

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

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

2. Military Pressures Against NVN (3 Vols.)
  - a. February - June 1964

**TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE**



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



**VIETNAM TASK FORCE**

**OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

**TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE**

*SET #13*

0295

IV. C. 2. (a)

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM

ACTION AND DEBATE

FEB - JUN 1964

SUMMARY

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

SUMMARY

The first half of 1964 saw the unfolding of an intensive debate and planning effort within the Johnson Administration concerning the desirability, limitations, and risks of mounting major military pressures against North Vietnam. Actual U.S. involvement in SEA increased only slightly during this period.

The single notable element of actual increased U.S. involvement during this period was a program of covert GVN operations, designed to impose "progressively escalating pressure" upon the North, and initiated on a small and essentially ineffective scale in February. The active U.S. role in the few covert operations that were carried out was limited essentially to planning, equipping, and training of the GVN forces involved, but U.S. responsibility for the launching and conduct of these activities was unequivocal and carried with it an implicit symbolic and psychological intensification of the U.S. commitment. A firebreak had been crossed, and the U.S. had embarked on a program that was recognized as holding little promise of achieving its stated objectives, at least in its early stages. Thus, a demand for more was stimulated and an expectation of more was aroused.

The demands came -- mostly from U.S. officials in Saigon and Washington and mostly because of the felt need to do something about a deteriorating situation in SVN -- to increase the intensity of the covert operations and to change from covert to overt action. The Khanh government, it should be noted, opposed these demands on the grounds that it would expose the vulnerable GVN to greater pressures from the enemy. With each successive "crisis" -- recognition of insufficient intelligence on the nature and scope of the infiltration (December through May), realization of dramatic communist gains in SVN (February), threats of major communist advances in Laos (late May) -- the demands were redoubled and intensified. The basic assumption underlying these demands was that the DRV, faced with the credible prospect of losing its industrial and economic base through direct attack, would halt its support of the insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam.

Beginning in early February, a series of valuable studies and planning exercises were undertaken, with participation of all national security agencies, to examine the whole panoply of problems -- objectives, options, effects, costs, and risks -- of mounting overt coercive pressures against the North. The planning effort served to develop consensus on some issues, including the recognition that punitive action in the North would be, at best, complementary to successful counterinsurgency in the South. It also surfaced significant differences among the participants in the planning effort and in the broader debate that ensued, in their respective approaches to "pressure planning" as well as in the substantive content of their recommendations. Thus, the JCS viewed the planning task as preparation of an action program for near-term implementation, and

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

their recommendations tended toward immediate and forceful military measures. The State-ISA planning group, on the other hand, viewed it as a contingency planning exercise and its scenarios and recommendations stressed a more deliberate, cautious approach, carefully tailoring proposed U.S. actions in SEA to the unique political context of each country. Ambassador Lodge, in turn, developed yet a third "carrot and stick" approach, stressing a diplomatic effort at persuasion, *i.e.*, combining a threat of punitive strikes with an offer of some economic assistance to the DRV. These divergences in approach and concept persisted, though varying in degree and emphasis, throughout the planning period.

By June, with increasing recognition that only relatively heavy levels of attack on the DRV would be likely to have any significant compelling effect, with a greater awareness of the many imponderables raised by the planning effort, and with the emergence of a somewhat more hopeful situation in SVN and Laos, most of the President's advisers favored holding off on any attempts to pressure North Vietnam through overt military operations. Only the JCS, Ambassador Lodge, and Walt Rostow continued to advocate increased military measures, and even Rostow qualified his recommendations with the claim that a firm public stance, and supporting actions giving the impression of increased military operations, would be the best assurance of avoiding having to employ them. Moreover, most of the advisers recognized the necessity of building firmer public and congressional support for greater U.S. involvement in SEA before any wider military actions should be undertaken.

Accordingly, with the political conventions just around the corner and the election issues regarding Vietnam clearly drawn, the President decided against actions that would deepen the U.S. involvement by broadening the conflict in Laos, Cambodia or North Vietnam. In his view, there were still a number of relatively mild military and intensified political actions in the South open to him that would serve the national interest better than escalation of the conflict.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM

ACTION AND DEBATE, FEB - JUN 1964

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND OUTLINE

	<u>Page</u>
<u>SUMMARY</u> .....	i
<u>CHRONOLOGY</u> .....	viii
I. <u>INITIATION OF COVERT OPERATIONS</u> .....	1
A. Covert Action Program: Scope and Character.....	1
B. Origins and Development: Presidential Support and Approval.....	2
C. Concept and Rationale: Convince DRV to Desist by Raising the Cost.....	2
D. Implications: Greater Pressure on Hanoi.....	4
II. <u>PLANNING FOR LARGER PRESSURES</u> .....	5
A. Conceptual Origins and Motivations.....	5
1. Limited potential of covert program	
2. Concern over deterioration in Laos and SVN	
3. Broader concern for disproving "wars of liberation" strategy	
B. Interagency Study, February-March 1964.....	6
1. Three alternative approaches to pressuring DRV	
2. JCS inputs	
3. Summary of study provided McNamara on March trip to SVN	
C. Study Group Analysis of Proposed Actions.....	7
1. Concept: To exploit DRV concern over loss of industry	
2. Multiple objectives with coercion primary	
3. Necessary public emphasis on DRV violations of SVN	



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Page

4.	Air strikes (in contrast with other actions) imply "commitment to go all the way"	
5.	Overt pressures: enhancing U.S. determination without influencing the DRV	
D.	McNamara Against Overt Pressures.....	9
1.	Against immediate overt actions	
2.	Hot pursuit and border control operations into Laos (Recommendation #11)	
3.	"Preparations" for retaliatory actions and graduated overt military pressures on 30 day notice (Recommendation #12)	
III.	<u>DIFFERENT POLICY PERCEPTIONS IN PLANNING</u> .....	11
A.	Two Basic Approaches: JCS and State-ISA.....	11
1.	JCS approval of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64	
2.	State/ISA development of political scenarios to accommodate graduated military pressures only	
B.	Different Approaches: Perceptions of the Strategic Problem in Southeast Asia.....	11
1.	Laos recce controversy: JCS for low-level recce and ground probes from SVN -- State/ISA against	
2.	JCS: SVN as key to SEA security; sensitivity of Laos minimized	
3.	State-ISA: SEA problems dependent on long-term political solutions	
4.	Short-term/long-term policy dilemma	
5.	President Johnson: long-term approach with political concessions to Laos as groundwork for Lao-Viet agreement on cross-border operations	
C.	Planning Overt Actions on Contingency Basis (April-May).....	14
1.	ISA scenario: three sequential phases:	
a.	Current political-military actions	
b.	Overt GVN-USAF/FARNGATE operations plus political activities surfacing in Saigon	
c.	Overt joint GVN and U.S. actions	

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Page

2.	Evolution of scenario and JCS influence	
3.	Saigon and MACV discussion of scenario	
	a.	Lodge: intermediary to convey "carrot and stick" approach to pressure DRV
	b.	Agreement from Canada to act as intermediary, but no "carrot and stick"
D.	Conflict of Short and Long Term Views: Caution Prevails.....	18
	1.	Rostow and Lodge: prompt measures to exert pressures
	2.	JCS: inclusion of more-immediate border control and retaliatory operations in planning scenario
	3.	The deliberate, cautious approach
	a.	McNamara to Khanh: no drastic measures; improve counterinsurgency in SVN
IV.	<u>DEALING WITH THE LAOTIAN CRISIS</u> .....	20
A.	Laos in Danger: "Pressure Planning".....	20
	1.	JCS and prompt measures to prepare for recommended actions
	2.	Lodge: need action against NVN to achieve improved GVN effort
	3.	Scenario development resumed: overt opera- against NVN as principal focus
B.	A New Scenario: 30 Days of Sequential Politico- Military Action.....	22
	1.	Initial air strikes leading to U.S. partici- pation and parallel efforts to enter negotia- tions
	2.	Effects of scenario: communists to intensify insurgency
C.	Rejection of Scenario: "Use Force if Necessary".....	25
	1.	Intelligence assessments: limited GVN-USAF/ FARMGATE might induce insurgency temporarily but stronger actions might produce intensified insurgency
	a.	DRV <u>will</u> as crucial target
	b.	Intensified actions by U.S. seen as caus- ing Hanoi to doubt limited U.S. aims

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Page

2.	ExCom Recommendations: Presidential "decision to use force" if necessary and if recommended deployments and signals, plus operations underway fail to achieve objectives	
a.	Abandon time-phase scenario leading to overt military action as goal	
b.	Retain in scenario as future actions: Canadian mission, Honolulu conference, UN diplomacy, Congressional Resolution, force deployments, and initial strike coupled with diplomatic initiative	
3.	Approval of Honolulu Conference and Canadian Mission	
V.	<u>THE QUESTION OF PRESSURES AGAINST THE NORTH</u> .....	28
A.	The Honolulu Conference: Defining the U.S. Commitment.....	28
1.	Basic assumption: Security of SEA is vital to U.S.	
2.	Administration view: Situation in SVN must be stiffened	
B.	At Honolulu: Exerting Pressure on NVN.....	28
1.	JCS for actions to destroy DRV support of insurgency	
2.	Lodge and Khanh: attacks against NVN forces to improve situation in SVN	
3.	Serious discussions of contingency "pressures" to meet a worsening Laotian situation	
a.	Bilateral consultations with SEATO allies to start with Thailand	
b.	Congressional Resolution considered necessary	
c.	Harsh communist reactions expected from large "deterrent" deployments	
d.	Need to delay wider military actions: public opinion, military necessity, and GVN weakness	
C.	The Need to Refine Plans and Resolve Issues.....	34
1.	Military planning inadequate on:	

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

	<u>Page</u>
a. Forces for Laos contingency	
b. Trade-offs between force build-up and limited objectives; and	
c. Targeting objectives for NVN	
2. Greater effort required: public information and political intelligence	
D. The Aftermath of Honolulu.....	35
1. Augmentation of Army contingency stocks in Thailand	
2. Public affirmations of U.S. intention to defend SEA allies	
3. Public information program	
4. Congressional Resolution	
5. Assessment of different views on U.S. commitment	
a. Rostow's views	
b. CIA assessment of "domino theory"	
E. Sources of Moderate Advice.....	36
1. CIA: U.S. retains leverage in SEA even with loss of Laos and SVN to NVN	
2. SecDef and CJCS: limited objectives and more cautious pace than JCS	
F. The President Decides.....	38
1. Congressional resolution seen as incurring a greater commitment	
2. White House against further work on overt pressures	
3. White House: other actions with no increased commitment initially will serve U.S. interests	
VI. <u>FOOTNOTES</u> .....	41

CHRONOLOGY

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

CHRONOLOGY

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
11 May 63	NSAM 52	Authorized CIA-sponsored covert operations against NVN.
9 Sep 63	CINCPAC OPLAN 34-63	JCS approved this program for non-attributable "hit and run" GVN covert operations against NVN, supported by U.S. military advisory materiel and training assistance.
1 Nov 63	Diem overthrown	Military junta led by General Minh assumed control.
20 Nov 63	Vietnam Policy Conference, Honolulu	During high-level USG discussions of the probable consequences, political and military, of Diem's downfall, conferees agreed military operations against the Viet Cong had not been and would not be particularly upset by the changed political situation. Development of a combined MACV-CAS program for covert operations against NVN was directed.
23 Nov 63	President Kennedy Assassinated	
26 Nov 63	NSAM 273	Authorized planning for specific covert operations, graduated in intensity, against the DRV.
11 Dec 63	State Department Views on Operations in Laos	State (and ISA) opposed overt military operations in Laos. Extension of CIA-sponsored covert activity in Laos was okayed; this neither threatened Souvanna's sovereignty nor openly violated the Geneva Accords which State termed basic to eventual political stability in the region.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
19 Dec 63	OPLAN 34A Submitted by CINCPAC	The MACV-CAS plan providing a "spectrum of capabilities for the RVNAF to execute against North Vietnam" was forwarded to the JCS with CINCPAC's comment that only air attacks and a few other "punitive or attritional" operations were likely to achieve the stated objective of convincing Hanoi to cease supporting insurgents in SVN and Laos.
30 Dec 63	Memo for the Director, CIA	Assessing "Probable Reactions to Various Courses of Action with Respect to North Vietnam" the Board of National Estimates studied 13 proposed covert operations. The BNE did not think any would convince NVN to change its policies. Hanoi's reaction to them was forecast as mild.
2 Jan 64	Krulak Committee Report	"Least risk" activities drawn from the 2062 in OPLAN 34A formed the basis of a 12-month, three-phase program of covert operations. MACV would exercise operational control, CAS and CINCPAC would train and equip the GVN or third-nation personnel involved. Phase One (February-May) included intelligence collection (through U-2 and special intelligence missions), psychological operations and some 20 "destructive" undertakings. Similar operations would be increased in number and intensity during Phases Two and Three; destructive acts would be extended to targets "identified with North Vietnam's economic and industrial well-being." Committee members reasoned that Hanoi attached great

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		importance to economic development, that progressive damage to the economy - or its threatened destruction - would convince Hanoi to cancel support of insurgency. But the committee cautioned, even successful execution of the program might not induce Hanoi to "cease and desist."
22 Jan 64	JCSM 46-64	Criticizing "self-imposed restrictions" on operations in Laos, arguing that Laotian security depended on that of South Vietnam, the JCS requested authority to initiate reconnaissance operations over and into Laos. Without them the task in Vietnam was made "more complex, time consuming... more costly."
30 Jan 64	Coup in Saigon	Minh's junta was ousted by one headed by General Khanh.
Early Feb 64	Situation in Laos and South Vietnam	NVA troop influx into Laos rose significantly and a similar rise was feared in SVN; Viet Cong terrorism continued to increase.
1 Feb 64	OPIAN 34A	Phase One of the covert activities program began.
20 Feb 64	Lodge Msg. to McGeorge Bundy	Ambassador Lodge urged adoption of a "carrot and stick" approach to North Vietnam (first presented to Governor Harriman on 30 October 1963). Lodge envisaged secret contact with Hanoi to demand NVN cease supporting the Viet Cong. In exchange the U.S. would offer economic aid (especially food imports). If Hanoi refused the offer, previously threatened punitive strikes would be initiated. The U.S. would not publicly admit to the attacks.
20 Feb 64	NSC Meeting	President Johnson ordered more rapid contingency planning for



