct logistical operations in support of military and flood relief operations.

(c) Conduct such combat operations as are necessary for self-defense and for the security of the area in which they are stationed.

(d) Provide an emergency reserve to back up the Armed Forces of the GVN in the case of a heightened military crisis.

(e) Act as an advance party of such additional forces as may be introduced if CINCPAC or SEATO contingency plans are invoked.

(8) The U.S. Government will review its economic aid program to take into account the needs of flood relief and to give priority to those projects in support of the expanded counter-insurgency program. 19/

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FROM THE PHILIPPINES

Eyes Only for the President from General Taylor.

This message is for the purpose of presenting my reasons for recommending the introduction of a U.S. military force into South Vietnam (SVN). I have reached the conclusion that this is an essential action if we are to reverse the present downward trend of events in spite of a full recognition of the following disadvantages:

a. The strategic reserve of U.S. forces is presently so weak that we can ill afford any detachment of forces to a peripheral area of the Communist bloc where they will be pinned down for an uncertain duration.

b. Although U.S. prestige is already engaged in SVN, it will become more so by the sending of troops.

c. If the first contingent is not enough to accomplish the necessary results, it will be difficult to resist the pressure to reinforce. If the ultimate result sought is the closing of the frontiers and the clean-up of the insurgents within SVN, there is no limit to our possible commitment (unless we attack the source in Hanoi).

d. The introduction of U.S. forces may increase tensions and risk escalation into a major war in Asia.

On the other side of the argument, there can be no action so convincing of U.S. seriousness of purpose and hence so reassuring to the people and Government of SVN and to our other friends and allies in SEA as the introduction of U.S. forces into SVN. The views of indigenous and U.S. officials consulted on our trip were unanimous on this point. I have just seen Saigon 545 to State and suggest that it be read in connection with this message. *

The size of the U.S. force introduced need not be great to provide the military presence necessary to produce the desired effect on national morale in SVN and on international opinion. A bare token, however, will not suffice; it must have a significant value. The kinds of tasks which it might undertake which would have a significant value are suggested in BAGU~~0005~~ (previous cable, 3.b.(7)). They are:

(a) Provide a US military presence capable of raising national morale and of showing to Southeast Asia the seriousness of the US intent to resist a Communist take-over.

(b) Conduct logistical operations in support of military and flood relief operations.

* Quoted below, page 25

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(c) Conduct such combat operations as are necessary for self-defense and for the security of the area in which they are stationed.

(d) Provide an emergency reserve to back up the Armed Forces of the GVN in the case of a heightened military crisis.

(e) Act as an advance party of such additional forces as may be introduced if CINCPAC or SEATO contingency plans are invoked.

It is noteworthy that this force is not proposed to clear the jungles and forests of Viet Cong guerrillas. That should be the primary task of the Armed Forces of Vietnam for which they should be specifically organized, trained, and stiffened with ample U.S. advisors down to combat battalion levels. However, the U.S. troops may be called upon to engage in combat to protect themselves, their working parties, and the area in which they live. As a general reserve, they might be thrown into action (with U.S. agreement) against large, formed guerrilla bands which have abandoned the forests for attacks on major targets. But in general, our forces should not engage in small-scale guerrilla operations in the jungle.

As an area for the operations of U.S. troops, SVN is not an excessively difficult or unpleasant place to operate. While the border areas are rugged and heavily forested, the terrain is comparable to parts of Korea where U.S. troops learned to live and work without too much effort. However, these border areas, for reasons stated above, are not the places to engage our forces. In the High Plateau and in the coastal plain where U.S. troops would probably be stationed, these jungle-forest conditions do not exist to any great extent. The most unpleasant feature in the coastal areas would be the heat and, in the Delta, the mud left behind by the flood. The High Plateau offers no particular obstacle to the stationing of U.S. troops.

The extent to which the Task Force would engage in flood relief activities in the Delta will depend upon further study of the problem there. As reported in Saigon 537, I see considerable advantages in playing up this aspect of the Task Force mission. I am presently inclined to favor a dual mission, initially help to the flood area and subsequently use in any other area of SVN where its resources can be used effectively to give tangible support in the struggle against the Viet Cong. However, the possibility of emphasizing the humanitarian mission will wane if we wait long in moving in our forces or in linking our stated purpose with the emergency conditions created by the flood.

The risks of backing into a major Asian war by way of SVN are present but are not impressive. NVN is extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing, a weakness which should be exploited diplomatically in

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convincing Hanoi to lay off SVN. Both the DRV and the Chicoms would face severe logistical difficulties in trying to maintain strong forces in the field in SEA, difficulties which we share but by no means to the same degree. There is no case for fearing a mass onslaught of Communist manpower into SVN and its neighboring states, particularly if our airpower is allowed a free hand against logistical targets. Finally, the starvation conditions in China should discourage Communist leaders there from being militarily venturesome for some time to come.

By the foregoing line of reasoning, I have reached the conclusion that the introduction of a U.S. military Task Force without delay offers definitely more advantage than it creates risks and difficulties. In fact, I do not believe that our program to save SVN will succeed without it. If the concept is approved, the exact size and composition of the force should be determined by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the JCS, the Chief MAAG, and CINCPAC. My own feeling is that the initial size should not exceed about 8000, of which a preponderant number would be in logistical-type units. After acquiring experience in operating in SVN, this initial force will require re-organization and adjustment to the local scene.

As CINCPAC will point out, any forces committed to SVN will need to be replaced by additional forces to his area from the strategic reserve in the U.S. Also, any troops to SVN are in addition to those which may be required to execute SEATO Plan 5 in Laos. Both facts should be taken into account in current considerations of the FY 1963 budget which bear upon the permanent increase which should be made in the U.S. military establishment to maintain our strategic position for the long pull. 20/

These cables, it will be noticed, are rather sharply focused on the insurgency as a problem reducible to fairly conventional military technique and tactics. Together with the cables from Saigon, the impression is given that the major needs are getting the Army to take the offensive, building up a much better intelligence setup, and persuading Diem to loosen up Administrative impediments to effective use of his forces.

V. THE TAYLOR REPORT

A report of the Taylor Mission was published November 3, in the form of a black loose-leaf notebook containing a letter of transmittal of more than routine significance, a 25-page "Evaluation and Conclusions," then a series of memoranda by members of the mission. Of these, the most important, of course, were the Taylor cables, which, being "Eyes only for the President," were deleted from all but one or a very few copies of the report. There is no separate paper from Rostow, and his views presumably are reflected in the unsigned summary paper.

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The impression the "Evaluation" paper gives is more easily summarized than its details. For the impression is clearly one of urgency combined with optimism. Essentially, it says South Vietnam is in serious trouble; major interests of the United States are at stake; but if the U.S. promptly and energetically takes up the challenge, a victory can be had without a U.S. take-over of the war.

For example:

Despite the intellectuals who sit on the side lines and complain; despite serious dissidence among the Montagnards, the sects, and certain old Viet Minh areas; despite the apathy and fear of the Viet-Cong in the countryside, the atmosphere in South Vietnam is, on balance, one of frustrated energy rather than passive acceptance of inevitable defeat.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly, however, that time has nearly run out for converting these assets into the bases for victory. Diem himself--and all concerned with the fate of the country --are looking to American guidance and aid to achieve a turning point in Vietnam's affairs. From all quarters in Southeast Asia the message on Vietnam is the same: vigorous American action is needed to buy time for Vietnam to mobilize and organize its real assets; but the time for such a turn around has nearly run out. And if Vietnam goes, it will be exceedingly difficult if not impossible to hold Southeast Asia. What will be lost is not merely a crucial piece of real estate, but the faith that the U.S. has the will and the capacity to deal with the Communist offensive in that area. 21/

The report, drawing on the appendices, includes a wide range of proposals. But the major emphasis, very emphatically, is on two ideas: First, there must be a firm, unambiguous military commitment to remove doubts about U.S. resolve arising out of the Laos negotiations; second, there is great emphasis on the idea that the Diem regime's own evident weaknesses--from "the famous problem of Diem as administrator" to the Army's lack of offensive spirit--could be cured if enough dedicated Americans, civilian and military, became involved in South Vietnam to show the South Vietnamese, at all levels, how to get on and win the war. The much-urged military Task Force, for example, was mainly to serve the first purpose, but partly also to serve the second: "the presence of American military forces in the [flood] area should also give us an opportunity to work intensively with the civil guards and with other local military elements and to explore the possibility of suffusing them with an offensive spirit and tactics." 22/

Here are a few extracts which give the flavor of the discussion:

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"It is evident that morale in Vietnam will rapidly crumble -- and in Southeast Asia only slightly less quickly -- if the sequence of expectations set in motion by Vice President Johnson's visit and climaxed by General Taylor's mission are not soon followed by a hard U.S. commitment to the ground in Vietnam." [Emphasis added]

"The elements required for buying time and assuming the offensive in Vietnam are, in the view of this mission, the following:

1. A quick U.S. response to the present crisis which would demonstrate by deeds -- not merely words -- the American commitment seriously to help save Vietnam rather than to disengage in the most convenient manner possible. To be persuasive this commitment must include the sending to Vietnam of some U.S. military forces.

2. A shift in the American relation to the Vietnamese effort from advice to limited partnership. The present character and scale of the war in South Vietnam decree that only the Vietnamese can defeat the Viet Cong; but at all levels Americans must, as friends and partners -- not as arms-length advisors -- show them how the job might be done -- not tell them or do it for them. 23/

* * * * *

"Perhaps the most striking aspect of this mission's effort is the unanimity of view -- individually arrived at by the specialists involved -- that what is now required is a shift from U.S. advice to limited partnership and working collaboration with the Vietnamese. The present war cannot be won by direct U.S. action; it must be won by the Vietnamese. But there is a general conviction among us that the Vietnamese performance in every domain can be substantially improved if Americans are prepared to work side by side with the Vietnamese on the key problems. Moreover, there is evidence that Diem is, in principle, prepared for this step, and that most -- not all -- elements in his establishment are eagerly awaiting it." 24/

Here is a section titled "Reforming Diem's Administrative Method":

The famous problem of Diem as an administrator and politician could be resolved in a number of ways:

-- By his removal in favor of a military dictatorship which would give dominance to the military chain of command.

-- By his removal in favor of a figure of more dilute power (e.g., Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho) who would delegate authority to act to both military and civil leaders.

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-- By bringing about a series of de facto administrative changes via persuasion at high levels; collaboration with Diem's aides who want improved administration; and by a U.S. operating presence at many working levels, using the U.S. presence (e.g., control over the helicopter squadrons) for forcing the Vietnamese to get their house in order in one area after another.

We have opted for the third choice, on the basis of both merit and feasibility.

Our reasons for these: First, it would be dangerous for us to engineer a coup under present tense circumstances, since it is by no means certain that we could control its consequences and potentialities for Communist exploitation. Second, we are convinced that a part of the complaint about Diem's administrative methods conceals a lack of first-rate executives who can get things done. In the endless debate between Diem and his subordinates (Diem complaining of limited executive material; his subordinates, of Diem's bottleneck methods) both have hold of a piece of the truth.

The proposed strategy of limited partnership is designed both to force clear delegation of authority in key areas and to beef up Vietnamese administration until they can surface and develop the men to take over.

This is a difficult course to adopt. We can anticipate some friction and reluctance until it is proved that Americans can be helpful partners and that the techniques will not undermine Diem's political position. Shifts in U.S. attitudes and methods of administration as well as Vietnamese are required. But we are confident that it is the right way to proceed at this stage; and, as noted earlier, there is reason for confidence if the right men are sent to do the right jobs. 25/

On many points the tone, and sometimes the substance, of the appendices by the lesser members of the Mission (with the exception of one by Lansdale) are in sharp contrast to the summary paper.

William Jorden of State begins a discussion of "the present situation" by reporting:

One after another, Vietnamese officials, military men and ordinary citizens spoke to me of the situation in their country as 'grave' and 'deteriorating.' They are distressed at the evidence of growing Viet Cong successes. They have lost confidence in President Diem and in his leadership. Men who only one

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or two months ago would have hesitated to say anything critical of Diem, now explode in angry denunciation of the man, his family, and his methods.

And after a page of details, Jordan sums up with:

Intrigue, nepotism and even corruption might be accepted, for a time, if combined with efficiency and visible progress. When they accompany administrative paralysis and steady deterioration, they become intolerable. 26/

But the summary paper, under the heading of "The Assets of South Vietnam," lists:

With all his weaknesses, Diem has extraordinary ability, stubbornness, and guts.

Despite their acute frustration, the men of the Armed Forces and the administration respect Diem to a degree which gives their grumbling (and perhaps some plotting) a somewhat half-hearted character; and they are willing -- by and large -- to work for him, if he gives them a chance to do their jobs. 27/

The military annex contains this summary comment on the South Vietnamese Army:

The performance of the ARVN is disappointing and generally is characterized by a lack of aggressiveness and at most levels is devoid of a sense of urgency. The Army is short of able young trained leaders, both in the officer and NCO ranks. The basic soldier, as a result, is poorly trained, inadequately oriented, lacking in desire to close with the enemy and for the most part unaware of the serious inroads communist guerrillas are making in his country. 28/

But the main paper, again in the summary of South Vietnamese assets, reports that the South Vietnamese regulars are "of better quality than the Viet Cong Guerrillas." 29/

The point is not that the summary flatly contradicts the appendices. For example, the statement about the superior quality of ARVN, compared to the Viet Cong, is qualified with the remark "if it can bring the Communists to engagement," and can be explained to mean only that the more heavily armed ARVN could defeat a VC force in a set-piece battle. But the persistent tendency of the summary is to put Saigon's weaknesses in the best light, and avoid anything that might suggest that perhaps the U.S. should consider limiting, rather than increasing, its commitments to the Diem regime, or alternatively face up to a need to openly take over the war.