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		pressures - covert and overt - against North Vietnam and ordered pressures shaped to produce the maximum credible deterrent effect on Hanoi.
		This decision reflects the convergence of (1) fear that the Laos situation could get worse; (2) knowledge that this would affect U.S. operations and policies in Vietnam; (3) recognition that more U.S. military assistance to the GVN was required to execute OPLAN 34A; (4) and the increasing articulation by policy makers (JCS, SecState) of a direct relationship between the challenge of halting NVN assistance to insurgents and broader U.S. strategic interests. Together, these factors increased the attractiveness of proposals for punitive, overt actions against NVN.
25 Feb 64	Draft Presidential Memorandum	State recommended 12 F-100's be deployed to Thailand to deter further NVN activity in Laos and to signal U.S. determination.
26 Feb 64	JCSM 159-64	"Steps to Improve the Situation in Southeast Asia with Particular Reference to Laos" asked authority to initiate low-level reconnaissance flights over Laos for intelligence collection and to visibly display U.S. power. The JCS argued the "root of the problem is in North Vietnam and must be dealt with there," but if operations against NVN had to be ruled out, operations in Laos must not be. They urged that Laos and South Vietnam be treated as an integrated theatre.
29 Feb 64	Director, DIA Memorandum for the Secretary	Reporting on "North Vietnamese Support to the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao," DIA said certain

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1 Mar 64	Interim Report: "Alternatives for the Imposition of Measured Pressure against NVN"	<p>"intelligence gaps" related to kinds and amounts of arms, supplies and men infiltrating SVN through Laos. The JCS favored closing such gaps by overt military operations; State opposed.</p> <p>An Interagency Study Group under State's Vietnam Committee listed these as U.S. objectives: make Hanoi cease support of the Viet Cong; strengthen GVN and Asian morale and reduce VC morale; prove to the world U.S. determination to oppose Communist expansion.</p> <p>Military means to attain those objectives were explored -- ranging from the air defense of Saigon and US/GVN cross-border operations to the massive deployment of U.S. ground troops and air strikes against North Vietnam. The group believed unilateral U.S. actions would not compel Hanoi to call off the Viet Cong (and doubted Hanoi could do that anyway); operations against NVN were termed no substitute for successful counterinsurgency in SVN.</p> <p>However, expanded activity could demonstrate U.S. power, determination and restraint to the world, reduce somewhat NVN support to the Viet Cong, cause "some reduction" Viet Cong morale, and possibly improve the U.S. negotiating position. "New U.S. bolstering actions" in South Vietnam and considerable improvement of the situation there were required to reduce VC activity and make victory on the ground possible, according to the report.</p>
1 Mar 64	Embassy Vientiane Message 927 for SecState	Reasoned that if current USG policy toward Laos is changed (e.g., if the Geneva Accords

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		were openly violated), large numbers of U.S. troops will eventually be required to enforce political stability.
2 Mar 64	JCSM 168-64	Requesting "Removal of Restrictions for Air and Ground Cross Border Operations," the Joint Chiefs said direct action had to be taken to convince NVN the U.S. was determined to eliminate the insurgents' Laotian sanctuary. "...The time has come to lift the restrictions which limit the effectiveness of our military operations."
2 Mar 64	JCSM 174-64	The Chiefs recommended direct strikes against North Vietnam. In line with their view (JCSM 159-64) that the "root of the problem was North Vietnam, the JCS justified the need for overt action against NVN on two grounds: first, to support the short-term policy objective of stopping Hanoi's aid to the insurgents; second, to support the long-range objective of forcing a change in DRV policy by convincing Hanoi the U.S. was determined to oppose aggression in Southeast Asia.
15 Mar 64	Lodge Msg. for the President (State 1757)	Reiterating his preference for the "carrot and stick" approach to Hanoi, Lodge opposed initiation of overt actions against North Vietnam.
16 Mar 64	SecDef Memo for the President	Reporting on his recent trip to Honolulu and Saigon, McNamara recommended against overt actions (U.S. or GVN) against NVN "at this time" because of the problems of justification, communist escalation and pressures for premature negotiations. McNamara felt the practical range of overt actions did not allow assured achievement

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		<p>of practical U.S. objectives. (Like the Interagency Group, the Secretary distinguished between the stated aim of eliminating Hanoi's control of the Viet Cong and the practical objective of building the morale of the Khanh regime while eroding VC morale.)</p> <p>The Secretary did favor military action against NVN in Laos. He recommended initiation by GVN forces of "hot pursuit" and small-scale operations across the Laotian border, plus continuation of U.S. high-level reconnaissance flights over Laos. He recommended the U.S. prepare planning for 72-hour readiness to initiate Laos and Cambodian border control actions and prepare plans for "retaliatory actions" (overt high and/or low level reconnaissance flights, "tit-for-tat" bombing strikes, commando raids) against NVN. He also recommended planning for 30 days' readiness to initiate the "program of Graduated Overt Military Pressure" against North Vietnam. *</p>
17 Mar 64	NSAM 288	Approved Mr. McNamara's report and his twelve recommendations to improve the military situation. Planning was to "proceed energetically."
17 Mar 64	President's Message to Lodge (State 1454)	<p>On North Vietnam, the President indicated agreement with Lodge's "carrot and stick" approach and said he had reserved judgment on overt U.S. measures against NVN.</p> <p>On Laos, the President said he was reluctant to inaugurate overt activities unless or until he had Souvanna's support and a stronger case had been made for the necessity of overt operations. Otherwise the</p>

\* Here McNamara probably referred to the various plans for graduated pressure against NVN then being discussed; no actual "program" had yet been finalized or approved.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		President felt such action "... might have only limited military effect and could trigger wider Communist action in Laos."
17 Mar 64	Lodge Message to SecState (State 1767)	Reported GVN-RLG agreement on political and military issues. Diplomatic relations had been reestablished. Laos granted free passage into southern Laos to GVN forces, the right to bomb infiltration areas with unmarked T-28s and to conduct hot pursuit, commando raids and sabotage operations "without limit" into Laotian territory to combined RLG-GVN units. A combined Laotian-Vietnamese staff was to be created.
18 Mar 64	JCS Message 5390 to CINCPAC	The JCS directed CINCPAC to begin "Planning Actions, Vietnam" in line with Recommendations 11 and 12 of NSAM 288. The program was to "permit sequential implementation" of three actions (border controls, retaliatory cross-border operations with 72-hour responsiveness, graduated overt military pressures against NVN with 30-days responsiveness).
20 Mar 64	President's Message to Lodge (State 1484)	Confirmed that actions with North Vietnam as the target mentioned in NSAM 288 were regarded strictly as contingency planning and that interagency study was so oriented.
31 Mar 64	State/ISA Draft Scenarios	State/ISA planners presented three papers. The first was a scenario for current actions (political steps to increase Congressional and international understanding of U.S. aims plus continued military action by GVN with U.S. advisory assistance). The second scenario called for overt GVN/covert U.S. action against NVN (characterized by the GVN-USAF FARMGATE operation); it emphasized political initiatives

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		which would surface in Saigon and thus retain credibility for GVN sovereignty. The third scenario -- associated with overt U.S. response to DRV-CHICOM escalation -- also included diplomatic and political preparations for overt U.S. activity.
13 Apr 64	J-5 Memorandum for the ASD (ISA)	Commenting on the 31 March scenario, the Joint Staff outlined a continually intensifying program of military pressures -- and gradually increasing U.S. military involvement. J-5 urged the 31 March scenario be fused with OPLAN 37-64 and border control operations be moved into the scenario for the current time period. Approximate time-phasing of the draft's then separate scenarios was recommended.
8 and 17 Apr 64	Scenario Drafts	Reflecting the JCS influence toward development of a continuous scenario, current political activities were treated in a separate section, "Steps Which Should be Taken Now." The other political-military scenarios included increased FARMGATE operations, separate Laotian and Cambodian border control actions, separate GVN retaliatory actions against NVN, and graduated overt U.S. military pressures against NVN. The detailed scenario for GVN/FARMGATE operations was given D-Day minus X time-phasing; apparently it was the basis for discussions held in Saigon on 19-20 April.
18 - 20 Apr 64	Saigon Conference	Scenarios and other issues were discussed by Lodge, William Bundy, Rusk, Wheeler, and others. Lodge objected to planning for - or adopting - massive publicity and massive destruction actions before trying a well-reasoned, well-planned diplomatic effort to convince Hanoi to "call off the VC." His "carrot/stick"

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		<p>approach was expanded: Lodge suggested a third country interlocuteur be selected to tell Hanoi of U.S. resolve, that the threat of air strikes be combined with an economic assistance offer and that as part of the "carrot" the U.S. offer to withdraw some personnel from South Vietnam.</p>
		<p>Rusk wanted the extent of NVN infiltration and support to be satisfactorily proved to U.S. citizens, allies and neutrals; he wanted Asian military support for the U.S. Rusk did not think China would intervene militarily without Soviet support and thought we could pressure the Chinese economically through our allies. He doubted elimination of DRV industrial targets would have much adverse impact on any NVN decision to stop aiding the insurgency.</p>
		<p>Results: Canada would be asked to act as interlocuteur. Also, Secretary Rusk recommended the U.S. seek "more flags" to support the GVN, deploy a carrier task force to Cam Ranh Bay to establish a permanent U.S. Naval presence, initiate anti-junk operations to "inch northward" along the coast and enlist SEATO support in isolating the DRV from economic or cultural relations with the Free World.</p>
23 Apr 64	SecDef Memorandum to CJCS	<p>This forwarded the 20 April scenario which contained three stages: uncommitting steps to be taken now; graduated overt pressures on the DRV (FARMGATE); and a contingency plan for overt U.S. response to DRV/CHICOM escalation. The first stage could stand alone, but stage two could not be launched unless the U.S. was prepared to take the third step -- perhaps within 10 days of the previous "D-Day."</p>

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
23 Apr 64	Rostow Memorandum for SecState	Reasoning that deterioration in Laos and SVN would make it very difficult to win Hanoi's adherence to the Geneva Accords and predicting deterioration was imminent, Rostow implied necessary (U.S.) actions should be taken soon.
30 Apr 64	Rusk visit to Ottawa	Set up the Seaborn Mission (interlocuteur) to Hanoi for mid-June.
4 May 64	Lodge to SecState (State 2108)	This reflects the deliberate, cautious approach then dominant. In talking with General Khanh (who suggested putting SVN fully on a war footing and wanted to tell NVN that further interference in GVN affairs would bring reprisals), Lodge urged Khanh to keep cool and asked that McNamara similarly emphasize the need to avoid such drastic measures during his 12 May meeting with Khanh.
7 May 64	Talking Paper for the Secretary	In addition to the Lodge suggestions, McNamara was to tell Khanh the U.S. did "not intend to provide military support nor undertake the military objective of 'rolling back' communist control in NVN."
12-13 May 64	McNamara/Sullivan trip to Vietnam	Khanh and McNamara met and apparently discussed the issues mentioned above.
16 May 64	JCSM 422-64	JCS criticized the final draft scenario for omitting the immediate actions mentioned in NSAM 288 (border control and retaliatory operations); advocated incorporating retaliatory and overt military pressures against NVN in the second stage, as well as battalion-size border control operations in Laos to include striking bridges and armed route reconnaissance. These were justified in JCS eyes because military operations against the DRV to help stabilize either the Laos or SVN situation involved



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		attacking the same target systems and to a large extent, the same targets. JCS felt attacks would assist "...in the achievement of the objective" and offer "...the possibility of a favorable long-term solution to the insurgency problem in Southeast Asia."
17 May 64	Pathet Lao Offensive	The Pathet Lao seized a significant portion of the Plaine des Jarres in Laos -- a major setback for RLG forces.
19 May 64	JCSM 426-64	Clearly indicating the crisis management aspects of the scene created by Pathet Lao gains, the JCS now called for new, more intensive covert operations during the second phase of OPLAN 34A.
21 May 64	At the UN...	Adlai Stevenson's major speech explaining U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia was the first such U.S. move at the UN.
21 May 64	<u>Baltimore Sun Report</u>	With Souvanna's permission, the U.S. began low-level reconnaissance operations over enemy-occupied areas in Laos.
21 May 64	Rusk Message to Lodge (State 2027)	Rusk said Washington saw the fragility of the SVN situation as an obstacle to further U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia. He asked Lodge to suggest ways to achieve greater solidarity in SVN saying, "we need to assure the President that everything humanly possible is being done both in Washington and the Government of Vietnam to provide a solid base of determination from which far-reaching decisions could proceed."
23 May 64	JCSM 445-64	The JCS renewed their plea for prompt "Readiness to Implement NSAM 288." Larger border control and retaliatory operations were

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
23 May 64	Draft Presidential Memorandum	<p>called for; prompt consultations with the GVN and immediate joint operations were said to be needed.</p> <p>The crisis in Laos had focused interest on but one stage of earlier scenarios: overt operations against NVN. The scenario for steps to be taken now had been dropped (as Rusk explained to Lodge on 22 May - State 2049 - because initial attacks without acknowledgement were not feasible; publicity seemed inevitable). The scenario called for 30 days of graduated military/political pressures (including initiatives to enter negotiations with Hanoi). A Congressional Resolution supporting U.S. resistance to DRV aggression was called for; air strikes would continue -- despite negotiations -- until it was clear that NVN had ceased subversion. Negotiating objectives were: terrorism, armed attack and armed resistance would stop; "communications on networks out of the North would be conducted entirely in uncoded form."</p>
25 May 64	SNIE 50-2-64	<p>An estimate of the likely consequences of actions proposed in the 23 May DPM (discussed by the Executive Committee, or ExCom, on 24, 25 and 26 May). NVN might order guerrillas to reduce "the level of insurrections for the moment" in response to U.S. force deployments or FARMGATE attacks; with Peking and Moscow, Hanoi might count on international actions to end the attacks and stabilize communist gains. If attacks continued, Hanoi might intensify political initiatives and possibly increase the tempo of insurgency. If these failed to bring a settlement and if attacks damaged</p>

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
25 May 64	McGeorge Bundy Memorandum to Rusk, <u>et.al.</u>	<p>NVN considerably, the SNIE estimated NVN would lower negotiating demands to preserve its regime -- and plan to renew insurgency later. The SNIE saw "significant danger" that Hanoi would fight because (1) NVN did not think the U.S. would commit ground forces and (2) even if U.S. troops were sent, NVN believed they could be defeated à la 1954. Affecting the <u>will</u> of NVN leaders was emphasized. None of the actions forecast in the DPM would affect enemy <u>capabilities</u> because the major sources of "communist strength in SVN are indigenous." The SNIE said the DRV must (be made to) understand that the U.S. -- not seeking to destroy NVN -- is willing to "bring ascending pressure to bear to persuade Hanoi to reduce the insurrections." The report added "... retaliatory measures which Hanoi might take in Laos and South Vietnam might make it increasingly difficult for the U.S. to regard its objectives as attainable by limited means. Thus difficulties of comprehension might increase on both sides as the scale of action mounted."</p> <p>The ExCom abandoned the scenario approach -- perhaps because entering into escalating conflict might obscure the limited U.S. objectives. The ExCom recommended the President decide that the U.S. will use graduated military force against NVN after appropriate diplomatic and political warning and preparation; evident U.S. determination to act -- combined with other efforts -- "should produce a sufficient improvement of non-communist prospects in South Vietnam and in Laos to make military action against North Vietnam unnecessary."</p>

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		OR: The ExCom explicitly assumed that a decision to use force if necessary -- backed by resolute deployment and conveyed every way possible "...gives the best present chance of avoiding the actual use of such force." Other actions recommended were: communicate U.S. resolve through the Canadian interlocuteur; call a high-level Southeast Asian strategy conference; begin diplomatic efforts at the UN to present the case for DRV aggression; consult with SEATO allies and obtain allied force commitments; seek a Congressional Resolution in support of U.S. resistance to NVN in SEA; deploy forces periodically to the region; consider an initial strike against NVN "designed to have more deterrent than destructive impact" and accompany it by an active diplomatic offensive to restore stability -- including an agreement to a Geneva Conference.
26 May 64	Lodge Message to Rusk (State 2318)	Lodge said only firm action against North Vietnam by the U.S. and GVN could lead to a significant improvement in the GVN effort. (A "new wrinkle" in Lodge's view.)
27 May 64	Polish Initiative	Poland proposed a Laos conference format which avoided many undesirable aspects of those formerly supported by communist governments.
29 May 64	State Message to Rusk (TOSEC 36)	The ExCom, preferring to initially treat Laos independently of Vietnam, recommended the President accept the Polish proposal. The U.S. would not be willing to write off Laos to the communists and would assure Souvanna: "We would be prepared to give him prompt and direct military support if the Polish Conference..." failed.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
30 May 64	JCSM 460-64	Advocating "Air Strikes Against North Vietnam," the JCS felt NVN support to insurgents could be reduced by armed reconnaissance of highways leading into Laos, striking airfields identified with supporting insurgents, striking supply, ammunition and POL storage sites and military installations connected with PL/VC support. The JCS said Hanoi's "military capability to take action against Laos and the RVN" would result from hitting "remaining" airfields, important railroad and highway bridges, depots in northern NVN and from aerial mining and bombing of POL stores in Hanoi and Haiphong. The Chiefs also outlined the capability to effectively destroy the entire NVN industrial base.
2 Jun 64	JCSM 461-64 (CJCS non-concurred)	Recommended the U.S. seek to destroy Hanoi's will and capabilities, as necessary, to support the insurgency. They called for "positive, prompt and meaningful military action" -- mainly air strikes -- to show NVN "we are now determined that (its support to insurgency) will stop" and to show NVN we can and will make them incapable of rendering such support.
2 Jun 64	SECTO 37	Rusk reported General Khanh's views: Khanh felt the GVN could not win against the Viet Cong without some military action outside its borders; he wanted insurgent forces in eastern Laos cleaned out -- by GVN forces and U.S. air support; he recommended selected air attacks against NVN "designed to minimize the chances of a drastic communist response."
1-2 Jun 64	Honolulu Conference	Conferees assessing overall U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia agreed with State that the point of departure "...is and must be that we cannot accept (the) over-running of Southeast Asia by Hanoi and Peking."

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		"Operational" -- not policy -- aspects of air operations against NVN were the main points of discussion, with attention centered on the effect of pressures in Laos, preparatory steps necessary for a Laotian contingency and probable repercussions.
		Evaluating possible communist reaction to pressures against NVN, Mr. McNamara said the "best current view" was an appropriately limited attack against NVN, which would not bring CHICOM air or NVN/CHICOM groundforces. Westmoreland felt there was no significant unused capability left to the VC; Lodge said the VC had a major capability for terrorism, even for military action against Saigon. Like Khanh, Lodge also felt selective bombing would build morale and unity in South Vietnam.
		Results: The U.S. would seek international (beginning with U.S.-Thai consultations) and domestic support (through a Congressional Resolution) for wider U.S. actions. ("Wider" could mean committing up to seven U.S. divisions and calling up the reserves "...as the action unfolds.") But actual expansion of the U.S. role would be postponed for these and other politico-military reasons.
3 Jun 64	William Bundy Memorandum for SecState	The report to the President on Honolulu was probably based on this paper in which Bundy recapped talks there and called for time to "refine" plans and estimates, to "get at" basic doubts about the value of Southeast Asia and the importance of the U.S. stake there.
Mid-Jun 64	Post-Honolulu Military Actions	Mr. McNamara discussed NVN targets, troop movement capabilities with the JCS (8 June); he wanted facts

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		and statistics on Haiphong traffic, existing plans for and estimated impact of mining the harbor, alternative DRV importation facilities. He ordered immediate improvement in effectiveness and readiness plus some expansion of prepositioned stocks in Thailand and Okinawa.
Mid-Jun 64	Post-Honolulu Non-Military Activity	State began gathering information on prevalent public questions about the U.S. in Vietnam, in Southeast Asia; interagency groups studied implications of a Congressional Resolution; Rusk (14 June), President Johnson (23 June) and others spoke publicly on U.S. goals in Asia, U.S. determination to support its Southeast Asian allies.
9 Jun 64	Memorandum for the Director, CIA	President Johnson asked: "Would the rest of Southeast Asia necessarily fall if Laos and South Vietnam came under NVN control?" The CIA response said Cambodia "might" but no other nation "would quickly succumb." U.S. prestige, credibility and position in the Far East would be profoundly damaged but the wider U.S. interest in containing overt military attacks would not be affected. All of this was predicated on a clear-cut communist victory in Laos and South Vietnam and U.S. withdrawal from the area. The Agency called results of a "fuzzy" outcome harder to evaluate.
10 Jun 64	SecDef Memorandum to CJCS (Response to CM-1451-64, 5 Jun 64)	McNamara supported Taylor's criticism of JCSM 461-64 (2 June), agreeing that the two courses of action presented by the Chiefs were neither accurate nor complete. Taylor saw three ways in which air power could be used to pressure NVN -- and opted for the least dangerous. He recommended demonstrative strikes against limited military targets to show

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		U.S. readiness and intent to move up the scale if NVN did not reduce insurgent support. Up the scale meant moving from demonstrative strikes to attacks against a significant part of the DRV military target system and ultimately, to massive attacks against all significant military targets in NVN. By destroying them the U.S would destroy NVN's capacity to support insurgency.
12 Jun 64	William Bundy Memorandum	Called for a Congressional Resolution right away to demonstrate U.S. resolve (especially to Souvanna and Khanh) and provide flexibility for executive action.
15 Jun 64	McGeorge Bundy Memorandum to SecState, SecDef, et.al.	One subject was made the agenda for final talks about a Congressional Resolution: actions still open to the U.S. if both major military operations and a Congressional Resolution are rejected at this time. White House guidance indicated that by taking limited military and political actions, the U.S. could demonstrate firm resistance without risking major escalation or loss of policy flexibility.  McGeorge Bundy suggested these possible limited actions, military: reconnaissance, strike, T-28 operations in all of Laos; small-scale reconnaissance strikes -- after appropriate provocation -- in NVN; VNAF strikes in Laotian corridors; limited air and sea, more limited ground deployments. (Bundy said major ground force deployments seem more questionable without a decision "to go north" in some form.) Political: "Higher authority" wants a maximum effort to increase allied real and visible presence in support



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

DATE

EVENT OR  
DOCUMENT

DESCRIPTION

of Saigon; make intensive efforts to sustain Souvanna; rapidly develop province and information programs, strengthen the country team, shift the U.S. role from advice to direction; opposing both aggressive adventure and withdrawal, explain the above lines of action (especially in the U.S.) and leave the door open to selected military actions.

Unless the enemy provoked drastic measures, the ExCom agreed that defense of "U.S. interests...over the next six months" is possible within limits. Both a Congressional Resolution and wider U.S. action were deferred.

I. INITIATION OF  
COVERT OPERATIONS

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

MILITARY PRESSURES AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM

ACTION AND DEBATE, FEB - JUN 1964

I. Initiation of Covert Operations

On 1 February 1964, the United States embarked on a new course of action in pursuance of its long-standing policy of attempting to bolster the security of Southeast Asia. On that date, under direction of the American military establishment, an elaborate program of covert military operations against the state of North Vietnam was set in motion. There were precedents: a variety of covert activities had been sponsored by the American CIA since 1961. Intelligence agents, resupplied by air, had been dispatched into North Vietnam; resistance and sabotage teams had been recruited inside the country; and propaganda leaflets had been dispensed from "civilian mercenary" aircraft. 1/ But the program that began in February 1964 was different, and its impact on future U.S. policy in Southeast Asia was far-reaching.

A. Covert Action Program: Scope and Character

The covert action program beginning in February 1964 was different, first of all, because it was a program. Designed to extend over a period of 12 months, it was divided into three phases distinguished by the character and intensity of their respective operations. The first phase (February through May) called for intelligence collection through U-2 and communications intelligence missions and psychological operations involving leaflet drops, propaganda kit deliveries, and radio broadcasts. It also provided for about "20 destructive undertakings, all within... early prospective [GVN] capabilities... [and] designed to result in substantial destruction, economic loss and harassment." The second and third phases involved the same categories of action, but of increased tempo and magnitude, and with the destructive operations extending to "targets identified with North Vietnam's economic and industrial well-being." Once started, the program was intended to inflict on North Vietnam increasing levels of punishment for its aggressive policies. 2/

The 1964 program was different also because it was placed under control of an operational U.S. military command. Though the program was designed to be carried out by GVN or third country personnel, plans were developed by COMUSMACV and the GVN jointly and given interagency clearance in Washington through a special office under the JCS. CINCPAC and the appropriate CIA station furnished the necessary training and equipment support and COMUSMACV exercised operational control. 3/ Since subsequent phases of the covert program were to be based on a continuous evaluation of actions already taken, operation reports were submitted periodically through JCS staff channels for review by various Washington agencies.

Normally such routine staffing arrangements tend to encourage expectations of continued program actions. Moreover, they foreshadow bureaucratic pressures for taking stronger measures should previous ones

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

fail to produce desired results. In the case of the covert operations program, these tendencies were reinforced through the evocation of a GVN policy commitment and the involvement of GVN officials in its implementation.

B. Origins and Development: Presidential Support and Approval

The covert program was spawned in May of 1963, when the JCS directed CINCPAC to prepare a plan for GVN "hit and run" operations against NVN. These operations were to be "non-attributable" and carried out "with U.S. military materiel, training and advisory assistance." 4/ Approved by the JCS on 9 September as CINCPAC OPLAN 34-63, the plan was discussed during the Vietnam policy conference at Honolulu, 20 November 1963. Here a decision was made to develop a combined COMUSMACV-CAS, Saigon plan for a 12-month program of covert operations. Instructions forwarded by the JCS on 26 November specifically requested provision for: "(1) harassment; (2) diversion; (3) political pressure; (4) capture of prisoners; (5) physical destruction; (6) acquisition of intelligence; (7) generation of intelligence; and (8) diversion of DRV resources." Further, that the plan provide for "selected actions of graduated scope and intensity to include commando type coastal raids." 5/ To this guidance was added that given by President Johnson to the effect that "planning should include... estimates of such factors as: (1) resulting damage to NVN; (2) the plausibility of denial; (3) possible NVN retaliation; and (4) other international reaction." 6/ The MACV-CAS plan, designated OPLAN 34A, and providing for "a spectrum of capabilities for RVNAF to execute against NVN," was forwarded by CINCPAC on 19 December 1963. 7/

The idea of putting direct pressure on North Vietnam met prompt receptivity on the part of President Johnson. According to then Assistant Secretary of State, Roger Hilsman, it was just a few days before the military-CIA submission that State Department Counselor, Walt Rostow passed to the President "a well-reasoned case for a gradual escalation." 8/ Rostow was well-known as an advocate of taking direct measures against the external sources of guerrilla support, having hammered away at this theme since he first presented it at Fort Bragg in April 1961. In any event, on 21 December, President Johnson directed that an interdepartmental committee study the MACV-CAS plan to select from it those least risk." This committee, under the chairmanship of Major General Krulak, USMC, completed its study on 2 January 1964 and submitted its report for review by the principal officials of its various member agencies. The report recommended the 3-phase approach and the variety of Phase I operations described earlier. 9/ President Johnson approved the committee's recommendations on 16 January and directed that the initial 4-month phase of the program be implemented beginning 1 February. 10/

C. Concept and Rationale: Convince DRV to Desist by Raising the Cost

In view of program performance and later decisions, the conceptualization underlying the program of covert operations against North Vietnam is particularly significant. JCS objectives for the initial CINCPAC formulation were to increase the cost to the DRV of its role in the South

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Vietnamese insurgency. The catalogue of operations submitted from Saigon was intended to "convince the DRV leadership that they should cease to support insurgent activities in the RVN and Laos." Although, in its forwarding letter, CINCPAC expressed doubt that all but a few of the 2062 separate operations detailed by MACV-CAS could have that kind of effect. In his view, only air attacks and a few other "punitive or attritional" operations had any probability of success in achieving the stated objectives. 11/

Rationale accompanying the interdepartmental committee's program recommendations, apparently accepted by higher authority, reflected both the coercive objectives and the reservations associated with the earlier documents. Through its recommended program of "progressively escalating pressure," the committee aimed "to inflict increasing punishment upon North Vietnam and to create pressures, which may convince the North Vietnamese leadership, in its own self-interest, to desist from its aggressive policies." However, it expressed the caution that "it is far from clear whether even the successful conduct of the operations... would induce Hanoi's leaders to cease and desist." Still, after enumerating a number of specific risks involved, it expressed the opinion that they were "outweighed by the potential benefits of the actions [it] recommended." In selecting these actions, the committee stated the assumption that the DRV's current strategy was to support the Viet Cong "at little cost to itself and at little risk to its industrial complex, while counting for victory upon U.S. and South Vietnamese war weariness..." It calculated:

"The importance attached by Hanoi's leaders to the development of North Vietnam's economy suggests that progressive damage of its industrial projects, attrition of its resources and dislocation of its economy might induce a decision to call off its physical support of the Viet Cong. This reaction might be intensified by the traditional Vietnamese fear of Chinese domination, where expanded operations by our side could arouse concern in Hanoi over the likelihood of direct Chinese Communist intervention in North Vietnamese affairs." 12/