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In contrast, the appendices contemplate (if not always recommend) the more drastic alternatives. The military appendix argues (in a paraphrase of the JCS position quoted earlier) that the U.S. ought to move into Southeast Asia, preferably Laos, in force. The appendix by Sterling Cottrell of State (Chairman of the Vietnam Task Force) suggests an opposite view:

Since it is an open question whether the GVN can succeed even with U.S. assistance, it would be a mistake for the U.S. to commit itself irrevocably to the defeat of the communists in SVN. 30/

And Cottrell, in the only explicit statement in the available record on why the U.S. would not want to give Diem the treaty he had asked for, states:

The Communist operation starts from the lowest social level -- the villages. The battle must be joined and won at this point. If not, the Communists will ultimately control all but the relatively few areas of strong military concentrations. Foreign military forces cannot themselves win the battle at the village level. Therefore, the primary responsibility for saving the country must rest with the GVN.

For the above reason, the U.S. should assist the GVN. This rules out any treaty or pact which either shifts ultimate responsibility to the U.S., or engages any full U.S. commitment to eliminate the Viet Cong threat. 31/

(And a treaty which did not apply to the Viet Cong threat would hardly be a very reassuring thing to Saigon; while one that did would face an uncertain future when it came to the Senate for ratification.)

Yet, Jorden and Cottrell had nothing much to recommend that was particularly different from what was recommended in the summary. The effect of their papers is to throw doubt on the prospects for success of the intervention proposed. But their recommendations come out about the same way, so that if their papers seem more realistic in hindsight than the main paper, they also seem more confused.

Cottrell, after recommending that the U.S. avoid committing itself irrevocably to winning in South Vietnam, goes on to recommend:

The world should continue to be impressed that this situation of overt DRV aggression, below the level of conventional warfare, must be stopped in the best interest of every free nation. 32/

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The idea that, if worse comes to worst, the U.S. could probably save its position in Vietnam by bombing the north, seems to underlie a good deal of the optimism that pervades the summary paper. And even Cottrell, in the last of his recommendations, states:

If the combined U.S./GVN efforts are insufficient to reverse the trend, we should then move to the "Rostow Plan" of applying graduated measures on the DRV with weapons of our own choosing. 33/

Taylor, in his personal recommendations to the President (the cables from Baguio quoted earlier), spoke of the "extreme vulnerability of North Vietnam to conventional bombing."

The summary paper, in its contrast between the current war and the war the French lost, states:

Finally, the Communists now not only have something to gain -- the South -- but a base to lose -- the North -- if war should come. 34/

Bombing was not viewed as the answer to all problems. If things did not go well, the report saw a possible requirement for a substantial commitment of U.S. ground troops. In a section on South Vietnamese reserves, there is the comment that

...it is an evident requirement that the United States review quick action contingency plans to move into Vietnam, should the scale of the Vietnam [Viet Cong?] offensive radically increase at a time when Vietnamese reserves are inadequate to cope with it. Such action might be designed to take over the responsibility for the security of certain relatively quiet areas, if the battle remained at the guerrilla level, or to fight the Communists if open war were attempted. 35/

And the concluding paragraphs of the summary state that:

One of the major issues raised by this report is the need to develop the reserve strength in the U.S. establishment required to cover action in Southeast Asia up to the nuclear threshold in that area, as it is now envisaged. The call up of additional support forces may be required.

In our view, nothing is more calculated to sober the enemy and to discourage escalation in the face of the limited initiatives proposed here than the knowledge that the United States has prepared itself soundly to deal with aggression in Southeast Asia at any level. 36/

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But these warnings were directed to an unexpectedly strong Viet Cong showing during the period of buildup of ARVN, and more still to deterring the likelihood of a Communist resumption of their offensive in Laos, or of an overt invasion of South Vietnam. The Vietnam contingencies, in particular, were not viewed as likely. But the possibility of bombing the North was viewed otherwise. The clearest statements are in General Taylor's letter of transmittal:

While we feel that the program recommended represents those measures which should be taken in our present knowledge of the situation in Southeast Asia, I would not suggest that it is the final word. Future needs beyond this program will depend upon the kind of settlement we obtain in Laos and the manner in which Hanoi decides to adjust its conduct to that settlement. If the Hanoi decision is to continue the irregular war declared on South Vietnam in 1959 with continued infiltration and covert support of guerrilla bands in the territory of our ally, we will then have to decide whether to accept as legitimate the continued guidance, training, and support of a guerrilla war across an international boundary, while the attacked react only inside their borders. Can we admit the establishment of the common law that the party attacked and his friends are denied the right to strike the source of aggression, after the fact of external aggression is clearly established? It is our view that our government should undertake with the Vietnamese the measures outlined herein, but should then consider and face the broader question beyond.

We cannot refrain from expressing, having seen the situation on the ground, our common sense of outrage at the burden which this kind of aggression imposes on a new country, only seven years old, with a difficult historical heritage to overcome, confronting the inevitable problems of political, social, and economic transition to modernization. It is easy and cheap to destroy such a country whereas it is difficult undisturbed to build a nation coming out of a complex past without carrying the burden of a guerrilla war.

We were similarly struck in Thailand with the injustice of subjecting this promising nation in transition to the heavy military burdens it faces in fulfilling its role in SEATO security planning along with the guerrilla challenge beginning to form up on its northeast frontier.

It is my judgment and that of my colleagues that the United States must decide how it will cope with Krushchev's "wars of liberation" which are really para-wars of guerrilla aggression.

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This is a new and dangerous Communist technique which bypasses our traditional political and military responses. While the final answer lies beyond the scope of this report, it is clear to me that the time may come in our relations to Southeast Asia when we must declare our intention to attack the source of guerrilla aggression in North Vietnam and impose on the Hanoi Government a price for participating in the current war which is commensurate with the damage being inflicted on its neighbors to the south. 37/

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VI. SOME CABLES FROM SAIGON

To a current reader, and very likely to the officials in Washington who had access to the full Taylor Mission Report (including Taylor's personal recommendations), there really seem to be three reports, not one.

1. Taylor's own cables read like, as of course they were, a soldier's crisp, direct analysis of the military problem facing the Saigon government. With regard to the Diem regime, the emphasis is on a need to build up intelligence capabilities, clear up administrative drags on efficient action, and take the offensive in seeking out and destroying VC units.

2. The main paper in the Report (the "Evaluations and Conclusions") incorporates General Taylor's views on the military problems. But, it is much broader, giving primary emphasis to the military problem, but also some attention to what we now call the "other war," and even more to conveying an essentially optimistic picture of the opportunities for a vigorous American effort to provide the South Vietnamese government and army with the elan and style needed to win. This paper was presumably drafted mainly by Rostow, with contributions from other members of the party.

It is consistent with Rostow's emphasis before and since on the Viet Cong problem as a pretty straight-forward case of external aggression. There is no indication of the doubts expressed in the Alexis Johnson "Concept of Intervention in Vietnam" paper that Diem might not be able to defeat the Viet Cong even if infiltration were largely cut off. At one point, for example, the paper tells its readers:

It must be remembered that the 1959 political decision in Hanoi to launch the guerrilla and political campaign of 1960-61 arose because of Diem's increasing success in stabilizing his rule and moving his country forward in the several preceding years. 38/

On the very next page (perhaps reflecting the vagaries of committee papers) the paper does not itself "remember" this description of conditions when the war started. For it states:

The military frustration of the past two months has...made acute, throughout his administration, dissatisfaction with Diem's method of rule, with his lack of identification with his people, and with his strategy which has been endemic for some years. 39/

But that seems only a momentary lapse from the general line of the paper, which is fairly reflected in the recommendation that we tell Moscow to:

use its influence with Ho Chi Minh to call his dogs off, mind his business, and feed his people. 40/

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3. Finally, there were the appendices by the military and especially the State representatives on the Mission which, as indicated by the extracts given in the previous section, paint a much darker picture than the reader gets from the main paper. Even when, as is frequently the case, their recommendations are not much different from the main paper, the tone is one of trying to make the best of a bad situation, rather than of seizing an opportunity.

Because of these distinctions between the different parts of the Report, two people reading the full Report could come away with far different impressions of what sort of problem the U.S. was facing in Vietnam, depending on which parts of the Report seemed to them to ring truest. Presumably, officials' judgments here were influenced by their reading of the series of cables that arrived during and just after the Taylor visit, many of which touch on critical points of the report.

Here are some samples.

The day Taylor left, Nolting sent a cable describing the immediate mood in Saigon in pretty desperate terms. All parts of the Taylor Report, including the main paper, did the same. The distinctions in describing the situation were in how deep-rooted the immediate malaise was seen. The main effect of this cable from Nolting was presumably to add weight to the warning of the Report that something dramatic had to be done if the U.S. were not ready to risk a collapse in Saigon within a few months. As the Taylor Report stressed and the cable implies, the very fact of the Taylor Mission would have a very negative impact if nothing came out of it.

There has been noticeable rise in Saigon's political temperature during past week. Taylor visit, though reassuring in some respects, has been interpreted by many persons as demonstrating critical stage which VC insurgency has reached...Following deterioration of general security conditions over past two months cancellation October 26 national day celebrations to devote resources to flood relief and terse, dramatic declaration national emergency caught an unprepared public by surprise and contributed additional unsettling elements to growing atmosphere of uneasiness...

This growing public disquietude accompanied by increasing dissatisfaction with Diem's methods of administration on part senior GVN officials. There is considerable cabinet level criticism and growing though still inchoate determination force organizational reforms on President. Similar attitude seems be developing in ARVN upper levels. Though trend of thinking these groups taking parallel courses, there nothing indicate at this moment that collaboration between them taking place. Beginnings of this would, of course, be serious indicator something brewing.

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At same time CAS [CIA] also has from Vietnamese government sources reports (C-3) of movement of certain platoon to company-size VC units (totalling perhaps 200-500 men) toward Saigon to profit from any disturbances or confusion which may occur. Knowledge these reports within GVN apparently tending deter disaffected officials from developing radical pace at this moment.

Situation here thus one of insecurity, uneasiness and emergent instability. A genuine and important military victory over VC would do more than anything else to redress balance and allay for moment high-level mutterings of need for change. On other hand, further deterioration of situation over next few weeks or months or new VC success similar Phuoc Hhanh incident might well bring situation to head. 41/

From MAAG Chief McGarr, Washington received an account of Taylor's meeting with "Big Minh," then Chief of Staff, later Head of State for a while after Diem was overthrown. It is interesting because it was one of the very few reports from Saigon in the available record suggesting that the Diem regime might be in need of more than administrative reforms. Minh complains that the Vietnamese army was "losing the support of the people" as indicated by a "marked decrease in the amount of information given by the population." He warned, further, that "GVN should discontinue favoring certain religions..." But McGarr stressed the administrative problems, particularly the need for an "overall plan." His reaction explicitly concerns what he saw as the "military" aspects of Minh's complaints. But Ambassador Nolting's cables and the main paper of the Report show a very similar tendency to take note of political problems, but put almost all the emphasis on the need for better military tactics and more efficient administrative arrangements.

...Big Minh was pessimistic and clearly and frankly outlined his personal feeling that the military was not being properly supported. He said not only Viet Cong grown alarmingly, but that Vietnamese armed forces were losing support of the people. As example, he pointed out marked decrease in amount of information given by population. Minh said GVN should discontinue favoring certain religions, and correct present system of selecting province chiefs. At this point Minh was extremely caustic in commenting on lack of ability, military and administrative, of certain province chiefs. Minh was bitter about province chief's role in military chain of command saying that although Gen. McGarr had fought for and won on the single... command which had worked for few months, old habits were now returning. Also, on urging from Gen. McGarr he had gone on offensive, but province chiefs had not cooperated to extent necessary. He discussed his inability to get cooperation from GVN agencies on developing overall plans for conduct of counterinsurgency. Minh also discussed need to bring sects back into fold as these are anti-communist. Although above

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not new Minh seemed particularly discouraged...When analyzed, most of Minh's comments in military field are occasioned by lack of overall coordination and cooperation. This re-emphasizes absolute necessity for overall plan which would clearly delineate responsibility and create a team effort... 42/

Nolting concerned himself, of course, with the civil as well as military arrangements, but with much the same stress on organizational and administrative formalities. A striking example was when Nolting reported that Diem was willing to consider (in response to American urging of top level administrative reforms) creating a National Executive Council patterned after the U.S. National Security Council. Nolting was favorably impressed. His cable notes no concern that under Diem's proposal, Diem's brother Nhu would be chairman of the NEC, although a year earlier (and of course even more urgently a year or so later) getting Nhu, and his wife, out of the picture entirely had been seen as the best real hope of saving the Diem regime.

The report Nolting sent on Taylor's final meeting with Diem also contains some interesting material. It leaves the impression that Diem was still not really anxious to get American troops deeply involved in his country, despite his favorable reaction at the meeting of the 24th, which, in turn, was a reversal of his reaction at the meeting on the 19th. Because of this, the impression left by the whole record is that Taylor came to the conclusion that some sort of ground troop commitment was needed mainly because of what he heard from Diem's colleagues and his military people, rather than from Diem himself.