Interagency commentary on the proposed operations provides additional insight into the rationale and expectancies associated with the initial 4-month program. After reviewing 13 of these operations, the Board of National Estimates concluded that "even if all were successful," they would not achieve the aim of convincing the DRV to alter its policies. The Board thought it possible that North Vietnamese leaders might view these operations "as representing a significant increase in the vigor of U.S. policy, potentially dangerous to them," but with a likely reaction no more significant than a DRV effort to try to arouse greater international pressure for a Geneva-type conference on Vietnam. In addition, it cautioned that at least three operations proposed for the initial period were too large and complex to be plausibly denied by the

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

GVN. 13/ The committee noted this CIA caution but suggested it might provide a psychological advantage "for South Vietnam to acknowledge publicly its responsibility for certain of the retaliatory acts taken against the aggressor." However, the State Department member demurred, urging that only those operations that were covert and deniable by both the GVN and the United States be undertaken. His caution reflected recognition "of the risks and the uncertainty as to whether operations against North Vietnam will materially contribute to our objective of ending the war." 14/

D. Implications: Greater Pressure on Hanoi

Thus, by early February 1964, the United States had committed itself to a policy of attempting to improve the situations in South Vietnam and Laos by subjecting North Vietnam to increasing levels of direct pressure. Despite explicit assessments that the contemplated early steps could not achieve its objectives, it had embarked on a program which demanded a significant commitment for its South Vietnamese allies and which in its expected later stages could expose them to considerable risk. Moreover, by initiating a program recognized as giving little promise of achieving its stated objectives through early actions, it raised expectancies for continued and intensified operations in later stages. It can be concluded that either the Administration (1) intended to continue to pursue the policy of pressuring North Vietnam until these pressures showed some propensity for success, or (2) sought through the covert operations program to achieve objectives different from those anticipated during the initial planning.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

II. Planning for Larger Pressures

As indicated by reservations expressed by an ad hoc interdepartmental committee on "pressures" against North Vietnam chaired by General Krulak, covert operations were seen as possessing several shortcomings with respect to influencing decisions in Hanoi. In appraising these operations, attention was drawn increasingly to the potential for undertaking punitive measures that appeared likely to be more compelling. The Krulak committee assessed the likely North Vietnamese response as follows:

"Toughened, as they have been, by long years of hardships and struggle, they will not easily be persuaded by a punitive program to halt their support of the Viet Cong insurgency, unless the damage visited upon them is of great magnitude." 15/

Moreover, the committee rationale reflected the idea generally held that the DRV would be responsive to more damaging actions. For example, Walt Rostow pressed the view on Secretary Rusk that "Ho [Chi Minh] has an industrial complex to protect: he is no longer a guerrilla fighter with nothing to lose." 16/

A. Conceptual Origins and Motivations

In early February, several conceptual elements converged to focus Administration attention on the question of whether U.S. policy should embrace readiness to undertake larger punitive actions against North Vietnam. One element was the realization that the GVN would be incapable of increasing the number or size of its maritime operations beyond the modest "pin pricks" included in the Phase I covert actions program. Should stronger pressures be called for before May or June, they would have to be applied through direct air strikes, probably with USAF/FARMGATE assistance. 17/ Another element was the prospect of serious deterioration within Laos and South Vietnam, resulting from recent North Vietnamese troop influxes into Laos, fear of similar trends in South Vietnam, and heightened VC activity in the wake of the latest GVN coup of 30 January. 18/ Concern within the State Department was such that discussions were held on the desirability of the President's requesting a congressional resolution, drawing a line at the borders of South Vietnam. 19/

A third element was the increasing articulation of a direct relation between the challenge of halting North Vietnam's assistance to the Southeast Asian insurgents and broader U.S. strategic interests. Stopping Hanoi from aiding the Viet Cong virtually became equated with protecting U.S. interests against the threat of insurgency throughout the world. For example, in support of their recommendation to "put aside many of the self-imposed restrictions which now limit our efforts" and "undertake a much higher level of activity" than the covert actions against external assistance to the Viet Cong, the JCS argued:

"In a broader sense, the failure of our programs in South Vietnam would have heavy influence on the judgment of Burma,



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, the Republic of Korea, and the Republic of the Philippines with respect to U.S. durability, resolution, and trustworthiness. Finally, this being the first real test of our determination to defeat the Communist wars of national liberation formula, it is not unreasonable to conclude that there would be a corresponding unfavorable effect upon our image in Africa and in Latin America." 20/

Similarly, in Secretary Rusk's perception.

"We must demonstrate to both the Communist and the non-Communist worlds that the wars of national liberation formula now being pushed so actively by the Communists will not succeed." 21/

B. Interagency Study, February-March 1964

The immediate effect of the heightened interest in causing Hanoi to alter its policies by exerting greater punitive pressures was to stimulate a variety of planning activities within the national security establishment. For example, on 20 February, at a meeting with the Secretaries of State and Defense, CIA Director McCone, CJCS Taylor and members of the Vietnam Committee, the President directed:

"Contingency planning for pressures against North Vietnam should be speeded up. Particular attention should be given to shaping such pressures so as to produce the maximum credible deterrent effect on Hanoi." 22/

Underway at the time was a detailed interagency study intended to determine ways of bringing measured pressures to bear against the DRV. Directed by Robert Johnson, of the Department of State Policy Planning Council, the study group was assembled under the auspices of State's Vietnam Committee. Its products were funneled through William Sullivan, head of the committee, to its members and thence to the principal officials of the agencies represented. However, the papers produced by the study group did not necessarily represent coordinated interdepartmental views. 23/

The study examined three alternative approaches to subjecting North Vietnam to coercive pressures: (1) non-attributable pressures (similar to the advanced stages of the covert actions program); (2) overt U.S. deployments and operations not directed toward DRV territory; and (3) overt U.S. actions against North Vietnam, including amphibious, naval and air attacks. In addition, it encompassed a number of "supporting studies" on such subjects as U.S. objectives, problems of timing, upper limits of U.S. action, congressional action, control arrangements, information policy, negotiating problems, and specific country problems. By addressing such a range of subjects, participants in the study came to grips with a number of broader issues valuable for later policy deliberations (e.g., costs and risks to the U.S. of contemplated actions; impact of the Sino-Soviet split; possible face-saving retreats). 24/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In support of this study and in order to permit necessary political evaluations concerning the military alternatives available, the JCS were asked to furnish their views on the following issues: (1) the overall military capabilities of the DRV and Chinese Communists with respect to logistical capacity, geographical areas of operation, time required to initiate operations, and capacity for concurrent reactions in different regions; (2) military actions against NVN, using air and naval power only, which the GVN might undertake alone or which the U. S. might undertake both with and without public acknowledgment; (3) NVN targets, attack of which would be most effective in inhibiting particular DRV military capabilities; (4) course of action likely to bring about cessation of DRV support for the conflicts in Laos and South Vietnam; (5) action most likely to deter communist attacks on various parts of Asia in the event of a large-scale communist reaction to attacks on NVN; (6) the extent to which the United States could counter such reactions, using only air and naval operations and different ordnance combinations; and (7) modifications needed in current contingency plans to provide for U.S. responses depending "primarily upon air activities rather than the intervention of substantial U.S. ground forces." 25/

The work of the study group resulted in an interim report on 1 March 1964, just prior to Secretary McNamara's and CJCS Taylor's visit to South Vietnam. This they carried with them in the form of a summary analysis of the group's findings. During a brief stopover in Honolulu, these findings and the issues raised by the Secretary's memorandum to the JCS were discussed. Particular emphasis was given to the possible advantage to be derived from converting the current operations into an "overt Vietnamese program with participation by [the] U.S. as required to obtain adequate results." 26/

C. Study Group Analysis of Proposed Actions

The study group had given considerable attention to over U. S. actions against North Vietnam. Its analysis was based on a concept of exploiting "North Vietnamese concern that their industrialization achievements might be wiped out or could be defended (if at all) only at the price of Chicom control" and of demonstrating "that their more powerful communist allies would not risk their own interests for the sake of North Vietnam." The actions it proposed were aimed at accomplishing five objectives: (1) induce North Vietnam to curtail its support of the Viet Cong in South Vietnam; (2) reduce the morale of the Viet Cong; (3) stiffen the Khanh government and discourage moves toward neutralism; (4) show the world that we will take strong measures to prevent the spread of communism; and (5) strengthen morale in Asia. However, the study group cautioned that "public justification of our actions and its expressed rationale must be based primarily upon the fact of Northern support for and direction of the war in the South in violation of the independence of South Vietnam." It then outlined a series of public informational, domestic political, and international diplomatic steps desirable for establishing this justification. 27/

In seeking to achieve the objective cited above, the study group suggested military actions with the best potential and raised some vital policy issues. In ascending order of the degree of national commitment, the study group believed each would entail, the military actions were as

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

follows: (1) "deploy to Thailand, South Vietnam, Laos and elsewhere the forces, sea, air and land, required to counter a North Vietnamese or Chicom response of the largest likely order"; (2) "initiate overt air reconnaissance activities as a means of dramatizing North Vietnamese involvement"; beginning with high-level flights and following with low-level missions; (3) "take limited air or ground action in Cambodia and Laos, including hot pursuit across the Cambodian border and limited operations across the Laos border"; (4) "blockade Haiphong," which would "have dramatic political effect because it is a recognized military action that hits at the sovereignty of North Vietnam and suggests strongly that we may plan to go further"; (5) "establish a limited air defense capability around Saigon"; and (6) conduct air strikes on key North Vietnamese LOC's, infiltrator training camps, key industrial complexes, and POL storage. It is important to note that the order of commitment perceived in early 1964 was considerably different from the order which most observers would assign to such actions at the time of this writing. The ground force deployments (Item 1) were primarily deterrent deployments to Thailand, on the model of those made during the 1961-62 Laotian crisis. Blockading (Item 4) was considered a low-commitment, low-risk action through most of 1964. Significantly, the last set of actions "in any number" was cited as implying "a U.S. commitment to go all the way if necessary." Thus, the group cautioned that before embarking on such steps the Administration should consider how far it would be willing to go in the event of possible reactions. For example, how long would we persist "in defiance of international pressures for a cease-fire and conference"? Or, how far would we go, either within the proposed concept or by escalating beyond it, in continuing military pressures if the DRV did not comply -- or if it decided to escalate? 28/

Although warning of the need to be prepared "to follow through against Communist China if necessary," the study group estimated that neither China nor the Soviet Union would intervene militarily, other than to supply equipment. In view of these estimates and the study group's basic assumption of DRV sensitivity to industrial losses, its assessments of the likely outcomes of the actions it discussed are significant. Asserting that pressures against North Vietnam were "no substitute for successful counterinsurgency in South Vietnam," the group listed the probable positive gains: (1) U.S. action could demonstrate U.S. power and determination, along with restraint, to Asia and the world at large; (2) U.S. action would lead to some reduction in Viet Cong morale; and (3) U.S. action if carefully planned and executed might improve our negotiating position over what it would otherwise be. (The group saw negotiation as "virtually inevitable.") However, it then countered with the following judgment:

"It is not likely that North Vietnam would (if it could) call off the war in the South even though U.S. actions would in time have serious economic and political impact. Overt action against North Vietnam would be unlikely to produce reduction in Viet Cong activity sufficiently to make victory on the ground possible in South Vietnam unless accompanied by new U.S. bolstering actions in South Vietnam and considerable improvement in the government there. The most to be expected would be reduction of North Vietnamese support of the Viet Cong for a while and, thus, the gaining of some time and opportunity by the government of South Vietnam to improve itself." 29/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

D. McNamara Against Overt Pressures

When he returned from his visit to South Vietnam, Secretary McNamara recommended against either the United States or the GVN undertaking overt actions against North Vietnam "at this time." One compelling reason was General Khanh's expressed wish not to engage in overt operations until a firmer GVN political base had been established, but there were others as well. Mr. McNamara regarded such actions as "extremely delicate... both from the military and political standpoints," because of specific problems. These were identified as: (1) the problem of justifying such actions; (2) the problem of "communist escalation"; and (3) the problem of pressures for premature negotiations. Moreover, he stated the judgment that the practical range of our overt options did not permit assured achievement of our practical objectives. In identifying these, he drew a distinction similar to that made by the interagency study group -- between the stated objective of eliminating Hanoi's control of the VC insurgency and the "practical" objectives of "collapsing the morale and the self-assurance of the Viet Cong cadres...and bolstering the morale of the Khanh regime." 30/

What Mr. McNamara did recommend for military actions outside South Vietnam reflected the contemporary concerns over Laos. Prior to his visit, the increased NVA activity in eastern Laos had prompted several recommendations for military measures to thwart new communist territorial gains in that country and to interrupt the flow of men and materiel into South Vietnam along the Laotian infiltration routes. In particular, elements within the Department of Defense urged efforts to lift existing restrictions on cross-border pursuit of engaged forces into Laos, including accompaniment of GVN air and ground forces by U.S. advisory personnel. They also sought authorization for both GVN and U.S. aircraft to overfly Laos for reconnaissance purposes. 31/ The JCS urged low-level reconnaissance flights over Laos as advantageous both for collecting badly needed intelligence and for visibly displaying U.S. power. 32/ The State Department recommended deploying twelve F-100's to Thailand, with a view toward its potential deterrence and signalling impacts on communist activities in Laos. 33/ On his return from South Vietnam, two of the actions for which Secretary McNamara sought Presidential authority dealt with activities affecting Laos: (1) (Recommendation 11) "hot pursuit" and small-scale operations across the Laotian border by GVN ground forces "for the purpose of border control" and "continued high-level U.S. overflights" of the border; and (2) (Recommendation 12) preparations to be ready "to initiate the full range of Laotian and Cambodian border control actions" within 72 hours. 34/

Actions recommended by the Secretary to provide measures aimed directly at North Vietnam (Recommendation 12) fell into two categories: (1) preparation for "retaliatory actions," defined to include "overt high and/or low level reconnaissance flights...over North Vietnam" as well as "tit-for-tat" bombing strikes and commando-type raids; and (2) planning and preparations "to be in a position on 30 days' notice to initiate the [sic] program of 'Graduated Overt Military Pressure' against North Vietnam." The wording of the latter recommendation is notable because, at the time, there apparently was no planned overt "program" in existence; the discussion of overt pressures appended to the Secretary's report was considerably less than even a recommendation for such a program. The concept of retaliatory actions was more explicitly defined, but here too, it was apparent

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

that important questions like, "Retaliation for what?" and "Under what circumstances?" had yet to be answered clearly. The scenario described in the report's appended "Illustrative Program" of retaliatory pressure seemed to mix elements appropriate for a continuous program of military actions against North Vietnam with those suitable as tit-for-tat response to specific provocations. 35/

Each of the Secretary's recommendations was approved by President Johnson at a National Security Council meeting on 17 March, with the directive for all agencies "to proceed energetically" in executing them. 36/ Subsequent planning activities by different implementing agencies indicate that they did not share a common view of the policy implications and assumptions contained in these recommendations.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

III. Different Policy Perceptions in Planning

A. Two basic approaches: JCS and State-ISA

The principal planning agencies responding to the President's directive regarding Recommendations 11 and 12 were the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Department of State together with OSD/ISA, and the two efforts took rather different approaches. The JCS responded literally to the instructions and tasked CINCPAC to prepare an action program of border control and retaliatory operations with 72-hour responsiveness and one of "graduated overt military pressure by GVN and U.S. forces" against North Vietnam with 30-day responsiveness. The JCS preparation for near-term implementation of these recommendations went beyond the usual contingency planning as indicated by their instruction that CINCPAC's plan "permit sequential implementation" of the three actions. 37/ The JCS approved the CINCPAC submission, as OPIAN 37-64, on 17 April 1964. 38/

The State-ISA planning activity proceeded under the apparent belief that the actions included in Secretary McNamara's Recommendation 12 were approved as contingency options, one or more or none of which might be selected for implementation at some time in the future. In fact, State believed the Secretary's categories of action were not in keeping with likely developments -- "that cross-border actions against Cambodia and Laos are dependent heavily on the political position in these countries at the time, and that, in general, it seems more likely that we would wish to hold off in hitting Cambodia until we had gone ahead hard against North Vietnam itself...there appear to be reasons not to open up other theaters until we have made clear that North Vietnam is the main theater and have not really started on it." Further, it questioned the utility of tit-for-tat retaliatory actions because of (1) the difficulty of responding in kind, or in a fitting manner, to the most likely -- terrorist -- variety of VC provocations and (2) their inappropriateness for conveying "the picture of concerted and steadily rising pressures that reflect complete U.S. determination to finish the job." 39/ Accordingly, the State-ISA effort began by developing a political scenario designed to accommodate only the graduated military pressures referred to in Recommendation 12. These were divided into three major categories: (1) covert GVN action against North Vietnam with covert U.S. support; (2) overt GVN action with covert U.S. support; and (3) overt joint GVN and U.S. action. The two categories involving overt activities were conceived of as possible future developments, contingent upon a Presidential decision that clearly had not been made. 40/

B. Different Approaches: Perceptions of the Strategic Problem in Southeast Asia

The differences in approach taken in the two planning efforts cannot be explained simply by the obvious military and political division of labor. It is clear from documents of the period that there was considerable coordination between the two groups, with the JCS planners looking to State and ISA for political guidance and the latter group looking to the former for recommendations for appropriate military actions. More fundamental was the existence of different perceptions of the strategic

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

problem in Southeast Asia and different assumptions as to how the United States Government should proceed to achieve its policy goals. During the early months of 1964, these are well illustrated in the different approaches taken to the problem of determining the extent and implications of the movement of men and supplies through Laos.

At the end of 1963 and early in 1964, there was general agreement among all Washington agencies that we lacked adequate information concerning the nature and magnitude of whatever movement of men and materiel was occurring along the Laotian infiltration routes. For example, citing the "lack of clarity" on the "role of external intrusion" in South Vietnam, Walt Rostow urged William Sullivan on the eve of his March visit to attempt to "come back from Saigon with as lucid and agreed a picture" as possible on the extent of the infiltration and its influence on the Viet Cong. 41/ A few days later, the Defense Intelligence Agency informed Secretary McNamara that "certain intelligence gaps" were "related primarily to the types and amounts of weapons and materiel coming into South Vietnam, and the number of Viet Cong personnel infiltrating into South Vietnam ...". 42/ To alleviate this situation, the JCS favored such measures as ground probes into Laos by GVN reconnaissance teams and low-level reconnaissance flights over the trail areas by GVN and U.S. aircraft. The State Department, supported by OSD/ISA, opposed such operations as potentially damaging to our relations with the Laotian government.

In supporting its recommendations and in its comments on State-ISA proposals, the JCS argued that an integrated approach should be taken to the security of Southeast Asia, with our actions in Laos closely related to those taken on behalf of South Vietnam. They saw the key problem for all of Southeast Asia as the DRV's aggressive intent. As they stated, "the root of the problem is in North Vietnam and must be dealt with there." 43/ Moreover, they felt that reconnaissance operations into and over Laos were justified because they saw Laotian security as dependent on that of South Vietnam. "Laos," they argued, "would not be able to endure the establishment of a communist -- or pseudo neutralist -- state on its eastern flank." They criticized our "self-imposed restrictions" as tending to make the task in Vietnam "more complex, time-consuming, and in the end, more costly" and for possibly signalling "irresolution to our enemies." 44/ Accordingly, they implied that the United States should convince the Laotian Premier of the need to take direct action against the Viet Minh infiltration through low-level reconnaissance and other cross-border operations -- but above all, to carry out these actions in order to impress the DRV with our resolve to deny its insurgents a sanctuary. In the specific context of recommending these kind of actions, they stated "that the time has come to lift the restrictions which limit the effectiveness of our military operations." 45/

The State-ISA policy view also regarded Laos and Vietnam as parts of the overall Southeast Asian problem, but in early 1964 their conception of how U.S. objectives might be achieved extended beyond the need to thwart the communist guerrilla threat. In this view, policy success meant

TOP SECRET - Sensitive



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

"bolstering the capability of all free countries in the area to resist communist encroachment." This required cooperating with the sovereign governments of these countries and being careful not to erode their authority or contribute to their instability. 46/ Thus, instead of cross-border ground probes or low-level reconnaissance missions, which might prove politically embarrassing to the shaky regime of Laotian Premier Souvanna Phouma, the State-ISA view favored extending the mission of Laotian ground reconnaissance teams, which had been sponsored covertly by the CIA with the Premier's support. 47/ Moreover, this approach to policy included the view that, within the scope of broad regional policy goals, solutions to problems in individual countries should be tailored to the unique political context of each country. Insofar as Laos was concerned, this meant not only being sensitive to Souvanna Phouma's political status, but also adhering to the letter and spirit of the 1962 Geneva Accords, on which it was conceded the structure of a stable political future must be erected. In the State-ISA view, the only alternative to this approach would be an eventual large-scale deployment of U.S. ground forces to drive out the Pathet Lao/NVA forces. 48/

The meaning of these different overall policy conceptions for the planning processes of April and early May 1964 was that the U.S. Government was faced with a dilemma -- whether to take remedial military actions which might ease the short-term problems in South Vietnam or whether to dramatize our commitment to all of Southeast Asia with the long-term solution in mind. The dilemma was particularly complex because elements of one alternative were needed to enable progress toward the other. Specifically, three accomplishments were considered vital to our long-term objectives in Southeast Asia: (1) to convince Hanoi, whose direction of the insurgencies was certain, of our resolve to prevent the success of its aggressive policies; (2) to maintain the cooperation of Souvanna Phouma and the Laotian neutralist political structure (which also required the support of the Geneva members) and thereby preserve the framework of the 1962 Geneva Accords; and (3) to build a stable, effective political authority in South Vietnam. Vital to the third accomplishment was our major short-term objective -- of permanently reversing the trends in the guerrilla war in South Vietnam. These, in turn, were believed to be sustained in their currently deteriorating direction by the infiltration of men and supplies from North Vietnam. The possibility was recognized that determining the extent of this infiltration and eliminating it, if necessary, might be a decisive element in a solution of the short-term problem.

However, the short-term solution involved potential threats to the long-term policy elements: the most effective measures for obtaining the necessary intelligence involved actions likely to alienate Souvanna and damage the political structure in Laos. Yet, some of this same kind of intelligence would be important in convincing the Premier of the need to permit low-level reconnaissance flights and other kinds of operations. On the other hand, the impact of the infiltration on the war in South Vietnam was far from certain. For example, Ambassador Unger reported in December that the recent use of the Laotian corridor was not extensive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

enough to have influenced significantly the then intensive VC efforts in South Vietnam. 49/ Hence, if the desired military operations were undertaken without Souvanna's approval, and it was discovered that the infiltration was not really crucial to the war in the South, a long-term interest would have been compromised without receiving any real short-term advantage.

To further complicate the picture, direct strikes against North Vietnam were being advocated as a means to obtain both long and short-term goals. On the one hand, overt military actions had been recommended to convince the DRV of our resolve. On the other hand, they were proposed as a means to force Hanoi to stop the flow of material assistance to the South. 50/ Moreover, it was generally agreed within policy circles that such actions must be supported by public disclosures of the kind of convincing evidence of Hanoi's support for the VC that the Administration did not yet possess.

By the end of March, one aspect of policy puzzle had been resolved. On 17 March, Ambassador Lodge reported a long conversation between General Khanh and a Laotian representative, with Souvanna's permission, at which a working agreement between military forces of the two governments was obtained. Khanh and Phoumi Nousavan, Laotian rightist military commander, arranged to resume diplomatic relations between the two countries during that week and came to other more specific agreements as follows:

1. Laotians agreed to allow South Vietnam to have free passage in Southern Laos, to create a combined Laotian-Vietnamese staff to use all the bases including Tchepone, and to conduct bombardment with unmarked T-28 planes (in the areas where FAR (Phoumi's) forces were engaged).

2. The 10-kilometer limit on hot pursuit is abrogated; commando raids and sabotage can be undertaken without limit by combined Laotian and South Vietnamese units; South Vietnamese officers will serve the Laotian units to provide added leadership. 51/

Previously, President Johnson had indicated approval of cross-border ground penetrations into Laos "along any lines which can be worked out between Khanh and Phoumi with Souvanna's endorsement." Although asking Secretaries Rusk and McNamara to develop a joint recommendation concerning U.S. participation in air strikes within Laos, the President went on to state a position consonant with that of the State-ISA view:

"My first thought is that it is important to seek support from Souvanna Phouma and to build a stronger case before we take action which might have only limited military effect and could trigger wider Communist action in Laos." 52/

C. Planning Overt Actions on Contingency Basis (April-May)

The planning efforts of April and early May attempted to accommodate the remaining contradictory aspects of the policy dilemma. On the same

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

day he signed NSAM 288 approving Secretary McNamara's visit report, the President sent the first of two closely spaced messages to Ambassador Lodge that could have set the tone for the planning ahead. (Presumably the President's views were communicated to the principal officials in the agencies involved in planning for Southeast Asia.) Commenting on Lodge's critique of the McNamara report, he indicated favor for the Ambassador's expressed preference for "carrot and stick" pressures short of overt military action, and specifically "reserve d judgment on overt U.S. measures against North Vietnam." 53/ Three days later he cabled confirmation that actions being studied with North Vietnam as a target were regarded strictly as contingency planning. 54/

Principal focus for the planning during April was OSD/ISA, with assistance from the Far Eastern Bureau and the Vietnam Committee, in the Department of State, and from the JCS. During the first three weeks of April, it developed three or four versions of scenarios of political actions "to set the stage and to develop support both at home and abroad" for different categories of military action against North Vietnam. Initially, the categories, and their scenarios, were regarded separately, although the first "Covert SVN action against the North (with U.S. covert support)," was recognized as the stage of political-military activity in which the United States was currently engaged. The others, (1) covert U.S. support of overt GVN aerial mining and air strike operations and (2) overt joint U.S. and GVN aerial reconnaissance, naval displays, naval bombardments and air attacks, would necessarily have to follow. 55/ In subsequent versions, the planning evolved more explicitly toward a continuous scenario in three sequential phases.

In each version, however, the "current" scenario included such political measures as: (1) a speech by General Khanh stating GVN war aims; (2) a briefing for "friendly" senators and congressmen on our aims in Southeast Asia and the problem of DRV directions of the VC; (3) public explanations of U.S. policy toward South Vietnam; and (4) diplomatic discussions with the United Kingdom and the North Atlantic Council. Each of the second scenarios, which came to be characterized by GVN-USAF/FARMGATE air operations, contained similar actions but placed emphasis on political initiatives that would surface in Saigon rather than in Washington, "so as to maintain the credibility of the sovereignty of the GVN." This stage also included such measures as: (1) another trip to Saigon by Secretary McNamara for the specific purpose of obtaining General Khanh's agreement to begin overt GVN actions against the North; (2) consultations with Thailand and the Philippines; (3) Presidential consultations with key congressional leaders; and (4) public release of a new State Department White Paper on North Vietnamese involvement in the insurgency. Each of the final scenarios, which came to be associated with our overt responses to DRV/CHICOM escalations, included diplomatic and political preparations for direct U.S. actions. Significantly, the scenarios also incorporated initiatives leading to an international conference on Vietnam at Geneva. 56/

The evolution toward a continuous sequential scenario reflects the influence of the JCS. Their response to the 31 March draft: (1) called

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

for approximate time-phasing of the various steps in "the scenario"; (2) urged a fusion of the scenario with CINCPAC operational planning (OPLAN 37/64); and (3) attempted to incorporate Secretary McNamara's requested border control operations into the political actions recommended for the current time period. Moreover, the JCS developed a "political/military scenario" for graduated overt military pressure against North Vietnam, as called for in Secretary McNamara's Recommendation No. 12, 16 March 1964. Within this scenario the JCS included "expanded U.S. overt military pressures" against the DRV. In effect, they outlined a continually intensifying program of military pressures which increasingly involved U.S. military participation. 57/

Complementing the thrust of JCS advice, the next draft, 8 April, removed current political actions from the list of political scenarios and treated them in a section entitled "Steps Which Should be Taken Now." The current scenarios included: (1) GVN/FARMGATE graduated overt military pressures against North Vietnam; (2) separate Laotian and Cambodian border control actions; (3) separate GVN retaliatory actions against North Vietnam; and (4) overt U.S. graduated military pressures against North Vietnam. The detailed scenario for the GVN/FARMGATE operations was reviewed by Mr. McNaughton with William Sullivan of the Department of State and Michael Forrestal of the White House staff. The scenario version resulting from this conference, contains the JCS-recommended time-phasing, in terms of D-Day minus X approximations. It also incorporates specific military actions recommended by the JCS submission. Apparently, only this scenario and the detailed description of "Steps Which Should be Taken Now" were circulated for comment by other agencies. Apparently, this draft provided the basis for scenario discussions held in Saigon among Secretary Rusk, Assistant Secretary William Bundy, CJCS Wheeler, Ambassador Lodge and certain military and civilian members of the Country Team on 19-20 April 1964.