According to Nolting's cabled account, Diem, although raising half a dozen issues relating to increased American military aid, did not mention the flood task force, or anything else that might imply a special interest in getting some sort of ground troops commitment. As seemed the case earlier, it was the Americans who pressed the idea of getting American military people involved in combat. In the only exchange Nolting reported touching on this issue, he said:

1. Diem stressed importance of reinforcement of aviation: particularly helicopters. Taylor and I [Nolting] used this opportunity to make clear to Diem that we envisaged helicopters piloted by Americans and constituting American units under American commanders which would cooperate with Vietnamese military commands... 43/

(At a meeting with McGarr November 9, Diem again raised the helicopter question, this time taking the initiative in saying he needed American pilots, but he did not mention the flood task force, or anything else that might imply a request for ground troops.) 44/

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On the question of better performance by Diem's regime, we have this exchange, which does not seem likely to have prepared Diem for the fairly substantial quid pro quo which turned out to be part of the package proposed by Washington:

...3. Taylor told Diem it would be useful if he and I could develop specifics with respect to political-psychological point in paper which Taylor presented to Diem October 24. * Taylor pointed out this would be very useful to him in Washington because he will be faced with question that, if program he proposes is adopted, what will be chances of early success. In response Thuan's question asking for exact meaning of this point in Taylor's paper, latter said there has been loss of confidence among both Vietnamese and American people about situation in Vietnam and we need to determine together what measures can be taken to restore confidence. Rostow commented that secret of turning point is offensive action. Diem stated complete psychological mobilization required so that everything can be done to raise potential GVN forces and damage enemy's potential. He referred to GVN efforts in past to collaborate more closely with US in military planning and said these efforts had run up against wall of secrecy surrounding US and SEATO military plans... 45/

Finally, there was this exchange, which does not appear to provide much support for the high hopes expressed in the Taylor Report that Diem was anxious for U.S. guidance and "in principle" ready to grant a role for Americans in his administration and army.

...4. Taylor referred to Diem's comments in earlier talk about shortage of capable personnel and suggested US might assist by lending personnel. Diem replied that US could help in this respect in training field. Thuan then brought up dilemma facing GVN re instructors at Thui Duc Reserve Officers' School... 46/

* Paragraph 12 of Taylor's cable reporting the meeting. Quoted in Section IV, above.

"Actions to emphasize national emergency and beginning of a new phase in the war: we should consider jointly all possible measures to emphasize turning point has been reached in dealing with communist aggression. Possible actions might include appeal to United Nations, an announcement by GVN of governmental changes to cope with crisis and exchange of letters between the two heads of State expressing their partnership in a common cause..." 47/

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IV.B.

CHAPTER VI

I. CONTEXT

Taylor's formal report, as noted, was dated November 3, a day after the Mission came back to Washington. (A good deal of it had been written during the stopover at Baguio, in the Philippines, when Taylor's personal cables to the President had also been written and sent.) The submission of Taylor's Report was followed by prominent news stories the next morning flatly stating (but without attribution to a source) that the President "remains strongly opposed to the dispatch of American combat troops to South Vietnam" and strongly implying that General Taylor had not recommended such a commitment. 1/ Apparently, only a few people, aside from Taylor, Rostow and a handful of very senior officials, realized that this was not exactly accurate--for the summary paper of the Report had not been very explicit on just what was meant by "a hard commitment to the ground." Thus only those who knew about the "Eyes Only" cables would know just what Taylor was recommending.

Diem himself had given one of his rare on-the-record interviews to the New York Times correspondent in Saigon while Taylor was on his way home, and he too gave the impression that the further American aid he expected would not include ground troops. 2/

Consequently, the general outline of the American aid that would be sent following the Taylor Mission was common knowledge for over a week before any formal decision was made. The decisions, when they were announced stirred very little fuss, and (considering the retrospective importance) not even much interest. The Taylor Mission had received much less attention in the press than several other crises at the UN, in the Congo, on nuclear testing, and most of all in Berlin, where there had just been a symbolic confrontation of Soviet and American tanks. The Administration was so concerned about public reaction to Soviet aggressiveness and apparent American inability to deal with it that a campaign was begun (as usual in matters of this sort, reported in the Times without specific attribution) to "counter-attack against what unnamed 'high officials' called a 'rising mood of national frustration.'" The Administration's message, the Times reported, was that a "mature foreign policy" rather than "belligerence of defeatism" was what was needed. 3/ What is interesting about such a message is what the necessity to send it reveals about the mood of the times.

In this sort of context, there was no real debate about whether the U.S. ought to do anything reasonable it could to prevent Vietnam from going the way of Laos. There is no hint of a suggestion otherwise in the classified record, and there was no real public debate on

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this point. What was seen as an issue was whether the limits of reasonable U.S. aid extended to the point of sending American troops to fight the Viet Cong. But even this was subdued. There had been, as noted before, the leaked stories playing down the prospects that combat troops would be sent, and then, immediately on Taylor's return, the unattributed but obviously authoritative stories that Kennedy was opposed to sending troops and Taylor was not recommending them.

In a most important sense, this situation distorts the story told in this account. For this account inevitably devotes a great deal of space to the decision that was not made -- that of sending ground troops -- and very little space to the important decisions that were made. There is simply nothing much to say about these latter decisions: except that they were apparently taken for granted at the time. Even today, with all the hindsight available, it is very hard to imagine Kennedy or any other President responding to the situation faced in 1961 by doing significantly less about Vietnam than he did. The only choices seen then, as indeed even today the only choices seem to have been, whether to do more. And it is on how that question was resolved, inevitably, that any account of the period will be focused.

The Administration faced (contrary to the impression given to the public both before and after the decisions) two major issues when Taylor returned.

1. What conditions, if any, would be attached to new American aid? The Taylor Report implicitly recommended none. But the leaked stories in the press following Taylor's return showed that some in the Administration inclined to a much harder line on Diem than the summary paper of the report. For example, A Times dispatch of November 5, from its Pentagon correspondent, reported that Diem would be expected to "undertake major economic, social, and military reforms to provide a basis for increased U.S. support." 4/

2. Would the limited commitment of ground forces recommended by Taylor be undertaken? The news stories suggested they would, although this would be apparent only to those who had seen Taylor's "Eyes Only" cables. The story appearing the day after the report was submitted, despite the flat statements against the use of combat troops, also stated that Taylor had recommended "the dispatch of more specialists in anti-guerrilla warfare to train Vietnamese troops, communications and transportation specialists, and army engineers to help the Vietnamese government combat its flood problems." The November 5 story was more explicit. It is noted that officials seemed to rule out the use of U.S. combat forces, "the move considered here a few weeks ago." But "at the same time it appears that Army engineers, perhaps in unusually large numbers, may be sent to help on flood control work

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and other civil projects and to fight if necessary." This last phrase was explicitly (and correctly) linked to the fact that the area in which the floods had taken place (the Delta) was precisely the area of greatest Viet Cong strength. 5/

A final question of great importance did not have to be resolved during this review: for although the Taylor Report had stressed the idea of eventually bombing the north, no immediate decision or commitment on this was recommended.

On the first of these issues (the quid pro quo for U.S. aid) our record tells us that demands were made on Diem, as we will see when we come to the actual decision. The newspaper stories strongly suggest that the decision to ask for a quid pro quo was made, at the latest, immediately following the return of the Taylor Mission. But the record does not show anything about the reasoning behind this effort to pressure Diem to agree to reforms as a condition for increased U.S. aid, nor of what the point of it was. It certainly conflicted with the main drive of the Taylor Mission Report. The report not only suggested no such thing, but put a great deal of stress on a cordial, intimate relationship with the Diem regime. Pressure for reform (especially when publicly made, as they essentially were in the leaked stories) was hardly likely to promote cordiality. Durbrow's experience earlier in the year had shown that pressure would have the opposite result.

Consequently, the President's handling of this issue had the effect of undermining from the start what appeared to have been a major premise of the strategy recommended to the President: that Diem was "in principle" prepared for what plainly amounted to a "limited partnership," with the U.S. in running his country and his Army. * 6/

The advantages, from the American view, of the President's decision to place demands on Diem were presumably that it might (contrary to realistic expectations) actually push Diem in the right direction; and that if this did not work, it would somewhat limit the American commitment to Diem. The limit would come by making clear that the U.S. saw a good deal of the problem as Diem's own responsibility, and not just a simple matter of external aggression. The balance of this judgment would turn substantially on whether whoever was making the decision judged that the "limited partnership" idea was really much more realistic than the trying to pressure Diem, and on whether he wanted to limit the U.S. commitment, rather than make it unambiguous. Further, the cables from Saigon had clearly shown that many South Vietnamese were hoping the Americans would put pressure on Diem, so that although such tactics

* A cable to Saigon November 4 asked Nolting whether he thought Diem might agree to, among other things, a proposal to establish a National Emergency Council which, in addition to the senior members of Diem's army and administration would include a "mature and hardheaded American...to participate in all decisions."

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would prejudice relations with Diem, they would not necessarily harm relations with others of influence in the country, in particular his generals.

Finally, although Kennedy's decisions here were contrary to the implications of the summary paper in the Taylor Report, they were not particularly inconsistent with the appendices by the State representatives. For these, as noted, took a far less rosy view of Diem's prospects than appeared in the summary.

On the second issue -- the U.S. combat military task force -- the available record tells us only the positions of Taylor and of the Defense Department. We are not sure what the position of State was -- although Sorenson claims that all the President's senior advisors had recommended going ahead with sending some ground troops. 7/

Even Taylor's position is slightly ambiguous. It is conceivable that he argued for the Task Force mainly because he thought that the numbers of U.S. personnel that might be sent as advisors, pilots, and other specialists would not add up to a large enough increment to have much of a psychological impact on South Vietnamese morale. But his choice of language indicates that a mere question of numbers was not the real issue. Rather Taylor's argument seems to have been that specifically ground forces (not necessarily all or even mainly infantrymen, but ground soldiers who would be out in the countryside where they could be shot at and shoot back) were what was needed. Combat engineers to work in the VC-infested flood area in the Delta would meet that need. Helicopter pilots and mechanics and advisors, who might accompany Vietnamese operations, but could not undertake ground operations on their own apparently would not. There is only one easily imagined reason for seeing this as a crucial distinction. And that would be if a critical object of the stepped up American program was to be exactly what Taylor said it should be in his final cable from Saigon: "...assuring Diem of our readiness to join him in a military showdown with the Viet Cong ..." 8/

Thus the flood task force was essentially different from the balance of the military program. It did not fill an urgent need for military specialists or expertise not adequately available within Vietnam; it was an implicit commitment to deny the Viet Cong a victory even if major American ground forces should be required.

Taylor clearly did not see the need for large U.S. ground involvement as at all probable. ("The risks of backing into a major Asian war by way of SVN are present but are not impressive," in large part because "NVN is extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing.") At another point, Taylor warns the President, "If the first contingent is not enough, ... it will be difficult to resist the pressure to reinforce. If the ultimate result sought is the closing of the frontiers and the

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cleanup of the insurgents within SVN, there is no limit to our possible commitment (unless we attack the source in Hanoi.)" 9/

We have a good record of the DoD staff work, which preceded the President's decision on this issue, but only a bit from State and none from the White House. Rusk, in a cable from Japan on November 1, contributed this note of caution (which also bears on the previous discussion of demands on Diem for a quid pro quo for increased American aid):

Since General Taylor may give first full report prior my return, believe special attention should be given to critical question whether Diem is prepared take necessary measures to give us something worth supporting. If Diem unwilling trust military commanders to get job done and take steps to consolidate non-communist elements into serious national effort, difficult to see how handful American troops can have decisive influence. While attaching greatest possible importance to security in SEA, I would be reluctant to see U.S. make major additional commitment American prestige to a losing horse.

Suggest Department carefully review all Southeast Asia measures we expect from Diem if our assistance forces us to assume de facto direction South Vietnamese affairs. 10/

But the view of the U.S. Mission in Saigon contained no such doubts, nor did most Vietnamese, according to this cable Nolting sent while Taylor was enroute home:

Our conversations over past ten days with Vietnamese in various walks of life show virtually unanimous desire for introduction U.S. forces into Viet-Nam. This based on unsolicited remarks from cabinet ministers, National Assembly Deputies, University professors, students, shopkeepers, and oppositionists. Dr. Tran Dinh De, level-headed Minister of Health, told Embassy officer Oct 29 that while GVN could continue resist communists for while longer if US troops not introduced, it could not win alone against commies. National Assembly members, according to Lai Tu, leader Personalist Community, unanimously in favor entry US forces. Diem told us while General Taylor was here that he had consulted National Assembly Committee on this question and had received favorable response. Even an oppositionist like Ex-Foreign Minister Tran Van Do has told us US forces are needed and is apparently so strongly convinced of this

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that he did not suggest any conditions precedent about political changes by Diem. AmConsul Hue reports that opinion among intellectuals and government officials in that city is also almost unanimously in favor of introduction of American combat troops. MAAG believes on basis private conversations and general attitude Vietnamese military personnel toward us that Vietnamese armed forces would likewise welcome introduction US forces.