A later version was prepared on 20 April and forwarded to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 23 April. Significantly, it contained only three scenarios: I. "Uncommitting" steps which should be taken now; II. GVN/FARMGATE graduated overt pressures on DRV; III. Contingency Plan for U.S. overt response to DRV/CHICOM reactions. It also carried the following comment concerning their relationship:

"It should be noted that carrying out Scenario I does not necessarily commit the U.S. to commence Scenario II; and that Scenario II may be carried out without requiring resort to Scenario III. However, since Scenario II cannot be launched without our being prepared to carry out Scenario III, you should assume that it may be necessary for the D-Day of Scenario III to occur as soon as 10 days after the D-Day of Scenario II. Scenario III is a contingency plan of action which we would contemplate putting into effect only if the DRV's or Chicom's reaction to Scenario II was judged by the President to require overt U.S. response." 58/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

At the Saigon meeting, the concerns of the local officials for initiating some immediate measures to relieve the situation in South Vietnam came into conflict with the longer-range scenario approach. Ambassador Lodge "questioned the wisdom both of massive publicity and of massive destruction actions before a well-planned and well executed diplomatic attempt had been made to persuade NVN to call off the VC." 59/ He went on to propose communicating to Hanoi, through a third-country "interlocutor," our intent to embark on a "carrot and stick program," combining the threat of increasing air strikes with the granting of some assistance to the DRV. His supporting rationale explicitly cautioned that the VC reaction to large-scale measures against the North might be violent and damaging to the South Vietnamese economy. More significant may have been the fact that the "large-scale measures" proposed in the scenario came quite late in the second stage, a stage that may not have been entered -- at least for some time.

What the Ambassador had in mind regarding a carrot and stick approach was not entirely new. It had first been proposed in his memorandum to Governor Harriman on 30 October 1963. It was raised again in cables to the White House on 20 February and 15 March 1964. 60/ Initially proposed in the context of a scheme to encourage the neutrality of North Vietnam, the carrot and stick concept envisioned a secret contact with Hanoi at which an ultimatum would be delivered demanding the DRV's cessation of support for the VC insurgency. Rewards for compliance would include our making available food imports, to help alleviate the known shortages affecting North Vietnam in late 1963 (and early '64). In the case of non-compliance, we would undertake previously threatened punitive strikes to which we would not admit publicly. What was new in the proposal of 19 April were: (1) the suggestion for using a third country intermediary and (2) that one element of the "carrot" might be our pledge to withdraw some U.S. personnel from South Vietnam. The latter suggestion was criticized by William Bundy on the basis that we didn't yet know how many and what types of American military personnel were needed in South Vietnam. Lodge countered with the comment that "it would be very hard indeed for Ho Chi Minh to provide a salable package for his own people and for other communist nations unless we can do something that Hanoi can point to, even though it would not be a real concession on our part." 61/

The ensuing discussion, on a variety of points, provided an indication of some of Secretary Rusk's paramount concerns, which may shed important light on later policy decisions. For example, he sought opinions on the likely GVN reaction to a Geneva Conference specifically for Laos. In another context, he stated "his concern that the extent of infiltration and other provisions of support from the North be proven to the satisfaction of our own public, of our allies, and of the neutralists." During a discussion of the availability of other Asian troops to fight in Vietnam, Secretary Rusk stated "that we are not going to take on the masses of Red China with our limited manpower in a conventional war." He also stated the opinion that the Chinese would not opt to intervene militarily

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

unless they felt they could count on Soviet support and that we could bring great economic pressure to bear on the Chinese through our allies. While expressing the opinion that Hanoi's renunciation of the Viet Cong would "take the heart out of the insurgency," he indicated doubt that elimination of North Vietnam's industrial targets would have much of an adverse impact on it. Moreover, the Secretary acknowledged the possibility that such an act "would have forfeited the 'hostage' which we hold in the North...without markedly affecting the fight against the Viet Cong, at least in the short run." 62/

The major immediate outcome of the meeting was a decision to go ahead with the suggestion to arrange for the visit of a third country interlocutor to Hanoi. On 30 April, Secretary Rusk visited Ottawa and obtained an agreement from the Canadian Government to include such a mission among the instructions for its new I.C.C. representative. According to the agreement, the new official, J. Blair Seaborn, would: (1) try to determine Ho's attitude toward Chinese support, whether or not he feels over-extended, and his aims in South Vietnam; (2) stress U.S. determination to see its objectives in South Vietnam achieved; (3) emphasize the limits of U.S. aims in Southeast Asia and that it wanted no permanent bases or installations there; and (4) convey U.S. willingness to assist North Vietnam with its economic problems. Other results of the Saigon meeting consisted of a variety of actions recommended by Secretary Rusk. Of these, only four were related to the issue of military pressures against North Vietnam. These were recommendations to (1) engage "more flags" in efforts directly supporting the GVN; (2) deploy a carrier task force to establish a permanent U.S. naval presence at Cam Ranh Bay; (3) initiate anti-junk operations that would "inch northward" along the Vietnam coast; and (4) enlist SEATO countries in an effort to isolate the DRV from economic or cultural relations with the Free World. 63/

D. Conflict of Short and Long Term Views: Caution Prevails

During the last week of April and the early weeks of May, the contention between those urging prompt measures and those counseling a deliberate, cautious pacing of our actions continued. For example, Walt Rostow urged Secretary Rusk to consider how difficult it would be to make a credible case in support of actions to force Hanoi's adherence to the Geneva Accords if political deterioration took place in Laos and South Vietnam. Predicting such an eventuality in the coming months, he implied that the necessary actions should be taken soon. 64/ Similarly, Ambassador Lodge continued to advocate prompt implementation of his carrot and stick approach including, if VC provocations warranted, a well-timed reprisal just prior to Commissioner Seaborn's arrival in Hanoi. These views were communicated to Secretary McNamara and William Sullivan during their visit to Saigon, 12-13 May, and confirmed in a cable to the President three days later. 65/

The JCS commented on the final version of the State-ISA political-military scenarios and criticized them for not including the more immediate actions requested in NSAM 288: namely, border control and retaliatory

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

operations. Making a distinction between border operations already arranged for (Recommendation 11) and those intended by Recommendation 12, they advocated incorporating in the second-stage scenario retaliatory operations and overt military pressures against North Vietnam. They also urged including border control operations of battalion-size or larger, low-level reconnaissance by U.S. aircraft, and VNAF air operations in Laos that include strikes on bridges and armed route reconnaissance. In justifying such actions, they stated:

"...military operations against the DRV to help stabilize the situation in the Republic of Vietnam, and other operations planned to help stabilize the situation in Laos, involve the attack of the same target systems and to a considerable extent the same targets. Assistance in the achievement of the objective in the Republic of Vietnam through operations against NVN could likewise have a similar result in Laos, offering the possibility of a favorable long-term solution to the insurgency problem in Southeast Asia." 66/

However, the deliberate, cautious approach continued to hold sway. Secretary McNamara's trip to Saigon, called for early in the second-stage scenario as a means to obtain General Khanh's agreement to initiate overt operations against the North, did not include this purpose. On the contrary, a week prior to the visit General Khanh had raised with Ambassador Lodge the issue of putting his country on a fully mobilized war footing -- accompanying it with a declaration that further interference by Hanoi in South Vietnamese affairs would bring reprisals -- and Secretary McNamara was instructed to impress upon Khanh that such drastic measures and threatening gestures were unnecessary at the moment. 67/ More important, it was stressed that the GVN "systematically and aggressively demonstrate to the world that the subversion of the South is directed from Hanoi," through sending "capable ambassadors to the important capitals of the world to convince governments of this fact." Moreover, while assuring General Khanh that our commitment to his country and Laos "does not rule out the use of force...against North Vietnam," the Secretary was advised to remind him that "such actions must be supplementary to and not a substitute for successful counter-insurgency in the South" -- and that "we do not intend to provide military support nor undertake the military objective of 'rolling back' communist control in North Vietnam." 68/

IV. DEALING WITH THE  
LAOTIAN CRISIS



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

IV. Dealing with the Laotian Crisis

A. Laos in Danger: "Pressure Planning"

In mid-May 1964, a new factor entered the policy-shaping process -- a factor which cast a shadow of crisis management over the entire decision making environment. On 17 May, pro-communist forces in Laos began an offensive which led to their control of a significant portion of the Plaine des Jarres. On the 21st, the United States obtained Souvanna Phouma's permission to conduct low-level reconnaissance operations over the occupied areas. 69/ For several weeks the offensive threatened to destroy the security of the neutralist-rightist position -- and with it the political underpinning of U.S.-Laotian policy. These developments lent a greater sense of urgency to the arguments of those advisers favoring prompt measures to strengthen the U.S. position in Southeast Asia.

The most avid of those urging prompt action were the JCS. On 19 May they had recommended a new, more intensive series of covert operations for the four-month Phase II under OPLAN 34-A. 70/ On the 23rd, referring to their earlier recommendations to incorporate larger border control and retaliatory operations and overt graduated pressures in the next-phase scenario, they expressed opinions on the urgency of preparing for such actions. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to consult with the GVN so that the necessary training and joint operational preparations could take place. The JCS prodded State with the comment, "The Department of State should take the lead on this but as yet has not," at the same time recalling that the operations in question had been provided for under the approved CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 (17 April 1964). In another plea for prompt implementation, they argued that since these operations were to be plausibly deniable by the United States, "efforts to create the necessary climate of opinion should not be, of necessity, too time consuming." 71/

Figuring prominently in the retaliatory operations and the graduated pressures advocated by the JCS against North Vietnam were air strikes -- some by the VNAF alone and some in cooperation with USAF/FARMGATE and other U.S. air units. What they thought these kinds of operations could accomplish varied according to the targets struck and the composition of the attacking force. Assuming an air campaign ordered for the purpose of:

- (1) causing the DRV to stop supporting the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao and
- (2) reducing its capability to renew such support, the JCS perceived the following categories of accomplishment: Category A - They believed that undertaking "armed reconnaissance along highways leading to Laos," striking "airfields identified with supporting" the insurgents, and destroying "supply and ammunition depots, petroleum storage and military (installations) connected with PL/VC support" would result in "a reduction of DRV support." Category B - They believed that striking the "remaining airfields," destroying "important railroad and highway bridges" and "depots in northern NVN," conducting aerial mining operations, and bombing "petroleum storage in Hanoi and Haiphong" would result in a reduced "DRV military capability to take action against Laos and the RVN." Category C - They cited the remaining capability for effectively destroying the North Vietnamese industrial base. 72/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

In the same appraisal, the JCS went on to estimate the time required to achieve 85% damage against the various target categories, using different force combinations in continuous operations. For Category A, they estimated, it would take the VNAF alone more than seven months, if they could sustain combat operations that long; the VNAF plus FARMGATE B-57's would require over two months. By using, in addition, U.S. land and carrier-based air units readily available in the Western Pacific, they claimed that targets in Category A could be eliminated in only twelve days; those in all categories could be destroyed in 46 days. They added that sustaining this destruction on LOC targets would require restrikes "conducted for an indeterminate period."

The JCS were not the only Presidential advisers to sense the urgency created by the situation in Laos. Referring to "recent steps with regard to bombing operations in Laos and reconnaissance which step up the pace," Secretary Rusk cabled Ambassador Lodge to seek suggestions for ways to achieve greater solidarity in South Vietnam. He explained that in Washington, the fragility of the situation in South Vietnam was seen as an obstacle to further U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia. As he stated, "We need to assure the President that everything humanly possible is being done both in Washington and by the government of Vietnam to provide a solid base of determination from which far-reaching decisions could proceed." 73/ Lodge's reply reflected a new wrinkle in his usual proposals for prompt, but carefully masked actions. He expressed the attitude that some kind of firm action against North Vietnam by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces was the only way to bring about a significant improvement in the GVN effort. 74/ This view complemented an apparently growing belief among Presidential advisers "that additional efforts within South Vietnam by the U.S. will not prevent further deterioration there." 75/

This belief, together with the threat presented by the Pathet Lao offensive, led to a resumption of scenario development. However, in the new "crisis management" atmosphere, several new elements affected the process. One was the fact that the latest scenario was prepared as a draft memorandum for the President. Another was the expectation that it would be presented to and discussed among the principal officials of the participating agencies, serving as an Executive Committee of the National Security Council. And finally, the crisis in Laos apparently had focused advisory interest primarily on one stage -- that dealing with overt operations against North Vietnam. The scenario no longer contained a section devoted to "uncommitting steps which should be taken now." 76/ The rationale behind this shift of emphasis was explained to Ambassador Lodge, an outspoken critic of both the overt approach and the scenario, by Secretary Rusk:

"It is our present view here that [substantial initial attacks without acknowledgment] would simply not be feasible. Even if Hanoi itself did not publicize them, there are enough ICC and other observers in North Vietnam who might pick them up and there is also the major possibility

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of leakage at the South Vietnam end. Thus, publicity seems almost inevitable to us here for any attack that did significant damage." 77/

B. A New Scenario: 30 Days of Sequential Politico-Military Action

On the same day that the JCS urged that the GVN be consulted regarding preparations for border control and retaliatory operations, the new scenario of political and military actions was completed. The scenario called for a 30-day sequence of military and political pressures coupled with initiatives to enter negotiations with Hanoi (see Table 1). Military actions would not start until after "favorable action on a U. S. Congressional Joint Resolution" supporting U. S. resistance to DRV aggressions in Southeast Asia. Initially, the strikes would be carried out by GVN aircraft, but as they progressed, USAF/FARMGATE and other U. S. air units would join in. These "would continue despite negotiations, until there was clear evidence that North Vietnam had stopped its subversion of the South." The negotiating objectives would be to obtain both agreement and evidence that (1) "terrorism, armed attacks, and armed resistance stop" and (2) "communications on the networks out of the North are conducted entirely in uncoded form." 78/

Presented along with the scenario were assessments of likely communist reactions and the possible U. S. responses to these moves. The most likely military reactions to the scenario actions were seen as expanded insurgency operations, including possible "sizeable infiltration" of North Vietnamese ground forces, and a drive toward the Mekong by Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces. The Soviet Union was expected to intensify its diplomatic opposition to U. S. policies and China was expected to (1) augment North Vietnamese air defense capabilities, and (2) successfully dissuade Hanoi from any willingness (particularly after U. S. air operations began) to reduce its support of the Viet Cong. To counter communist reactions, the proposal specified in each contingency that intensified operations against North Vietnam would be the most effective option. In response to intensified insurgency, considered the least intense (though most likely) alternative available to the communist powers, the proposal included provision for augmenting South Vietnamese forces "by U. S. ground forces prepositioned in South Vietnam or on board ship nearby."

The May 23, 1964 scenario read as follows: (Table 1)

"1. Stall off any 'conference on [Laos or] Vietnam until D-Day.'

2. Intermediary (Canadian?) tell North Vietnam in general terms that U.S. does not want to destroy the North Vietnam regime (and indeed is willing 'to provide a carrot'), but is determined to protect South Vietnam from North Vietnam.

3. (D-30) Presidential speech in general terms launching Joint Resolution.

4. (D-20) Obtain Joint Resolution approving past actions and authorizing whatever is necessary with respect to Vietnam.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Concurrently: An effort should be made to strengthen the posture in South Vietnam. Integrating (interlarding in a single chain of command) the South Vietnamese and U.S. military and civilian elements critical to pacification, down at least to the district level, might be undertaken.

5. (D-16) Direct CINCPAC to take all repositioning and logistic actions that can be taken 'quietly' for the D-Day forces and the forces described in Paragraph 17 below.

6. (D-15) Get Khanh's agreement to start overt South Vietnamese air attacks against targets in the North (see D-Day item 15 below), and inform him of U.S. guarantee to protect South Vietnam in the event of North Vietnamese and/or Chinese retaliation.

7. (D-14) Consult with Thailand and the Philippines to get permission for U.S. deployments; and consult with them plus U.K., Australia, New Zealand and Pakistan, asking for their open political support for the undertaking and for their participation in the re-enforcing action to be undertaken in anticipation of North Vietnamese and/or Chinese retaliation.

8. (D-13) Release an expanded 'Jordan Report,' including recent photography and evidence of the communications nets, giving full documentation of North Vietnamese supply and direction of the Viet Cong.

9. (D-12) Direct CINCPAC to begin moving forces and making specific plans on the assumption that strikes will be made on D-Day (see Attachment B\* in backup materials for deployments).

10. (D-10) Khanh makes speech demanding that North Vietnam stop aggression, threatening unspecified military action if he does not. (He could refer to a 'carrot.')

11. (D-3) Discussions with Allies not covered in Item 7 above.

12. (D-3) President informs U.S. public (and thereby North Vietnam) that action may come, referring to Khanh speech (Item 10 above) and declaring support for South Vietnam.

13. (D-1) Khanh announces that all efforts have failed and that attacks are imminent. (Again he refers to limited goal and possibly to 'carrot.')

14. (D-Day) Remove U.S. dependents.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

15. (D-Day) Launch first strikes (see Attachment C\*\* for targets). Initially, mine their ports and strike North Vietnam's transport and related ability (bridges, trains) to move south; and then against targets which have maximum psychological effect on the North's willingness to stop insurgency -- POL storage, selected airfields, barracks/training areas, bridges, railroad yards, port facilities, communications, and industries. Initially, these strikes would be by South Vietnamese aircraft; they could then be expanded by adding FARMGATE, or U.S. aircraft, or any combination of them.

16. (D-Day) Call for conference on Vietnam (and go to UN). State the limited objective: Not to overthrow the North Vietnam regime nor to destroy the country, but to stop DRV-directed Viet Cong terrorism and resistance to pacification efforts in the South. Essential that it be made clear that attacks on the North will continue (i.e., no cease-fire) until (a) terrorism, armed attacks, and armed resistance to pacification efforts in the South stop, and (b) communications on the networks out of the North are conducted entirely in uncoded form." 79/

The scenario was circulated among members of the ExCom and discussed during their meetings of 24 and 25 May. Apparently, modifications were made in the course of these meetings, as notations in the SecDef files indicate scenario versions of 24, 25 and 26 May. In addition to the assessments that accompanied the scenario proposal, the discussants had available to them an estimate of likely consequences of the proposed actions, prepared by the Board of National Estimates, CIA, with State and DIA assistance, and concurred in by the U.S. Intelligence Board. 80/

The national estimate agreed essentially with the proposal's assessment of Soviet and Chinese reactions and concluded that Hanoi's would vary with the intensity of the U.S./GVN actions. The national intelligence boards believed that Hanoi "would order the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao to refrain from dramatic new attacks, and might reduce the level of the insurrections for the moment" in response to U.S. force deployments or GVN-USA/USAF/FARMGATE attacks. The expected DRV rationale, supported by Peking and Moscow, would be to bank on "a new Geneva Conference or UN action... [to] bring a cessation of attacks" and to stabilize communist gains in Vietnam and Laos. Communist agitation of world opinion would be employed to bring on the conference. If attacks on North Vietnam continued, the intelligence boards saw Hanoi intensifying its political initiatives, but also possibly increasing "the tempo of the insurrections in South Vietnam and Laos." If these tactics failed to produce a settlement "and North Vietnam began to suffer considerable destruction," the boards estimated:

"We incline to the view that [DRV leaders] would lower their terms for a negotiating outcome; they would do so in the interests of preserving their regime and in the expectation

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

of being able to renew the insurrections in South Vietnam and Laos at a later date. There would nevertheless be a significant danger that they would fight, believing that the U.S. would still not be willing to undertake a major ground war, or that if it was, it could ultimately be defeated by the methods which were successful against the French." 81/

In its discussion of the problem of compelling Hanoi to halt the VC insurgency, the national estimate emphasized that this depended on affecting the will of the DRV leaders. It stressed that the measures called for in the scenario "would not seriously affect communist capabilities to continue that insurrection," stating that "the primary sources of communist strength in South Vietnam are indigenous." On the other hand, it predicted that withdrawal of material assistance from North Vietnam would badly hurt the Pathet Lao capability. Because of the crucial importance of Hanoi's will, the estimate argued that the DRV "must understand that although the U.S. is not seeking the destruction of the DRV regime, the U.S. is fully prepared to bring ascending pressures to bear to persuade Hanoi to reduce the insurrections." But, while comprehending U.S. purposes in the early phase of the scenario actions, they may "tend increasingly to doubt the limited character of U.S. aims" as the scale of the attacks increases. The report adds:

"Similarly, the retaliatory measures which Hanoi might take in Laos and South Vietnam might make it increasingly difficult for the U.S. to regard its objectives as attainable by limited means. Thus difficulties of comprehension might increase on both sides as the scale of action mounted." 82/

C. Rejection of Scenario: "Use Force if Necessary"

At its meeting on 25 May, the ExCom apparently decided not to retain the scenario approach in the courses of action it would recommend to the President. At least, it abandoned the time-phasing aspects of the series of actions contained in the scenario proposal, and it made explicit its purpose not to embark on a series of moves "aimed at the use of force as an end in itself." 83/ The available evidence is far from conclusive on the reasons why the scenario approach was cast aside, but it seems clear that the potential for entering into an escalating conflict in which our limited objectives might become obscured weighed heavily in the decision.

In addition to the evidence already cited, a strong indication of the ExCom's desire to avoid the possibility of escalation is contained in the draft memorandum prepared for President Johnson, as a result of the 25 May meeting. In this memorandum, it was recommended that the President decide:

"...that the U.S. will use selected and carefully graduated military force against North Vietnam, under the following conditions: (1) after appropriate diplomatic and political warning and preparation, (2) and unless such warning and preparation -- in combination with other efforts -- should produce a sufficient improvement of non-Communist prospects in South Vietnam and in Laos to make military action against North Vietnam unnecessary." 84/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The recommendation was based on an explicit assumption "that a decision to use force if necessary, backed by resolute and extensive deployment, and conveyed by every possible means to our adversaries, gives the best present chance of avoiding the actual use of such force." Reflecting the influence of the national intelligence boards' rationale concerning "U.S. preparatory and low-scale action," the ExCom also stated the belief that "selective and carefully prepared military action against North Vietnam will not trigger acts of terror and military operations by the Viet Cong which would engulf the Khanh regime." 85/ What the ExCom meant by "selective and carefully prepared military actions" is suggested by its request, on the same day, for JCS views on the feasibility of telegraphing intended action through military deployments. 86/

Despite its abandonment of the paced scenario approach, the ExCom proposed that many of the actions incorporated in the scenario be undertaken. Although proposing a particular order for these actions, the committee suggested that the sequence may need to be modified in reaction to specific developments, especially in view of different choices available to the enemy. In addition to the Presidential decision, the recommended actions included: (1) communication of our resolve and limited objectives to Hanoi through the Canadian intermediary; (2) conducting a high-level Southeast Asian strategy conference in Honolulu; (3) diplomatic initiatives at the UN to present the case for DRV aggression; (4) formal and bilateral consultation with SEATO allies, including the question of obtaining allied force commitments; (5) seeking a Congressional Resolution in support of U.S. resistance to communist aggression in Southeast Asia; (6) periodic force deployments toward the region; and (7) an initial strike against North Vietnam, "designed to have more deterrent than destructive impact" and accompanied by an active diplomatic offensive to restore peace in the area -- including agreement to a Geneva Conference. Further, the ExCom recommended that in the execution of these actions, all functional and geographic elements "should be treated as parts of a single problem: the protection of [all] Southeast Asia from further communist encroachment." 87/

If all of the decisions and actions contained in the draft memorandum were in fact recommended to the President, all of them were not approved immediately. It is doubtful that the President made the decision to use force if necessary, since some advisers were still urging the same kind of decision on him in the weeks to follow. The plan to convey a message to Hanoi by Canadian channels was carried out on June 18, but it may have been decided on already before the meeting, given the earlier negotiations with Ottawa. 88/ The President did approve the calling of a conference in Honolulu "to review for [his] final approval a series of plans for effective action" in Southeast Asia. 89/ U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia was explained by Ambassador Stevenson in a major UN speech on 21 May. He did not address the Security Council on this subject again until 6 August, after the Tonkin Gulf episode. It is doubtful if less publicized statements at the UN contained the "hitherto secret evidence" suggested in the ExCom sessions as "proving Hanoi's responsibility" before the world diplomats. 90/ It is likely that questions of consulting with SEATO allies,

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

deploying additional forces to Southeast Asia, and requesting a congressional resolution were held in abeyance pending that meeting.

One of the kinds of developments which the ExCom thought would necessitate a flexible approach to its proposed action sequence occurred prior to the Honolulu meeting. Its effect was to remove some of the "crisis management" pressure from further policy deliberations. On 27 May, the Polish Government proposed a conference format for Laos that avoided many of the undesirable features of the Geneva proposals which had been supported by communist governments in the past. After two days of deliberations, during which time Secretary Rusk departed for Nehru's funeral in New Delhi, a policy group composed of several ExCom members determined that the United States should attempt initially "to treat [the] Lao question separately from [the] SVN-NVN problem." Reasoning that "if [a] satisfactory Lao solution [were] not achieved, [a] basis should have been laid for possible subsequent actions that would permit our dealing more effectively with NVN with respect [to] both SVN and Laos," the group decided to recommend to the President that he accept the Polish proposal. Integral to the approach would be a "clear expression of U.S. determination...that U.S. [is] not willing [to] write off Laos to [the] communists," and assurances to Souvanna Phouma "that we would be prepared to give him prompt and direct military support if the Polish Conference was [sic] not successful." 91/ With respect to our larger objectives in Southeast Asia, the proposed discussions among representatives of Laos, the I.C.C. and the Geneva co-chairmen would have the advantage of permitting Souvanna to continue to insist upon his preconditions for any resumed 14-nation conference, and would avoid the issue of Vietnam.



V. QUESTION OF PRESSURES  
AGAINST THE NORTH

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

V. The Question of Pressures Against the North

With the policy line and the courses of action for dealing with Laos determined, and with the Laotian military situation having become somewhat stabilized, the Administration turned to the broader issues of its South-east Asian policy. These were among the principal concerns of the Honolulu Conference, 1-2 June 1964.

A. The Honolulu Conference: Defining the U.S. Commitment.

The Honolulu Conference was approached with the realization that the "gravest decisions are in front of us and other governments about [the] free world's interest in and commitment to [the] security of Southeast Asia." 92/ The State Department saw such decisions focusing on three "central questions": (1) Is the security of Southeast Asia vital to the United States and the Free World? (2) Are additional steps which carry risks of escalation necessary? (3) Will the additional steps accomplish our goals of stopping intrusions of Hanoi and Peking into South Vietnam? The Conference apparently began with the answer to the first question as a basic assumption. Again State:

"Our point of departure is and must be that we cannot accept [the] overrunning of Southeast Asia by Hanoi and Peiping." 93/

In addition to considering specific proposals for improving conditions in South Vietnam (Administration officials entered the Conference with another assumption that "we must do everything in our power to stiffen and strengthen the situation in South Vietnam" 94/ ), the discussions in Honolulu were intended to help clarify issues with respect to exerting pressures against North Vietnam.

B. At Honolulu: Exerting Pressure on NVN

In preparation for the conference, CINCPAC and COMUSMACV had been asked by JCS Chairman Taylor to develop their views on such questions as:

"(1) What military actions might be taken in ascending order of gravity to impress Hanoi with our intention to strike NVN?

(2) What should be the purpose and pattern of the initial air strikes against NVN?

(3) What is your concept of the actions and reactions which may arise from the progressive implementation of CINCPAC 37-64 and 32-64? How may NVN and Communist China respond to our escalating pressures?

(4) If at some point Hanoi agrees to desist from further help to VC & PL, how can we verify fulfillment? How long should we be prepared to maintain our readiness posture while awaiting verification?

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

(5) What help should be sought from SEATO nations in relation to the situation (a) in Laos? (b) in SVN?" 95/

Just prior to the conference, the JCS also submitted their views, to which General Taylor did not subscribe. 96/ Expressing concern over "a lack of definition" of U.S. objectives, the JCS asserted that it was "their first obligation to define a militarily valid objective for South-east Asia and then advocate a desirable military course of action to achieve that objective." With its basis identified as "military considerations," they then made the recommendation that:

"...the United States should seek through military actions to accomplish destruction of the North Vietnamese will and capabilities as necessary to compel the Democratic Government of Vietnam (DRV) to cease providing support to the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos. Only a course of action geared to this objective can assure that the North Vietnamese support of the subversive efforts in Laos and South Vietnam will terminate." 97/

However, the JCS went on to note that "some current thinking appears to dismiss the objective in favor of a lesser objective, one visualizing limited military action which, hopefully, would cause the North Vietnamese to decide to terminate their subversive support..." Drawing a distinction between destroying DRV capability to support the insurgencies and "an enforced changing of policy...which, if achieved, may well be temporary," they stated their opinion that "this lesser objective" was inadequate for the current situation. They agreed, however, to undertake a course of action to achieve this lesser objective as an "initial measure."