General Vietnamese desire for introduction US forces arises from serious morale decline among populace during recent weeks because of deterioration in security and horrible death through torture and mutilation to which Col Nam subjected. Expanded VC infiltration has brought fully home to Vietnamese the fact that US has not intervened militarily in Laos to come to rescue of anti-communists. Now that they see Viet-Nam approaching its own crucial period, paramount question in their minds is whether it will back down when chips are down. Vietnamese thus want US forces introduced in order to demonstrate US determination to stick it out with them against Communists. They do not want to be victims of political settlement with communists. This is especially true of those publicly identified as anti-communist like Dean Vu Quoc Thue who collaborated with Dr. Eugene Staley on Joint Experts Report.

Most Vietnamese whose thoughts on this subject have been developed are not thinking in terms of US troops to fight guerrillas but rather of a reassuring presence of US forces in Viet-Nam. These persons undoubtedly feel, however, that if war in Viet-Nam continues to move toward overt conventional aggression as opposed to its guerrilla character, combat role for US troops could eventually arise. 11/

The special commitment involved in committing even a small force of ground troops was generally recognized. We have notes on an ISA staff paper, for example, which ranked the various types of increased U.S. military aid in ascending order of commitment, and of course, placed the flood task force at the top. According to the notes,

Any combat elements, such as in the task force, would come under attack and would need to defend themselves, committing U.S. prestige deeply. U.S. troops would then be fighting in South Vietnam and could not withdraw under fire. Thus, the introduction of U.S. troops in South Vietnam would

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be decisive act and must be sent to achieve a completely decisive mission. This mission would probably require, over time, increased numbers of U.S. troops; DRV intervention would probably increase until a large number of U.S. troops were required, three or more divisions. 12/

This assessment differed from that in General Taylor's cables only in not stressing the hope that a U.S. willingness to bomb the north would deter North Vietnamese escalation of its own commitment.

A special NIE prepared at this time reached essentially the same conclusions.

This SNIE, incidentally, is the only staff paper found in the available record which treats communist reactions primarily in terms of the separate national interests of Hanoi, Moscow, and Peiping, rather than primarily in terms of an overall communist strategy for which Hanoi, is acting as an agent. In particular, the Gilpatric Task Force Report, it will be recalled, began with references to a communist 'master plan' for taking over Southeast Asia. The Taylor Mission Report, similarly, began with a section on "Communist Strategy in Southeast Asia" and opening:

At the present time, the Communists are pursuing a clear and systematic strategy in Southeast Asia. It is a strategy of extending Communist power and influence in ways which bypass U.S. nuclear strength, U.S. conventional naval, air, and ground forces, and the conventional strength of indigenous forces in the area. Their strategy is rooted in the fact that international law and practice does not yet recognize the mounting of guerrilla war across borders as aggression justifying counterattack at the source. 13/

The November 5 SNIE presumably indicates the principal courses of action that were under formal review at the time:

The courses of action here considered were given to the intelligence community for the purposes of this estimate and were not intended to represent the full range of possible courses of action. The given courses of action are:

A. The introduction of a US airlift into and within South Vietnam, increased logistics support, and an increase in MAAG strength to provide US advisers down to battalion level;

B. The introduction into South Vietnam of a US force of about 8,000 - 10,000 troops, mostly engineers with some combat support, in response to an appeal from President Diem for assistance in flood relief;

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C. The introduction into the area of a US combat force of 25,000 to 40,000 to engage with South Vietnamese forces in ground, air, and naval operations against the Viet Cong; and

D. An announcement by the US of its determination to hold South Vietnam and a warning, either private or public, that North Vietnamese support of the Viet Cong must cease or the US would launch air attacks against North Vietnam. This action would be taken in conjunction with Course A, B, or C. 14/

These proposed courses of action correspond to those outlined for consideration by the Taylor Mission, with the exception that the flood task force proposed by Taylor has been substituted for the former "intermediate" solution of stationing a token U.S. force at DaNang, and that an opinion is asked on the prospects of threats to bomb the north, again reflecting the Taylor Mission Report. *

The gist of the SNIE was that North Vietnamese would respond to an increased U.S. commitment with an offsetting increase in infiltrated support for the Viet Cong. Thus, the main difference in the estimated communist reaction to Courses A, B, and C was that each would be stronger than its predecessor. On the prospects for bombing the north, the SNIE implies that threats to bomb would not cause Hanoi to stop its support for the Viet Cong, and that actual attacks on the North would bring a strong response from Moscow and Peiping, who would "regard the defense of North Vietnam against such an attack as imperative." 15/

*See Gilpatric memo quoted at conclusion of Section I, Chapter V.

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II. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

On November 8, McNamara sent the following memorandum on behalf of himself, Gilpatric, and the JCS:

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

The basic issue framed by the Taylor Report is whether the U.S. shall:

- a. Commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism, and
- b. Support this commitment by necessary immediate military actions and preparations for possible later actions.

The Joint Chiefs, Mr. Gilpatric, and I have reached the following conclusions:

1. The fall of South Vietnam to Communism would lead to the fairly rapid extension of Communist control, or complete accommodation to Communism, in the rest of mainland Southeast Asia and in Indonesia. The strategic implications worldwide, particularly in the Orient, would be extremely serious.
2. The chances are against, probably sharply against, preventing that fall by any measures short of the introduction of U.S. forces on a substantial scale. We accept General Taylor's judgment that the various measures proposed by him short of this are useful but will not in themselves do the job of restoring confidence and setting Diem on the way to winning his fight.
3. The introduction of a U.S. force of the magnitude of an initial 8,000 men in a flood relief context will be of great help to Diem. However, it will not convince the other side (whether the shots are called from Moscow, Peiping, or Hanoi) that we mean business. Moreover, it probably will not tip the scales decisively. We would be almost certain to get increasingly mired down in an inconclusive struggle.
4. The other side can be convinced we mean business only if we accompany the initial force introduction by a clear commitment to the full objective stated above, accompanied by a warning through some channel to Hanoi that continued support of the Viet Cong will lead to punitive retaliation against North Vietnam.
5. If we act in this way, the ultimate possible extent of our military commitment must be faced. The struggle may be prolonged and Hanoi and Peiping may intervene overtly. In view of the

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logistic difficulties faced by the other side, I believe we can assume that the maximum U.S. forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia will not exceed 6 divisions, or about 205,000 men (CINCPAC Plan 32-59, Phase IV). Our military posture is, or with the addition of more National Guard or regular Army divisions, can be made, adequate to furnish these forces without serious interference with our present Berlin plans.

6. To accept the stated objective is of course a most serious decision. Military force is not the only element of what must be a most carefully coordinated set of actions. Success will depend on factors many of which are not within our control -- notably the conduct of Diem himself and other leaders in the area. Laos will remain a major problem. The domestic political implications of accepting the objective are also grave, although it is our feeling that the country will respond better to a firm initial position than to courses of action that lead us in only gradually, and that in the meantime are sure to involve casualties. The over-all effect on Moscow and Peiping will need careful weighing and may well be mixed; however, permitting South Vietnam to fall can only strengthen and encourage them greatly.

7. In sum:

a. We do not believe major units of U.S. forces should be introduced in South Vietnam unless we are willing to make an affirmative decision on the issue stated at the start of this memorandum.

b. We are inclined to recommend that we do commit the U.S. to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism and that we support this commitment by the necessary military actions.

c. If such a commitment is agreed upon, we support the recommendations of General Taylor as the first steps toward its fulfillment.

Sgd: Robert S. McNamara 16/

A number of things are striking about this memorandum, including of course the judgment that the "maximum" U.S. ground forces required, even in the case of overt intervention by not only North Vietnam, but China as well, would "not exceed" 205,000 men. This estimate of the requirement to deal with a large scale overt invasion is consistent with the Chief's earlier estimate that the addition of 40,000 U.S. troops to the South Vietnamese forces would be sufficient to "clean up" the Viet Cong.

But the strongest message to the President in the memorandum (growing out of points 3, 4, and 7c) was surely that if he agreed to sending the military task force, he should be prepared for follow-up recommendations

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for re-enforcements and to threaten Hanoi with bombing. Unless the SNIE was wholly wrong, threats to bomb Hanoi would not turn off the war, and Hanoi would increase its infiltration in response to U.S. commitments of troops. Even should Hanoi not react with counter-escalation, the President knew that the Chiefs, at least, were already on record as desiring a prompt build-up to 40,000 ground troops. In short, the President was being told that the issue was not whether to send an 8,000-man task force, but whether or not to embark on a course that, without some extraordinary good luck, would lead to combat involvement in Southeast Asia on a very substantial scale. On the other hand, he was being warned that anything less than sending the task force was very likely to fail to prevent the fall of Vietnam, since "the odds are against, probably sharply against, preventing that fall by any means short of the introduction of U.S. forces on a substantial scale" (of which the task force would be the first increment).

Although the Chief's position here is clear, because their views are on record in other memoranda, McNamara's own position remains a little ambiguous. For the paper does not flatly recommend going ahead; it only states he and his colleagues are "inclined" to recommend going ahead. Three days later McNamara joined Rusk in a quite different recommendation, and one obviously more to the President's liking (and, in the nature of such things, quite possibly drawn up to the President's specifications).

As with the May revision of the Gilpatric Report, this paper combines an escalation of the rhetoric with a toning down of the actions the President is asked to take. Since the NSAM formalizing the President's decisions was taken essentially verbatim from this paper, the complete text is reprinted here. (The NSAM consisted of the Recommendations section of this memorandum, except that Point 1 of the recommendations was deleted.)

Of particular importance in this second memorandum to the President was Section 4, with its explicit sorting of U.S. military aid into Category A, support forces, which were to be sent promptly; and Category B, "larger organized units with actual or potential direct military missions" on which no immediate decision was recommended. There is no explicit reference in the paper to the flood relief task force; it simply does not appear in the list of recommended actions, presumably on the grounds that it goes in Category B. Category B forces, the paper notes, "involve a certain dilemma: if there is a strong South Vietnamese effort, they may not be needed; if there is not such an effort, United States forces could not accomplish their mission in the midst of an apathetic or hostile population."

If McNamara's earlier memorandum is read carefully, the same sort of warning is found, although it sounds much more perfunctory. But that such warnings were included shows a striking contrast with the last go-around in May. Then, the original Defense version of the Gilpatric

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Task Force Report contained no hint of such a qualification, and there was only a quite vague warning in the State revisions. Part of the reason, undoubtedly, was the 6 month's additional experience in dealing with Diem. A larger part, though, almost certainly flowed from the fact that the insurgency had by now shown enough strength so that there was now in everyone's minds the possibility that the U.S. might someday face the choice of giving up on Vietnam or taking over a major part of the war.

These warnings (that even a major U.S. commitment to the ground war would not assure success) were obviously in some conflict with the recommendations both papers made for a clear-cut U.S. commitment to save South Vietnam. The contrast is all the sharper in the joint Rusk/McNamara memorandum, where the warning is so forcefully given.

Here is the Rusk/McNamara memorandum. 17/

TOP SECRET

November 11, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: South Viet-Nam

1. United States National Interests in South Viet-Nam.

The deteriorating situation in South Viet-Nam requires attention to the nature and scope of United States national interests in that country. The loss of South Viet-Nam to Communism would involve the transfer of a nation of 20 million people from the free world to the Communist bloc. The loss of South Viet-Nam would make pointless any further discussion about the importance of Southeast Asia to the free world; we would have to face the near certainty that the remainder of Southeast Asia and Indonesia would move to a complete accommodation with Communism, if not formal incorporation within the Communist bloc. The United States, as a member of SEATO, has commitments with respect to South Viet-Nam under the Protocol to the SEATO Treaty. Additionally, in a formal statement at the conclusion session of the 1954 Geneva Conference, the United States representative stated that the United States "would view any renewal of the aggression . . . with grave concern and seriously threatening international peace and security."

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The loss of South Viet-Nam to Communism would not only destroy SEATO but would undermine the credibility of American commitments elsewhere. Further, loss of South Viet-Nam would stimulate bitter domestic controversies in the United States and would be seized upon by extreme elements to divide the country and harass the Administration.

2. The Problem of Saving South Viet-Nam.

It seems, on the face of it, absurd to think that a nation of 20 million people can be subverted by 15-20 thousand active guerrillas if the Government and people of that country do not wish to be subverted. South Viet-Nam is not, however, a highly organized society with an effective governing apparatus and a population accustomed to carrying civic responsibility. Public apathy is encouraged by the inability of most citizens to act directly as well as by the tactics of terror employed by the guerrillas throughout the countryside. Inept administration and the absence of a strong non-Communist political coalition have made it difficult to bring available resources to bear upon the guerrilla problem and to make the most effective use of available external aid. Under the best of conditions the threat posed by the presence of 15-20 thousand guerrillas, well disciplined under well-trained cadres, would be difficult to meet.

3. The United States' Objective in South Viet-Nam.

The United States should commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communist. The basic means for accomplishing this objective must be to put the Government of South Viet-Nam into a position to win its own war against the guerrillas. We must insist that that Government itself take the measures necessary for that purpose in exchange for large-scale United States assistance in the military, economic and political fields. At the same time we must recognize that it will probably not be possible for the GVN to win this war as long as the flow of men and supplies from North Viet-Nam continues unchecked and the guerrillas enjoy a safe sanctuary in neighboring territory.

We should be prepared to introduce United States combat forces if that should become necessary for success. Dependent upon the circumstances, it may also be necessary for United States forces to strike at the source of the aggression in North Viet-Nam.

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4. The Use of United States Forces in South Viet-Nam.

The commitment of United States forces to South Viet-Nam involves two different categories: (A) Units of modest size required for the direct support of South Viet-Nameese military effort, such as communications, helicopter and other forms of airlift, reconnaissance aircraft, naval patrols, intelligence units, etc., and (B) larger organized units with actual or potential direct military missions. Category (A) should be introduced as speedily as possible. Category (B) units pose a more serious problem in that they are much more significant from the point of view of domestic and international political factors and greatly increase the probabilities of Communist bloc escalation. Further, the employment of United States combat forces (in the absence of Communist bloc escalation) involves a certain dilemma: if there is a strong South-Vietnamese effort, they may not be needed; if there is not such an effort, United States forces could not accomplish their mission in the midst of an apathetic or hostile population. Under present circumstances, therefore, the question of injecting United States and SEATO combat forces should in large part be considered as a contribution to the morale of the South Viet-Nameese in their own effort to do the principal job themselves.

5. Probable Extent of the Commitment of United States Forces.

If we commit Category (B) forces to South Viet-Nam, the ultimate possible extent of our military commitment in Southeast Asia must be faced. The struggle may be prolonged, and Hanoi and Peiping may overtly intervene. It is the view of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, in the light of the logistic difficulties faced by the other side, we can assume that the maximum United States forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia would not exceed six divisions, or about 205,000 men (CINCPAC Plan 32/59 PHASE IV). This would be in addition to local forces and such SEATO forces as may be engaged. It is also the view of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that our military posture is, or, with the addition of more National Guard or regular Army divisions, can be made, adequate to furnish these forces and support them in action without serious interference with our present Berlin plans.

6. Relation to Laos.

It must be understood that the introduction of American combat forces into Viet-Nam prior to a Laotian settlement would run a considerable risk of stimulating a Communist breach of the cease fire

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and a resumption of hostilities in Laos. This could present us with a choice between the use of combat forces in Laos or an abandonment of that country to full Communist control. At the present time, there is at least a chance that a settlement can be reached in Laos on the basis of a weak and unsatisfactory Souvanna Phouma Government. The prospective agreement on Laos includes a provision that Laos will not be used as a transit area or as a base for interfering in the affairs of other countries such as South Viet-Nam. After a Laotian settlement, the introduction of United States forces into Viet-Nam could serve to stabilize the position both in Viet-Nam and in Laos by registering our determination to see to it that the Laotian settlement was as far as the United States would be willing to see Communist influence in South-east Asia develop.

7. The Need for Multilateral Action.

From the political point of view, both domestic and international, it would seem important to involve forces from other nations alongside of United States Category (B) forces in Viet-Nam. It would be difficult to explain to our own people why no effort had been made to invoke SEATO or why the United States undertook to carry this burden unilaterally. Our position would be greatly strengthened if the introduction of forces could be taken as a SEATO action, accompanied by units of other SEATO countries, with a full SEATO report to the United Nations of the purposes of the action itself.

Apart from the armed forces, there would be political advantage in elisting the interest of other nations, including neutrals, in the security and well-being of South Viet-Nam. This might be done by seeking such assistance as Malayan police officials (recently offered Diem by the Tunku) and by technical assistance personnel in other fields, either bilaterally or through international organizations.

8. Initial Diplomatic Action by the United States.

If the recommendations, below, are approved, the United States should consult intensively with other SEATO governments to obtain their full support of the course of action contemplated. At the appropriate stage, a direct approach should be made by the United States to Moscow, through normal or special channels, pointing out that we cannot accept the movement of cadres, arms and other supplies into South Viet-Nam in support of the guerrillas. We should also discuss the problem with neutral governments in the general area and get them to face up to their own interests in the security of South Viet-Nam; these governments will be concerned about (a) the introduction of United States combat forces and (b) the withdrawal of United States support from Southeast Asia; their concern, therefore, might be usefully expressed either to Communist bloc countries or in political support for what may prove necessary in South Viet-Nam itself.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the foregoing, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense recommend that:

1. We now take the decision to commit ourselves to the objective of preventing the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communism and that, in doing so, we recognize that the introduction of United States and other SEATO forces may be necessary to achieve this objective. (However, if it is necessary to commit outside forces to achieve the foregoing objective our decision to introduce United States forces should not be contingent upon unanimous SEATO agreement thereto.)

2. The Department of Defense be prepared with plans for the use of United States forces in South Viet-Nam under one or more of the following purposes:

(a) Use of a significant number of United States forces to signify United States determination to defend South Viet-Nam and to boost South Viet-Nam morale.

(b) Use of substantial United States forces to assist in suppressing Viet Cong insurgency short of engaging in detailed counter-guerrilla operations but including relevant operations in North Viet-Nam.

(c) Use of United States forces to deal with the situation if there is organized Communist military intervention.

3. We immediately undertake the following actions in support of the GVN:

(a) Provide increased air lift to the GVN forces, including helicopters, light aviation, and transport aircraft, manned to the extent necessary by United States uniformed personnel and under United States operational control.

(b) Provide such additional equipment and United States uniformed personnel as may be necessary for air reconnaissance, photography, instruction in and execution of air-ground support techniques, and for special intelligence.

(c) Provide the GVN with small craft, including such United States uniformed advisers and operating personnel as may be necessary for quick and effective operations in effecting surveillance and control over coastal waters and inland waterways.

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- (d) Provide expedited training and equipping of the civil guard and the self-defense corps with the objective of relieving the regular Army of static missions and freeing it for mobile offensive operations.
- (e) Provide such personnel and equipment as may be necessary to improve the military-political intelligence system beginning at the provincial level and extending upward through the Government and the armed forces to the Central Intelligence Organization.
- (f) Provide such new terms of reference, reorganization and additional personnel for United States military forces as are required for increased United States participation in the direction and control of GVN military operations and to carry out the other increased responsibilities which accrue to MAAG under these recommendations.
- (g) Provide such increased economic aid as may be required to permit the GVN to pursue a vigorous flood relief and rehabilitation program, to supply material in support of the security effort, and to give priority to projects in support of this expanded counter-insurgency program. (This could include increases in military pay, a full supply of a wide range of materials such as food, medical supplies, transportation equipment, communications equipment, and any other items where material help could assist the GVN in winning the war against the Viet Cong.)
- (h) Encourage and support (including financial support) a request by the GVN to the FAO or any other appropriate international organization for multilateral assistance in the relief and rehabilitation of the flood area.
- (i) Provide individual administrators and advisers for insertion into the Governmental machinery of South Viet-Nam in types and numbers to be agreed upon by the two Governments.
- (j) Provide personnel for a joint survey with the GVN of conditions in each of the provinces to assess the social, political, intelligence, and military factors bearing on the prosecution of the counter-insurgency program in order to reach a common estimate of these factors and a common determination of how to deal with them.

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4. Ambassador Nolting be instructed to make an immediate approach to President Diem to the effect that the Government of the United States is prepared to join the Government of Viet-Nam in a sharply increased joint effort to cope with the Viet Cong threat and the ravages of the flood as set forth under 3., above, if, on its part, the Government of Viet-Nam is prepared to carry out an effective and total mobilization of its own resources, both material and human, for the same end. Before setting in motion the United States proposals listed above, the United States Government would appreciate confirmation of their acceptability to the GVN, and an expression from the GVN of the undertakings it is prepared to make to insure the success of this joint effort. On the part of the United States, it would be expected that these GVN undertakings would include, in accordance with the detailed recommendations of the Taylor Mission and the Country Team:

(a) Prompt and appropriate legislative and administrative action to put the nation on a wartime footing to mobilize its entire resources. (This would include a decentralization and broadening of the Government so as to realize the full potential of all non-Communist elements in the country willing to contribute to the common struggle.)

(b) The establishment of appropriate Governmental wartime agencies with adequate authority to perform their functions effectively.

(c) Overhaul of the military establishment and command structure so as to create an effective military organization for the prosecution of the war.

5. Very shortly before the arrival in South Viet-Nam of the first increments of United States military personnel and equipment proposed under 3., above, that would exceed the Geneva Accord ceilings, publish the "Jordan report" as a United States "white paper," transmitting it as simultaneously as possible to the Governments of all countries with which we have diplomatic relations, including the Communist states.

6. Simultaneous with the publication of the "Jordan report," release an exchange of letters between Diem and the President.

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(a) Diem's letter would include: reference to the DRV violations of Geneva Accords as set forth in the October 24 GVN letter to the ICC and other documents; pertinent references to GVN statements with respect to its intent to observe the Geneva Accords; reference to its need for flood relief and rehabilitation; reference to previous United States aid and the compliance hitherto by both countries with the Geneva Accords; reference to the USG statement at the time the Geneva Accords were signed; the necessity now of exceeding some provisions of the Accords in view of the DRV violations thereof; the lack of aggressive intent with respect to the DRV: GVN intent to return to strict compliance with the Geneva Accords as soon as the DRV violations ceased; and request for additional United States assistance in framework foregoing policy. The letter should also set forth in appropriate general terms steps Diem has taken and is taking to reform Governmental structure.

(b) The President's reply would be responsive to Diem's request for additional assistance and acknowledge and agree to Diem's statements on the intent promptly to return to strict compliance with the Geneva Accords as soon as DRV violations have ceased.

7. Simultaneous with steps 5 and 6, above, make a private approach to the Soviet Union that would include: our determination to prevent the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communism by whatever means is necessary; our concern over dangers to peace presented by the aggressive DRV policy with respect to South Viet-Nam; our intent to return to full compliance with the Geneva Accords as soon as the DRV does so; the distinction we draw between Laos and South Viet-Nam; and our expectation that the Soviet Union will exercise its influence on the CHICOMS and the DRV.

8. A special diplomatic approach made to the United Kingdom in its role as co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference requesting that the United Kingdom seek the support of the Soviet co-Chairman for a cessation of DRV aggression against South Viet-Nam.

9. A special diplomatic approach also to be made to India, both in its role as Chairman of the ICC and as a power having relations with Peiping and Hanoi. This approach should be made immediately prior to public release of the "Jordan report" and the exchange of letters between Diem and the President.

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10. Immediately prior to the release of the "Jordan report" and the exchange of letters between Diem and the President, special diplomatic approaches also to be made to Canada, as well as Burma, Indonesia, Cambodia, Ceylon, the UAR, and Yugoslavia. SEATO, NATO, and OAS members should be informed through those organizations, with selected members also informed individually. The possibility of some special approach to Poland as a member of the ICC should also be considered.

When we reach this memorandum in the record, the decision seems essentially sealed. Kennedy, by every indication in the press at the time and according to the recollections of all the memoirs, was, at the least, very reluctant to send American ground forces to Vietnam, and quite possibly every bit as "strongly opposed" as the leaked news stories depicted him. He now had a joint recommendation from his Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense telling him just what he surely wanted to hear: that a decision on combat forces could be deferred. Consequently, Kennedy's decision on this point can hardly be considered in doubt beyond November 11, although a formal NSC meeting on the question was not held until the 15th. On the question of demands on Diem, again there is no reason to suspect the issue was in doubt any later, at most, than the 11th. The only questions which are in doubt are the extent to which the Rusk/McNamara memorandum simply happened to come to the President in such convenient form, or whether the President arranged it so; and if so, how far this formal paper differed from the real recommendations of the President's senior advisors. The record available gives no basis for even guessing about this. As noted earlier, even McNamara, who is on record with a previous, quite different memorandum, cannot be flatly said to have changed his mind (or been overruled). There is too much room for uncertainty about what he was really up to when he signed the memorandum.

In any event, Kennedy essentially adopted the Rusk/McNamara set of recommendations, although the record is not entirely clear on when he did so. There was an NSC meeting November 5; but although at least the Chairman of the JCS was there, the record shows that even after this meeting there was some uncertainty (or perhaps reluctance) in the JCS about whether the decision had been made. The record shows that McNamara phoned General Lemnitzer to assure him that this was the case. But the cables transmitting the decision to Saigon were dated November 14, the day before the NSC meeting. The formal decision paper (NSAM 111) was not signed until November 22nd. As noted earlier, the NSAM is essentially the recommendations section of the Rusk/McNamara paper, but with the initial recommendation (committing the U.S. to save Vietnam) deleted. 18/

The NSAM was headed "First Phase of Vietnam Program," which, of course, implied that a further decision to send combat troops was in prospect.

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Both Sorenson and Hilsman claim this was really a ruse by the President, who had no intention of going ahead with combat troops but did not choose to argue the point with his advisors.

Schlesinger, apparently writing from diary notes, says the President talked to him about the combat troops recommendations at the time, describing the proposed first increment as like an alcoholic's first drink:

The Taylor-Rostow report was a careful and thoughtful document, and the President read it with interest. He was impressed by its description of the situation as serious but not hopeless and attracted by the idea of stiffening the Diem regime through an infusion of American advisers. He did not, however, like the proposal of a direct American military commitment. "They want a force of American troops," he told me early in November. "They say it's necessary in order to restore confidence and maintain morale. But it will be just like Berlin. The troops will march in; the bands will play; the crowds will cheer; and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told we have to send in more troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another." The war in Vietnam, he added, could be won only so long as it was their war. If it were ever converted into a white man's war, we would lose as the French had lost a decade earlier. 19/

Whether, in fact, Kennedy had such a firm position in mind at the time cannot be surmised, though, from the official record itself. It is easy to believe that he did, for as Sorenson points out, Kennedy had strong views on the difficulties of foreign troops putting down an insurgency dating from his bleak, but correct, appraisals of French prospects in Vietnam as early as 1951, and again in Algeria in the late 1950's. And he was hardly alone in such sentiments, as shown in columns of the period by Reston and Lippman, and in a private communication from Galbraith to be quoted shortly.

But, Kennedy did not need to have such a firm position in mind to make the decisions he did. There was a case to be made for deferring the combat troops decision even if the President accepted the view that U.S. troops commitments were almost certainly needed in Vietnam and that putting them in sooner would be better than waiting. There was, in particular, the arguments in the Rusk/McNamara memorandum that putting combat troops into Vietnam just then would upset the Laos negotiations, and the unstated but obvious argument that the U.S. perhaps ought to hold back on the combat troop commitment to gain leverage on Diem.

General Taylor's advice, as shown in the record, gave a different ground for delaying. Taylor argued that the ground troop commitment was essentially for its psychological, not military, impact. Taylor's judgment was that it

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was "very doubtful" that anything short of a prompt commitment of ground troops would restore South Vietnamese morale. But such a commitment would obviously be a costly stop. The President was thoroughly forewarned that such a move would lead both to continual pressure to send more troops and to political difficulties at home that would inevitably flow from the significant casualties that had to be expected to accompany a ground troop commitment. The risk of delaying the ground troop commitment might easily have been judged not worth the certain costs that would accompany it. And of course, in hindsight, we know that the limited program approved by the President was sufficient to put off any imminent collapse of the Diem regime. Consequently, Kennedy's decisions do not tell us just what his view was, and indeed he did not need to have a firmly settled view to make the decision, which after all, was only to put off, not to foreclose a decision to send ground troops. He had only to decide that, on balance, the risks of deferring the troop decision were no worse than the costs of making it, and he could have reached that judgment by any number of routes. The reasons stated in the various papers may or may not accurately reflect the President's state of mind. The only thing we can be sure of is that they conveyed his judgment of the tactically most suitable rationale to put in writing. The most detailed record we have of this rationale and explanation of is the following cable to Nolting:

....Review of Taylor Report has resulted in following basic decisions:

1. Must essentially be a GVN task to contain and reduce the VC threat at present level of capability. Means organizing to go on offensive. We are prepared to contemplate further assistance after joint assessment establishes needs and possibilities of aid more precisely.
2. No amount of extra aid can be substitute for GVN taking measures to permit them to assume offensive and strengthen the administrative and political bases of government.
3. Do not propose to introduce into GVN the US combat troops now, but propose a phase of intense public and diplomatic activity to focus on infiltration from North. Shall decide later on course of action should infiltration not be radically reduced.
4. On flood, decide best course to treat as primarily civil problem, and occasion should be used to draw in as many nationals of other countries as can be used in GVN flood plan. Have been encouraged this course on advise of Desai of Indian Foreign Office who observed a good thing if some Indians and Burmese involved constructively in SVN and subject to VC attack. We prepared to put maximum pressure on FAO. Do not exclude ad hoc US military aid in flood area.

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5. Diplomatically position that the violations to be documented in Jordan report and strong references to DRV attack against SVN in DM's letter to Kennedy, need not confirm to the world and Communists that Geneva accords are being disregarded by our increased aid. Need not accuse ourselves publicly, make Communist job easier. GVN should be advised to counter charges by leveling charges against DRV and insisting that if ICC investigates in SVN must equally investigate in NVN. Appreciate approach will make ICC task difficult but will explain position to Canadians and Indians to get their support.

6. A crucial element in USG willingness to move forward is concrete demonstration by Diem that he is now prepared to work in an orderly way on his subordinates and broaden the political base of his regime.

7. Package should be presented as first steps in a partnership in which US is prepared to do more as joint study of facts and GVN performance makes increased US aid possible and productive.

8. Still possible Laotian settlement can be reached pertaining our minimum objective of independent Laos on the basis of a neutral coalition, (although weak and unsatisfactory), headed by Soubanna. Would include provision Laos not be used as transit area or base for interference in SVN. Therefore must keep in mind impact of action in SVN or prospects for acceptable Laos settlement.

9. Introduction of US or Sento forces into SVN before Laotian settlement might wreck changes for agreement, lead to break up of Geneva conference, break Laos cease fire by communists with resumption of hostilities.

10. Decision to introduce US combat forces in GVN would have to be taken in light of GVN effort, including support from people, Laotian situation, Berlin crisis, readiness of allies or sharply increased tension with Bloc, and enormous responsibilities which would have to be borne by US in event of escalation SEA or other areas.

11. Hope measures outlined in instructions will galvanize and supplement GVN effort, making decision on use of US combat forces unnecessary and no need for decision in effect to shift primary responsibility for defense of SVN to USG.

12. We are fully cognizant of extent to which decisions if implemented through Diem's acceptance will sharply increase the commitment of our prestige struggle to save SVN.

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13. Very strictly for your own information, DOD has been instructed to prepare plans for the use of US combat forces in SVN under various contingencies, including stepped up infiltration as well as organized inventory (sic) [military] intervention. However objective of our policy is to do all possible to accomplish purpose without use of US combat forces. 20/

An accompanying cable also provided this additional comment on troops question:

...4. It is anticipated that one of the first questions President Diem will raise with you after your presentation of the above joint proposals will be that of introducing U.S. combat troops. You are authorized to remind him that the actions we already have in mind involve a substantial number of U.S. military personnel for operational duties in Viet-Nam and that we believe that these forces performing crucial missions can greatly increase the capacity of GVN forces to win their war against the Viet Cong. You can also tell him that we believe that the missions being undertaken by our forces, under present circumstances, are more suitable for white foreign troops than garrison duty or missions involving the seeking out of Viet Cong personnel submerged in the Viet-Nam population. You can assure him that the USG at highest levels will be in daily contact with the situation in Viet-Nam and will be in constant touch with him about requirements of the situation.... 20a/

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III. AFTERMATH

The President's decisions were apparently sent to Nolting on the 14th, in a cable that is taken essentially verbatim from the description of the Rusk/McNamara memorandum (paragraphs 3 and 4) of the program the U.S. was offering and the response expected from Diem. But the cable added some new language, putting still more emphasis on pressuring Diem:

...It is most important that Diem come forth with changes which will be recognized as having real substance and meaning. Rightly or wrongly, his regime is widely criticized abroad and in the U.S., and if we are to give our substantial support we must be able to point to real administrative political and social reforms and a real effort to widen its base that will give maximum confidence to the American people, as well as to world opinion that our efforts are not directed towards the support of an unpopular or ineffective regime, but rather towards supporting the combined efforts of all the non-Communist people of the GVN against a Communist take-over. You should make this quite clear, and indicate that the U.S. contribution to the proposed joint effort depends heavily upon his response to this point.

You should inform Diem that, in our minds, the concept of the joint undertaking envisages a much closer relationship than the present one of acting in an advisory capacity only. We would expect to share in the decision-making process in the political, economic and military fields as they affect the security situation. 21/

Overall, then, what Kennedy ended up doing was to offer Diem a good deal less than he was expecting, and nevertheless to couple this offer with demands on Diem for which, on the basis of the available record, we can only assume he was totally unprepared. Nolting's first cable, though, reported Diem listened quietly and "took our proposals rather better than I expected."

Here are some extracts:

...As anticipated [by Washington], his first question was re introduction US combat troops. I replied along line para 4 reftel....

Diem said that he presumed I realized that our proposals involved the question of the responsibility of the Government of Viet Nam. Viet Nam, he said, did not want to be a protectorate.

I said that this was well understood; we for our part did not wish to make it one. Diem also pointed out that GVN was constantly in process of making reforms but major action could not be taken without thorough consideration and without having always in mind

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that there was a war to be won. Object was to restore order, not to create disorder. I said I recognized that this was a delicate judgment, in my opinion, as a friend of his country and of him, his greater risk was to stand pat, or act too cautiously...

On the whole, I am not discouraged at Diem's reaction. In fact, he took our proposals rather better than I had expected. He has promised to call me as soon as he has been able to reflect upon our proposals and, until we have heard his considered reaction, I think it would be idle to speculate on outcome... 22/

On the 20th, Nolting met with Thuan, who among other things said the U.S. offer had set Diem to wondering "whether U.S. getting ready to back out on Vietnam...as we had done in Laos." Nolting hoped Thuan's bleak report was only a bargaining tactic.

Thuan said that Diem had not yet discussed fully with him US proposals presented last Friday; but had given him impression of being 'very sad and very disappointed.' Thuan said Diem had said he now hesitates to put proposals before even his cabinet ministers, fearing that they would be disappointed and lose heart. He had intended to discuss US proposals with both cabinet and selected members of assembly who had been consulted re advisability of US forces at time of Taylor Mission, but now thought contrast between his earlier question and our proposals too striking. Thuan conveyed impression that Diem is brooding over US proposals and has made no move yet to develop specific ideas on actions GVN expected to take. Thuan said President's attitude seemed to be that US asking great concessions of GVN in realm its sovereignty, in exchange for little additional help; that this is great disappointment after discussions with General Taylor involving, in particular, concept of Delta Task Force; that Diem seemed to wonder whether US was getting ready to back out on Viet Nam, as he suggested, we had done in Laos. 23/

There followed a long discussion in which Thuan described all the difficulties that would be involved in doing what the U.S. was asking, including the risk of looking like a U.S. puppet.

There is nothing in our record to indicate any U.S. reconsideration of the decision against sending the military task force. Thus, if Diem and Thuan's response was a bargaining tactic to get the task force, it failed. On the other hand, if Diem was using disappointment over the failure to send the task force as a bargaining counter to get the U.S. to relent on its demands for reforms, then he got just what he wanted. But what amounted to a complete U.S. reversal on these demands also may have been influenced by the advice Kennedy received from John Kenneth Galbraith at this time. Kennedy had asked Galbraith to stop by Saigon on his return to

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India. Galbraith did so, and after three days cabled back, among other things, the advice that it was a waste of effort to bargain with Diem.

On the 20th, the day of Thuan's meeting with Nolting, Galbraith cabled the President:

There is scarcely the slightest practical chance that the administrative and political reforms now being pressed upon Diem will result in real change....there is no solution that does not involve a change in government.

On the insurgency, though, Galbraith was optimistic, provided Diem was replaced:

While situation is indubitably bad military aspects seem to me out of perspective. A comparatively well-equipped army with paramilitary formations number a quarter million men is facing a maximum of 15-18,000 lightly armed men. If this were equality, the United States would hardly be safe against the Sioux. I know the theories about this kind of warfare....Given even a moderately effective government and putting the relative military power into perspective, I can't help thinking the insurgency might very soon be settled. 24/

The following day, Galbraith, now in New Delhi, sent a more detailed appraisal, covering essentially the same ground. Here are some extracts.

... THE VIET CONG INSURRECTION IS STILL GROWING IN EFFECT. THE OUTBREAK ON THE NORTHERN HIGHLANDS IS MATCHED BY A POTENTIALLY EVEN MORE DAMAGING IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY AND ESPECIALLY ON THE MOVEMENT OF RICE TO SAIGON.

IN THE ABSENCE OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE ADMIXTURE OF TERROR AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EVANGELISM WE HAD BEST ASSUME THAT IT IS EMPLOYING BOTH. WE MUST NOT FOREVER BE GUIDED BY THOSE WHO MISUNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF REVOLUTION AND IMAGINE THAT BECAUSE THE COMMUNISTS DO NOT APPEAL TO US THEY ARE ABHORRENT TO EVERYONE.

IN OUR ENTHUSIASM TO PROVE OUTSIDE INTERVENTION BEFORE WORLD OPINION WE HAVE UNQUESTIONABLY EXAGGERATED THE ROLE OF MATERIAL ASSISTANCE ESPECIALLY

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IN THE MAIN AREA OF INSURRECTION IN THE FAR SOUTH. THAT LEADERS AND RADIO GUIDANCE COME IN WE KNOW. BUT THE AMOUNT OF AMMUNITION AND WEAPONRY THAT A MAN CAN CARRY ON HIS BACK FOR SEVERAL HUNDRED KILOMETERS OVER JUNGLE TRAILS WAS NOT INCREASED APPRECIABLY BY MARX. NO MAJOR CONFLICT CAN DEPEND ON SUCH LOGISTIC SUPPORT.

A MAXIMUM OF 18,000 LIGHTLY ARMED MEN ARE INVOLVED IN THE INSURRECTION. THESE ARE GVN ESTIMATES AND THE FACTOR OF EXAGGERATION IS UNQUESTIONABLY CONSIDERABLE. TEN THOUSAND IS MORE PROBABLE. WHAT WE HAVE IN OPPOSITION INVOLVES A HEAVY THEOLOGICAL DISPUTE. DIEM IT IS SAID IS A GREAT BUT DEFAMED LEADER. IT IS ALSO SAID HE HAS LOST TOUCH WITH THE MASSES, IS IN POLITICAL DISREPUTE AND OTHERWISE NO GOOD. THIS DEBATE CAN BE BYPASSED BY AGREED POINTS. IT IS AGREED THAT ADMINISTRATIVELY DIEM IS EXCEEDINGLY BAD. HE HOLDS FAR TOO MUCH POWER IN HIS OWN HANDS, EMPLOYS HIS ARMY BADLY, HAS NO INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION WORTHY OF THE NAME, HAS ARBITRARY OR INCOMPETENT SUBORDINATES IN THE PROVINCES AND SOME ACHIEVEMENTS NOTWITHSTANDING, HAS A POOR ECONOMIC POLICY. HE HAS ALSO EFFECTIVELY RESISTED IMPROVEMENT FOR A LONG WHILE IN FACE OF HEAVY DETERIORATION. THIS IS ENOUGH. WHETHER HIS POLITICAL POSTURE IS NEPOTIC, DESPOTIC OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE VILLAGERS AND HENCE DAMAGING OR WHETHER THIS DAMAGE IS THE FIGMENT OF SAIGON INTELLECTUALS DOES NOT BEAR ON OUR IMMEDIATE POLICY AND MAY BE BY-PASSED AT LEAST IN PART.

THE SVN ARMY NUMBERS 170,000 AND WITH PARAMILITARY UNITS OF THE CIVIL GUARD AND HOME DEFENSE FORCES A QUARTER OF A MILLION. WERE THIS WELL DEPLOYED

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ON BEHALF OF AN EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS THAT THE VIET CONG WOULD HAVE NO CHANCE OF SUCCESS OR TAKEOVER. WASHINGTON IS CURRENTLY HAVING AN INTELLECTUAL ORGASM ON THE UNBEATABILITY OF GUERRILLA WAR. WERE GUERRILLAS EFFECTIVE IN A RATIO OF ONE TO FIFTEEN OR TWENTY-FIVE IT IS OBVIOUS THAT NO GOVERNMENT WOULD BE SAFE. THE VIET CONG, IT SHOULD BE NOTED, IS STRONGEST IN THE SOUTHERN DELTA WHICH IS NOT JUNGLE BUT OPEN RICE PADDY.

THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFICULTIES IN COUNTERING THE INSURGENCY, APART FROM ABSENCE OF INTELLIGENCE, ARE TWO-FOLD. FIRST IS THE POOR COMMAND, DEPLOYMENT, TRAINING, MORALE AND OTHER WEAKNESSES OF THE ARMY AND PARAMILITARY FORCES. AND SECOND WHILE THEY CAN OPERATE -- SWEEP -- THROUGH ANY PART OF THE COUNTRY AND CLEAR OUT ANY VISIBLE INSURGENTS, THEY CANNOT GUARANTEE SECURITY AFTERWARDS. THE VIET CONG COMES BACK AND PUTS THE ARM ON ALL WHO HAVE COLLABORATED. THIS FACT IS VERY IMPORTANT IN RELATION TO REQUESTS FROM AMERICAN MANPOWER. OUR FORCES WOULD CONDUCT THE ROUND-UP OPERATIONS WHICH THE RVN ARMY CAN ALREADY DO. WE COULDN'T CONCEIVABLY SEND ENOUGH MEN TO PROVIDE SAFETY FOR THE VILLAGES AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR AN EFFECTIVELY TRAINED CIVIL GUARD AND HOME DEFENSE FORCE AND, PERHAPS, A POLITICALLY COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY.

THE KEY AND INESCAPABLE POINT, THEN, IS THE INEFFECTUALITY (ABETTED DEBATABLELY BY THE UNPOPULARITY) OF THE DIEM GOVERNMENT. THIS IS THE STRATEGIC FACTOR. NOR CAN ANYONE ACCEPT THE STATEMENT OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN EITHER TOO LONG OR TOO LITTLE IN ASIA THAT HIS IS THE INEVITABLE POSTURE OF THE

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ASIAN MANDARIN. FOR ONE THING IT ISN'T TRUE, BUT WERE IT SO THE ONLY POSSIBLE CONCLUSION WOULD BE THAT THERE IS NO FUTURE FOR MANDARINS. THE COMMUNISTS DON'T FAVOR THEM.

I COME NOW TO A LESSER MISCALCULATION, THE ALLEGED WEAKENING EMPHASIS OF THE MEKONG FLOOD. FLOODS IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD ARE AN OLD TRAP FOR WESTERN NON-AGRICULTURISTS. THEY ARE JUDGED BY WHAT THE OHIO DOES TO ITS TOWNS. NOW AS THE FLOOD WATERS RECEDE IT IS ALREADY EVIDENT THAT THIS FLOOD CONFORMS TO THE ASIAN PATTERN, ONE REPEATED EVERY YEAR IN INDIA. THE MUD VILLAGES WILL SOON GROW AGAIN. SOME UPLAND RICE WAS DROWNED BECAUSE THE WATER ROSE TOO RAPIDLY. NEARER THE COAST THE PRESSURE ON THE BRACKISH WATER WILL PROBABLY BRING AN OFFSETTING IMPROVEMENT. NEXT YEAR'S CROP WILL BE MUCH BETTER FOR THE SILT.

I COME NOW TO POLICY, FIRST THE BOX WE ARE IN PARTLY AS THE RESULT OF RECENT MOVES AND SECOND HOW WE GET OUT WITHOUT A TAKEOVER. WE HAVE JUST PROPOSED TO HELP DIEM IN VARIOUS WAYS IN RETURN FOR A PROMISE OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLITICAL REFORMS. SINCE THE ADMINISTRATIVE (AND POSSIBLY POLITICAL) INEFFECTUALITY ARE THE STRATEGIC FACTORS FOR SUCCESS THE ABILITY TO GET REFORMS IS DECISIVE. WITH THEM THE NEW AID AND GADGETRY WILL BE USEFUL. WITHOUT THEM THE HELICOPTERS, PLANES AND ADVISER'S WON'T MAKE APPRECIABLE DIFFERENCE.

IN MY COMPLETELY CONSIDERED VIEW, AS STATED YESTERDAY, DIEM WILL NOT REFORM EITHER ADMINISTRATIVELY OR POLITICALLY IN ANY EFFECTIVE

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WAY. THAT IS BECAUSE HE CANNOT. IT IS POLITICALLY NAIVE TO EXPECT IT. HE SENSES THAT HE CANNOT LET POWER GO BECAUSE HE WOULD BE THROWN OUT. HE MAY DISGUISE THIS EVEN FROM HIMSELF WITH THE STATEMENT THAT HE LACKS EFFECTIVE SUBORDINATES BUT THE CIRCUMSTANCE REMAINS UNCHANGED. HE PROBABLY SENSES THAT HIS GREATEST DANGER IS FROM THE ARMY. HENCE THE REFORM THAT WILL BRING EFFECTIVE USE OF HIS MANPOWER, THOUGH THE MOST URGENT MAY BE THE MOST IMPROBABLE.

THE POLITICAL REFORMS ARE EVEN MORE UNLIKELY BUT THE ISSUE IS ACADEMIC. ONCE THE IMAGE OF A POLITICIAN IS FIXED, WHETHER AMONG OPPOSITION INTELLECTUALS OR PEASANTS, IT IS NOT CHANGED. NOR DO POLITICIANS CHANGE THEMSELVES. DIEM'S IMAGE WOULD NOT BE CHANGED BY HIS TAKING IN OTHER NON-COMMUNISTS, INITIATING SOME SOCIAL REFORMS OR OTHERWISE MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF OUR DEMARCHE.

HOWEVER HAVING STARTED ON THIS HOPELESS GAME WE HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE, BUT TO PLAY IT OUT FOR A MINIMUM TIME. THOSE WHO THINK THERE IS HOPE OF REFORM WILL HAVE TO BE PERSUADED.

* * * * *

It is a cliché that there is no alternative to Diem's regime. This is politically naive. Where one man has dominated the scene for good or ill there never seems to be. No one considered Truman an alternative to Roosevelt. There is none for Nehru. There was none I imagine for Rhee. This is an optical illusion arising from the fact that the eye is fixed on the visible figures. It is a better rule that nothing succeeds like successors.

We should not be alarmed by the Army as an alternative. It would buy time and get a fresh dynamic. It is not ideal; civilian rule is ordinarily more durable and more saleable to the world.

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But a change and a new start is of the essence and in considering opinion we may note that Diem's flavor is not markedly good in Asia.

A time of crisis in our policy on South Vietnam will come when it becomes evident that the reforms we have asked have not come off and that our presently proffered aid is not accomplishing anything. Troops will be urged to back up Diem. It will be sufficiently clear that I think this must be resisted. Our soldiers would not deal with the vital weakness. They could perpetuate it. They would enable Diem to continue to concentrate on protecting his own position at the expense of countering the insurgency. Last spring, following the Vice President's promise of more aid, proposals for increased and reform taxes which were well advanced were promptly dropped. The parallel on administrative and political reform could be close.

It will be said that we need troops for a show of strength and determination in the area. Since the troops will not deal with fundamental faults -- since there can't be enough of them to give security to the countryside -- their failure to provide security could create a worse crisis of confidence. You will be aware of my general reluctance to move in troops. On the other hand I would note that it is those of us who have worked in the political vineyard and who have committed our hearts most strongly to the political fortunes of the New Frontier who worry most about its bright promise being sunk under the rice fields. Dulles in 1954 saw the dangers in this area. Dean Acheson knew he could not invest men in Chiang.

* * * *

My overall feeling is that despite the error implicit in this last move and the supposition that Diem can be reformed, the situation is not hopeless. It is only hopeless if we marry our course to that of a man who must spend more time protecting his own position and excluding those who threaten it than in fighting the insurgency. Diem's calculation instinctive or deliberate is evident. He has already been deposed once and not by the Communists. He can see his clear and present danger as well as anyone. 25/

Two things are particularly worth noting about Galbraith's advice: the first, to the extent it had an influence on Kennedy, it counselled him to avoid sending troops, but also not to take seriously the quid pro quo with Diem because Diem was not going to do anything anyway. Consequently, Galbraith, with a limitlessly bleak view of the prospects for success under Diem, really had no quarrel with those who argued against putting pressure on Diem and for trying to win his confidence. He had no argument, because he thought both approaches (pressure and no pressure) were equally hopeless. And indeed, both had been tried during the year --

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the pressure approach in the CIP negotiations; the "get on his wave length" approach following the Task Force review -- and both produced an identical lack of results.

Second, Galbraith's analysis of the situation really has a good deal in common with that of the Taylor Mission. Obviously, he thought we must be rid of Diem, and he apparently thought it was a mistake to put this move off by making new aid offers to Diem rather than letting word get around that we would be prepared to offer more support to Vietnam if Diem should be removed. But at this time, even people like Galbraith (and Schelsinger, as is clear from his memoir) saw no alternative to continuing to support Vietnam, although not to continuing to support Diem personally. Galbraith was, if anything, more optimistic about the chances of putting down the insurgency (given a change in Saigon) than was the Taylor Report. For his optimism was not at all contingent on any hopes of the efficacy of bombing threats against the north. For all we know, he may have been right in supposing any "moderately effective" Saigon government could do all right against the insurgents; but we now know all too well how over-optimistic was his fairly confident expectation that a military replacement of the Diem regime would be at least moderately effective.

To return to the negotiations in Saigon, in late November, we now had the following situation:

1. It was clear that Diem was, to say the least, disappointed with the bargain Kennedy had proposed.

2. Kennedy was obviously aware that he had offered Diem less than Diem expected, and demanded much more in return.

3. Both supporters of Diem, like Lansdale and Kenneth Young, and his severest critics, like Galbraith, were agreed that it was futile to try to force Diem to reform. Kennedy had already had his own experiences with such efforts earlier in the year.

4. Presumably, although we have nothing to show it in the available record, there was some unrest within the Administration about the limited offer that was being made, the demands being pressed, and the delay it was all causing. To put off an agreement too long raised the dual threat of an awkward public squabble and renewed pressure on the President to send the task force after all.

It is hard to think of any realistic counter-arguments to the case for settling the dispute and get on with either trying to do better in the war, or get rid of Diem.

The next phase was a brief flurry of anti-American stories in the government-controlled Saigon press. The U.S. was accused, among other

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things, of trying to use Vietnam as a "pawn of capitalist imperialism." 26/ Nolting went to Diem to complain about the damage that such stories would do to U.S.-Vietnamese relations. But Diem disclaimed responsibility, and suggested they were an understandable reaction of the South Vietnamese to what they had learned about the U.S. proposals from U.S. press reports. Nolting's final comment in his report on this meeting was a suggestion that the U.S. concentrate on "efficiency in GVN rather than on more nebulous and particularly offensive to Diem concept of political reform." 27/ The impression given by the cable is that Nolting felt on the defensive, which was probably the case since the package Washington had proposed must have been disappointing to him as well as to Diem.

It did not take long for Washington to back away from any hard demands on Diem. A sentence from the original guidance telegram stated "we would expect to share in the decision-making process in the political, economic and military fields as they affected the security situation"...as opposed to the previous arrangement of "acting in an advisory capacity only." 28/ Alexis Johnson and Rostow drafted a cable on December 7 that "clarified" this and a number of other points to which Diem had strongly objected, in this case to explain that,

...what we have in mind is that, in operations directly related to the security situation, partnership will be so close that one party will not take decisions or actions affecting the other without full and frank prior consultations... 29/

This was quite a comedown from the idea that American involvement in the Vietnamese government should be so intimate that the government could be reformed "from the bottom up" despite Diem. Once the U.S. backed away from any tough interpretation of its proposals, agreement was fairly easily reached with Diem, and one of the usual fine sounding statements of agreed principles and measures was drawn up.

On one seemingly modest request from Diem, Washington was curiously firm. Diem repeatedly, both while the Taylor Mission was in Saigon, and after its return, asked for Lansdale to be sent. (Our record shows four such requests, one directly by Diem to Taylor; a second from Thuan; and in a memorandum to McNamara William Bundy referred to two further requests relayed through McGarr.) Cottrell, the senior State representative on the Taylor Mission, strongly endorsed sending Lansdale, and the main paper of the Taylor Report seemed to endorse the idea. William Bundy was in favor of sending Lansdale, and Lansdale wanted to go. But nothing happened. Lansdale never got to Vietnam until Cabot Lodge brought him out late in 1965.

The first contingents of helicopters arrived in Saigon December 11 (having been put to sea several weeks earlier). On the following day a New York Times dispatch from Saigon began:

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Two United States Army helicopter companies arrived here today. The helicopters, to be flown and serviced by United States troops, are the first direct military support by the United States for South Vietnam's war against Communist guerrilla forces.

The craft will be assigned to the South Vietnamese Army in the field, but they will remain under United States Army control and operation.

At least 33 H-21C twin-rotor helicopters, their pilots and ground crews, an estimated total of 400 men, arrived aboard the Military Sea Transportation Service aircraft ferry Core. 30/

The Times story ended by describing the force as "the first fruits" of the Taylor Mission, with more to come. The Times did not find the story important enough to put it on the front page.

A day later, the Times published a story about the ICC reaction to the arrival of the helicopters. It began:

The International Control Commission for Vietnam was reported today to be considering whether to continue functioning here in the face of an increase in United States assistance to South Vietnam's struggle against Communist guerrillas.

The Commission, made up of representatives of India, Canada, and Poland, has been holding emergency sessions since the arrival here yesterday of a United States vessel loaded with at least 33 helicopters and operating and maintenance crews. 31/

A few paragraphs later, the dispatch noted that:

With the arrival yesterday of the Core, a former escort carrier, bearing the helicopters, four single-engine training planes and about 400 men, the United States military personnel here now are believed to total about 1,500. Many more are expected. 32/

Again, the Times ran the story on an inside page.

Finally, on the 15th, a formal exchange of letters between Presidents Diem and Kennedy was published, announcing in general terms a stepped-up U.S. aid program for Vietnam.

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THE KENNEDY PROGRAM AND COMMITMENTS: 1961

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER I

1. NIE 63-59, 26 May 1959, "Prospects for North and South Vietnam"
2. Durbrow (Saigon) message to State (61)
3. NIE 63.1-60, 23 August 1960, "Short Term Trends in South Vietnam"
4. Brig. Gen Lansdale Report to Secretary of Defense, 17 January 1961
5. CINCPAC Command History, 1960, p. 142
6. NIE 63.1-60, 23 August 1960
7. Young Memorandum to Diem (copy attached to Young Letter to Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric, 24 April)
8. Saigon message to State 1656, 4 December 1960
9. CAS message (Lodge) to White House (65)
10. Coolidge Commission Report, January 1960 (Item 1, Recommendations)

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FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER II

1. DEPTTEL 1054 to Saigon, 3 February 1961
2. Saigon message 276, 4 January 1961
3. Charles von Luttichau of Office, Chief of Army History, "U.S. Army Role in the Conflict in Vietnam," 1964, Chapter 5 (TS). For detail on the chain of command problem, see page 7ff; for the dispute on an operations plan, see page 15ff.
4. Saigon message 276, 4 January 1961.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Memorandum, Lansdale to Secretary of Defense, 17 January 1961. Tab 1, R. L. Gilpatric Task Force File.
9. Hilsman, Roger, To Move a Nation (Doubleday), p. 419
10. State message 1054, op. cit.
11. Ibid.
12. Saigon message 1444, 8 March 1961
13. Saigon message 1466, 16 March 1961
14. DEPTTEL 1218 to Saigon, 23 March 1961
15. Saigon message 1650, 3 May 1961

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FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER III

1. Secretary of Defense Memorandum to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, 20 April 1961, confirmed by Secretary of Defense Memorandum for the President, 20 April 1961
2. NIE 50-61, "Outlook in Mainland Southeast Asia" 28 March 1961; Lansdale Memorandum to Secretary of Defense, 17 January 1961; Saigon message to State 1656, 3 May 1961; Draft Report of Task Force on Vietnam, 26 April 1961
3. NIE 50-61
4. Gilpatric Task Force File, handwritten note among drafts on impact on Vietnam of Laos, at Tab 20.
5. Public Papers of the President: John F. Kennedy, 1961, p. 261
6. Ibid., p. 306
7. W. W. Rostow Memorandum to the President in Secretary of Defense files (File Copy). Lansdale's Memorandum describing it is found at Tab 2, Gilpatric Task Force file. Copy of 26 April Draft of Task Force Report in Gilpatric Task Force file.
8. The "implementing agent" language is from an SNIE dated 5 October on Bloc support for the Viet Cong. But similar formulations are commonplace throughout the record. See, for example, the opening section of the Taylor Mission Report, or the opening section of the Rusk/McNamara Memorandum for the President dated 11 November 1961.
9. Lansdale Memorandum to Richard Bissell (CIA), Gilpatric Task Force, Tab 19
10. NSAM 52, 11 May 1961
11. Gilpatric Task Force file, Tab 13
12. Ibid., Tab 20
- 12.a. Schlesinger, Arthur, A Thousand Days (Houghton Mifflin), p. 337
13. Public Papers of the President: John F. Kennedy, 1961, p. 340
14. Gilpatric Task Force file, Tab 23
15. Ibid., Tab 26

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16. Ibid., Tab 29
17. Ibid., Tab 28
18. Ibid., Tab 29 (Line-in/Line-out draft from State which shows both the Defense draft and the State-proposed revisions). The changes cited are from the section headed "Political and Economic Objectives."
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., Tab 31. (Copies of the summary section only were distributed as attachments to NSAM 52.)
21. Gilpatric Task Force, op. cit.
22. Political Annex to May 6 (Final) Draft
23. Papers of the Presidents, op. cit., p. 356
24. President Kennedy's Letter to Ngo Dinh Diem, 8 May 1961
25. Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum to Chairman, JCS, 8 May 1961, Subject: "Vietnam."
26. Gilpatric Task Force Draft, May 6, Military Recommendations
27. JCSM 320-61, 10 May 1961
28. NSAM 52, 11 May 1961
29. Ibid.
30. Gilpatric Task Force Drafts, Political and Economic Section
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. OSD Task Force (Vietnam) files - Dr. D. Ellsberg Paper
34. Ibid.
35. Deputy Secretary of Defense files. Among other things, states that Vice President Johnson will find Diem "as interested in cattle as any Texan, and as interested in freedom as Sam Houston." Concludes "Here is our toughest ally in Asia...a 60-year old bachelor who gave up romance with his sweetheart to devote his life to his country."

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FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER IV

1. Saigon message 421, 1 October 1961
2. Saigon message 1743, 15 May 1961
3. Vice President Johnson Memorandum for the President, 23 May 1961
4. Lansdale Memorandum for Gilpatric, 18 May 1961, Subject: "Vietnam."
5. President Diem Letter to President Kennedy, 9 June 1961
6. Joint Action Program Proposed by the Vietnam-United States Special Financial Groups, undated, but submitted to President Kennedy approximately July 25.
7. NSAM 65, 11 August 1961
8. Lansdale Memorandum for Gilpatric, 18 May 1961, Subject: "Vietnam."
9. According to notes in the Task Force files. We do not have citations for the JCS Memorandum or McGarr's messages. Lansdale's Memorandum to Gilpatric also alludes to such proposals.
10. Saigon message 1803, 27 May 1961
11. Diem Letter to Kennedy, 9 June 1961
12. Sorenson, Kennedy (Harper & Rowe), p. 736
13. Note found in Secretary of Defense files.
14. NIE 14.3/53-61, 15 August 1961, "Prospects for North and South Vietnam."
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. State Department, "First 12-Month Report," 1 September 1961
18. Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 544
19. Saigon message, 29 September 1961
20. Quoted from an untitled, mimeographed paper in Secretary of Defense's files. The only marking on the paper is the usual note "Secretary of Defense has seen." Probably it was a product of a Laos, or South-east Asia working group.
21. Ibid.

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22. NIE 14.3/53-61
23. New York Times, 23 September 1961
24. New York Times, 27 September 1961, Editorial Page, Reston Column

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FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER V

1. JCSM 717-61
2. Ibid.
3. "Concept of Intervention in South Vietnam," considered at an NSC Meeting, 11 October.
4. SNIE 53-2-61, "Bloc Support of the Communist Effort Against the Government of SVN," 5 October 1961
5. Washington Post, 10 April 1968
6. SNIE 10-3-61, "Probable Communist Response to Certain SEATO Undertakings in SEA."
7. Supplemental Note 2, 11 October 1961, to "Concept of Intervention in Vietnam," 10 October 1961.
8. William Bundy Memorandum for Secretary McNamara, 10 October 1961.
9. Gilpatric Memorandum for the Record, 11 October 1961.
10. New York Times, 12 October 1961, p. 1. Transcript of Press Conference at p. 20.
11. New York Times, 13 October 1961, p. 16
12. New York Times, 14 October 1961, p. 14
13. Saigon message 488, 13 October 1961
14. New York Times, 15 October 1961, p. 1
15. CINCPAC message to JCS, 20 October 1961, Subject: "Pros and Cons of Introducing U.S. Combat Forces Into South Vietnam."
16. Saigon message 516, 20 October 1961
- 16a. ChMAAG Saigon message to JCS, 23 October 1961
17. Saigon message 536, 25 October 1961
18. Saigon message 537, 25 October 1961
19. BAGUIO message 0005, 1 November 1961
20. BAGUIO message 0006, EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT, 1 November 1961

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21. Summary Section, Taylor Mission Report, p. 8
22. Ibid., p. 24
23. Ibid., pp 8, 9
24. Ibid., p. 11
25. Ibid., p. 14
26. Appendix C, Taylor Report, pp 2, 3
27. Summary, Taylor Report, p. 8
28. Appendix A, Section III, Taylor Report
29. Summary, Taylor Report, p. 7
30. Appendix B, Taylor Report, p. 1
31. Ibid., p. 2
32. Ibid., p. 1
33. Ibid., p. 1
34. Summary, Taylor Report, p. 5
35. Ibid., p. 19
36. Ibid., p. 25
37. General Maxwell Taylor's Letter to the President, transmittal of Taylor Mission Report
38. Summary, Taylor Report, p. 5
39. Ibid., p. 6
40. Ibid., p. 11
41. Saigon message 545, 25 October 1961
42. ChMAAG Saigon message to JCS, 24 October 1961
43. Saigon message 541, 25 October 1961
44. ChMAAG Saigon Letter to Secretary of Defense, 11 November 1961

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- 45. Saigon message 541, 25 October 1961
- 46. Ibid.
- 47. Saigon message 536, 25 October 1961

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FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER VI

1. New York Times, 4 November 1961, p. 1
2. New York Times, 29 October 1961, p. 28
3. New York Times, 21 October 1961, p. 1
4. New York Times, 5 November 1961, p. 1
5. Ibid.
6. DEPTTEL 545 to Saigon, 4 November 1961. The language cited in the footnote is the only completely unambiguous indication of how far the U.S. hoped to go in putting Americans into a direct position of influence in the Vietnamese government and army. But there is plenty of language in the Taylor Mission Report that suggests as much and there is a rather blunt statement, quoted at the end of Section II of this chapter, which Nolting was told to pass on to Diem in explaining the U.S. offer.
7. Sorenson, op. cit., p. 737, says senior advisors "on Vietnam," which presumably did not include someone like George Ball, then Under-secretary of State, who has been widely reported to have opposed any combat troop commitments.

As we will see, Galbraith is also on record against troops. Rusk is on record as deferring combat troops in a joint McNamara/Rusk memorandum which appears to have been drafted after the President had made his decision (it contradicts a memorandum McNamara signed only three days earlier). We do not know whether Rusk, like McNamara was reversing his position.
8. Saigon message 437, 25 October 1961
9. BAGUIO message 0006, 1 November 1961, EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT
10. USDEL Hakone to State, Section 6, 1 November 1961
11. Saigon message 575, 31 October 1961
12. Staff memoranda, 2 and 6 November 1961, by Colonel Kent, OSD(ISA)
13. Summary, Taylor Report, p. 1
14. SNIE 10-4-61, 5 November 1961, "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain U.S. Actions in South Vietnam," 5 November 1961
15. Ibid.

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16. Memorandum for the President from McNamara, Gilpatric, JCS, 8 November 1961 (TS)
17. Rusk/McNamara Memorandum for the President, 11 November 1961 (TS)
18. NSAM 111, 22 November 1961
19. Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 547
20. DEPTTEL 618 to Saigon, 14 November 1961
- 20.a. DEPTTEL 619 to Saigon, 14 November 1961
21. Ibid.
22. Saigon message 678, 18 November 1961
23. Saigon message 687, 22 November 1961
24. Bangkok message, Galbraith to the President, 20 November 1961
25. New Delhi (Galbraith) message 9941 for the President, 21 November 1961
26. Reuters dispatch from Saigon in The Washington Post, 25 November 1961
27. Saigon message 708, 25 November 1961
28. DEPTTEL 619 to Saigon, 14 November 1961
29. DEPTTEL 693 to Saigon, 7 November 1961
30. New York Times, 12 December 1961
31. New York Times, 13 December 1961
32. Ibid.