What the JCS proposed as this "initial measure" were a pair of sustained attacks to destroy target complexes directly associated with support of the communist efforts in Laos and South Vietnam. Military installations at Vinh, which served as a major resupply facility for transshipping war materiel into Laos, and a similar facility at Dien Bien Phu were recommended. In support of these operations, which would require U.S. participation to achieve "timely destruction" as necessary to achieve the objectives, the JCS stated a need to demonstrate forcefully that our pattern of responses to Hanoi's aggression had changed. They argued:

We should not waste critical time and more resources in another protracted series of "messages," but rather we should take positive, prompt, and meaningful military action to underscore our meaning that after more than two years of tolerating this North Vietnamese support we are now determined that it will stop. 98/

Aside from the JCS, whose views were not shared by their spokesman at Honolulu, the main voices in support of the idea of attacking the North in early June 1964 seemed to come from Saigon. But this source of advocacy

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

seemed to anticipate short-term impacts on South Vietnam, rather than ultimate effects on the DRV. On the way to Honolulu, Secretary Rusk had talked with General Khanh, who argued that South Vietnam could not win against the Viet Cong without some military action outside its borders. In particular, the General urged clearing out the communist forces in eastern Laos, who might move across the border and attempt to cut South Vietnam in two, with the implication that GVN forces could carry out the task if given air support. He also favored attacks directly on North Vietnam, but said that they "should be selective and designed to minimize the chances of a drastic communist response." 99/

At the conference's initial plenary session, Ambassador Lodge also argued in favor of attacks on the North. In answer to Secretary Rusk's query about South Vietnamese popular attitudes, which supported Hanoi's revolutionary aims, the Ambassador stated his conviction that most support for the VC would fade as soon as some "counter-terrorism measures" were begun against the DRV. He urged "a selective bombing campaign against military targets in the North" and predicted this would "bolster morale and give the population in the South a feeling of unity." When asked by Mr. McCone how the political differences among Vietnamese leaders might be overcome, he stated the opinion that "if we bombed Tchepone or attacked the [NVN motor torpedo] boats and the Vietnamese people knew about it, this would tend to stimulate their morale, unify their efforts and reduce [their] quarreling." 100/

If other comments, either pro or con, were made at the plenary session about the desirability of attacking North Vietnam, they were not reflected in the record. General Westmoreland discussed the "military and security situation" in South Vietnam and apparently did not mention the potential impact of measures against the North. Similar discussions of the military situations in Laos and Cambodia apparently did not include the subject either. The discussion of North Vietnam, as indicated by the record, was limited to assessments of the DRV's military capabilities, particularly its air defenses, and their implications for the feasibility of an air attack. Policy aspects of air operations against the North were not mentioned. 101/

On the second day of the conference, possible pressures to be applied against North Vietnam were a prominent subject. However, as reported by William Bundy, the main context for the discussion was Laos -- what might have to be done in the event the current diplomatic track failed or the military situation deteriorated. Not contemplated, it seems, were initiatives against the North to relieve the current levels of pressure on Laos or South Vietnam. Rather, considerable attention was given to preliminary steps that would need to be taken in order to prepare for actions necessary within the context of a Laotian military contingency. 102/

One such step would be consultation with allies who might contribute to a ground force contingent needed for the defense of Laos. The UK and other SEATO nations were cited as particularly important contributors. The conferees agreed, however, that contingency preparations for Laos should

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

be undertaken outside the SEATO framework. As Secretary Rusk pointed out, "Souvanna Phouma might well call on individual SEATO nations for help, but was less likely to call on SEATO as an organization." Besides, the French and Pakistani were expected to be obstructive and the Philippines Government was regarded as presenting a constant threat of untimely leaks. Consensus was reached that the starting point for our bilateral consultations should be Thailand, since that government's confidence in the sincerity of the U.S. commitment seemed particularly needful of being shored up. At the meeting, Ambassador Martin echoed the themes which he had reported earlier in cables -- that the Thais were not convinced that we meant to stop the course in Southeast Asia and probably would not participate in or permit allied troop build-ups in their country without firmer assurances than had been given in the past. 103/

Another preliminary step discussed by the conferees was the desirability of obtaining a Congressional resolution prior to wider U.S. action in Southeast Asia. Ambassador Lodge questioned the need for it if we were to confine our actions to "tit-for-tat" air attacks against North Vietnam. However, Secretaries McNamara and Rusk and CIA Director McCone all argued in favor of the resolution. In support, McNamara pointed to the need to guarantee South Vietnam's defense against retaliatory air attacks and against more drastic reactions by North Vietnam and Communist China. He "added that it might be necessary, as the action unfolded...to deploy as many as seven divisions." Rusk noted that some of the military requirements might involve the calling up of reserves, always a touchy Congressional issue. He also stated that public opinion on our Southeast Asian policy was badly divided in the United States at the moment and that, therefore, the President needed an affirmation of support. 104/

Next, the discussion turned to present estimates of communist reaction to attacks on North Vietnam:

"General Taylor summarized the present Washington view, to the effect that there would certainly be stepped-up Viet Cong activity in South Vietnam, Communist Chinese air might be sent to North Vietnam, Hanoi itself might send some ground forces south (though probably only on a limited scale), and there was the final possibility that the Communist Chinese would respond with significant military action. As to the last, he made clear that he did not visualize a 'yellow horde' of Chinese pouring into Southeast Asia, and that air interdiction could have a significant effect in reducing the number of forces the Communist Chinese could send down and support...In any case, he said that the military judgment was that seven ground divisions would be needed if the Communist Chinese employed their full capabilities in the dry season, and five divisions even in the wet season. The needed five-seven divisions could come in part from the Thai and others, but a major share would have to be borne by the U.S.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

Secretary McNamara said that before we undertook attacks against the North, we certainly had to be prepared to meet threats at the level stated by General Taylor. Mr. McCone agreed with this point, but went on to say that there was a serious question about the effect of major deployments on Communist Chinese reactions. The intelligence community was inclined to the view that the more substantial the deployment, the greater the possible chance of a drastic Communist Chinese reaction. General Taylor commented that under present plans it was not contemplated that we should have deployment of all the potentially necessary forces at the outset. We were thinking along the lines of a brigade to the northern part of South Vietnam, two to three brigades to Thailand, considerable naval deployments, and some alerting of other forces in the U.S. and elsewhere. Even this, however, added up to a significant scale of activity...

Secretary McNamara noted that all this planning was on the basis that a really drastic communist reaction was possible, and was not based on any judgment that it was probable. The best current view was that appropriately limited attacks on the North would not bring in Communist Chinese air or North Vietnam or Communist Chinese ground forces. However, it was still essential that we be prepared against these eventualities.

Ambassador Lodge asked whether the Communist Chinese could not in fact mount almost any number of forces they chose. General Taylor and Admiral Felt said they could not do so and support them to the extent required...Secretary McNamara then went on to say that the possibility of major ground action also led to a serious question of having to use nuclear weapons at some point. Admiral Felt responded emphatically that there was no possible way to hold off the communists on the ground without the use of tactical nuclear weapons, and that it was essential that the commanders be given the freedom to use these as had been assumed under the various plans. He said that without nuclear weapons the ground force requirement was and had always been completely out of reach. General Taylor was more doubtful as to the existence or at least to the degree of the nuclear weapon requirement, and again the point was not really followed up.

Secretary Rusk said that another possibility we must consider would be the Soviets stirring up trouble elsewhere. We should do everything we could to minimize this risk, but it too must be considered. He went on to stress the nuclear question, noting that in the last ten years this had come to include the possibility of a nuclear exchange, with all that this involved.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

General Taylor noted that there was a danger of reasoning ourselves into inaction. From a military point of view, he said that the U.S. could function in South-east Asia about as well as anywhere in the world except Cuba. Mr. McCone made the point that the passage of the Congressional resolution would in itself be an enormous deterrent. This led to brief discussion of the text of the resolution, which was read by Mr. Sullivan...

Discussion then shifted to what the Viet Cong could do in South Vietnam if we struck the North. General Westmoreland thought there was not a significant unused Viet Cong capability, but Ambassador Lodge thought there was a major capability for terrorism and even for military action against Saigon, and that in sum the Viet Cong 'could make Saigon uninhabitable.'" 105/

Finally, the conferees dealt with the crucial question of how soon the United States and the GVN would be prepared to engage in wider military actions should the need arise. For several reasons, the consensus seemed to be that such actions should be delayed for some time yet. "Secretary Rusk thought we should not be considering quick action unless the Pathet Lao lunged toward the Mekong." Discussion yielded several things we could do in the interim to strengthen the current government position in Laos (i.e., re-equip Kong Le's neutralist forces as an aid to Phouma's FAR; back Souvanna's demand for preconditions before any reconvening of the Geneva Conference; support the RIAF T-28 operations). General Taylor pointed to the prior need to educate the American public regarding U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. Secretary McNamara thought this would require at least 30 days.

Generals Taylor and Westmoreland then listed a number of military factors that affected the question of timing, although stating that these referred to "an optimum military posture":

1. The additional Vietnamese aircraft would not be available until July for two squadrons and September for another. However, B-57's could be introduced at any time and operated on a FARMGATE basis.
2. There were logistic factors, shipping requirements, and the call-up of some logistic reserve units involved in having five-seven divisions ready for action, and these would take two months to be sorted out properly.
3. It was desirable if not essential to build up military manpower in South Vietnam. He would like to be in a position to have 12 battalions that could be freed for deployment along the Laos border.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

4. The rainy season was a factor precluding any substantial offensive in the panhandle area until mid-November.

They added that General Khanh's political base was not as strong as we wished and that it might not be so until the end of the year. This factor was also cited by other conferees as being a reason for delay. 106/

C. The Need to Refine Plans and Resolve Issues.

Immediately following the Honolulu Conference, its Chairman, Secretary Rusk, reported to President Johnson, presumably making some recommendations. Although a record of this discussion is not available, Ass't Secretary Bundy's brief to Rusk just prior to his White House meeting may provide a clue to the thrust of the Secretary's remarks. Citing a "somewhat less pessimistic estimate" of conditions in South Vietnam, the "somewhat shaky" but hopeful situation in Laos, and the military timing factors reported above, Bundy counseled taking more time "to refine our plans and estimates." Criticizing CINCPAC's presentation on military planning, he stated that it "served largely to highlight some of the difficult issues we still have." These he identified as: "(1) the likely effects of force requirements for any significant operations against the [Laotian] Panhandle"; (2) the trade-off between the precautionary advantages of a major build-up of forces prior to wider action and the possible disadvantages of distorting the signal of our limited objectives; (3) the sensitivity of estimates of communist reactions to different levels and tempos of a military build-up; and (4) the need for "more refined targeting and a clearer definition of just what should be hit and how thoroughly, and above all, for what objective." 107/

In particular, Bundy emphasized to Secretary Rusk the need for immediate efforts in the information and intelligence areas. These were needed, he said, "both for the sake of refining our plans and for preparing materials to use for eventual support of wider action if decided upon" -- particularly to support the diplomatic track in Laos. He called for "an urgent U.S. information effort" to "get at the basic doubts of the value of Southeast Asia and the importance of our stake there..." However, noting the problem of "handling the high degree of expectations flowing from the conference itself," Bundy recommended "careful guidance and consideration of high-level statements and speeches in the next two weeks" to assure that our posture appeared firm. 108/

Rusk was accompanied at the White House meeting by other high-ranking Honolulu conferees. Bundy's reactions to Honolulu were forwarded to Secretary McNamara, Mr. McCone and General Taylor prior to the meeting. 109/ Events which followed the late afternoon meeting of 3 June provide an indication of the discussion that probably occurred.



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

D. The Aftermath of Honolulu.

The importance of combining appearances of a firm posture with efforts to reduce public doubts on U.S. interests in Southeast Asia apparently struck a responsive chord in the White House. In the military area, the President apparently recognized the need for more and better information, but did not convey a sense of urgency regarding its acquisition. Possibly just following the meeting, Secretary McNamara expressed his wish to discuss North Vietnamese targets and troop movement capabilities with the JCS on 8 June. 110/ The following day, he communicated interest to the Joint Staff in obtaining "facts and statistics" on Haiphong harbor traffic; existing plans for mining the harbor; impacts of such operations on different import categories; and alternative DRV importation facilities. 111/ On the other hand, non-committing military actions which could improve our image in Southeast Asia were given immediate approval. On the same day he received the request for Haiphong mining information, the Director of the Joint Staff informed the Army of a McNamara directive calling for "immediate action...by the Army to improve the effectiveness and readiness status of its materiel prestocked for possible use in Southeast Asia." Specifically, the Secretary ordered (1) augmenting the stockage at Korat, in Thailand, to support a ROAD Infantry Brigade and (2) giving first priority at the Okinawa Army Forward Depot to stocking non-air-transportable equipment required by an airlifted ROAD Infantry Brigade. 112/ In keeping with the Administration's current policy rationale, the augmentation of contingency war stocks in Thailand was given extensive press coverage. 113/

In non-military areas, the President apparently encouraged further examination of the vital issues which impacted on national commitment and public support. Soon after the 3 June meeting, work was begun under State Department guidance to assemble information in answer to some of the prevalent public questions on Southeast Asian involvement. For example, on 10 June, the Department of Defense was asked to furnish responses to 27 questions developed in State, as a fall-out of the discussions in Honolulu. 114/ Similar questions became a frequent focus for interdepartmental correspondence and meetings in the coming weeks. Paralleling this effort was an examination of the desirability of requesting a Congressional resolution. On the same day that OSD received State's request to furnish information, an interagency meeting was held to discuss the implications which a resolution would have for the U.S. policy position and the public rationale which its acceptance would demand. The relative advantages of having or not having a resolution were also considered. 115/

To supplement recommendations coming from Honolulu, the President apparently sought additional guidance to help sort out the alternatives available to him. Soon after receiving reports from the Honolulu conference, he sent a request to Walt Rostow to prepare a public statement for him, detailing a Governmental view of U.S. policy and commitments in Southeast Asia. As most likely expected, the rationale and discussion which resulted took a more aggressive approach than the prevailing views at Honolulu and were not used. 116/ In fact, President Johnson did not deliver

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

a major policy address during the coming weeks, relying on news conferences and speeches by other officials to state the official view. In contrast to the Rostow approach, his news conference of 23 June and Secretary Rusk's speech at Williams College, 14 June, emphasized the U.S. determination to support its Southeast Asian allies, but avoided any direct challenge to Hanoi and Peking or any hint of intent to increase our military commitment. 117/

In addition, the President asked his advisers the basic question, "Would the rest of Southeast Asia necessarily fall if Laos and South Vietnam came under North Vietnamese control?" On 9 June, the Board of National Estimates, CIA, provided a response, stating:

"With the possible exception of Cambodia, it is likely that no nation in the area would quickly succumb to communism as a result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam. Furthermore, a continuation of the spread of communism in the area would not be inexorable, and any spread which did occur would take time -- time in which the total situation might change in any of a number of ways unfavorable to the communist cause." 118/

The statement went on to argue that the loss of South Vietnam and Laos "would be profoundly damaging to the U.S. position in the Far East," because of its impact on U.S. prestige and on the credibility of our other commitments to contain the spread of communism. It did not suggest that such a loss would affect the wider U.S. interest in containing overt military attacks. Our island base, it argued, would probably still enable us to employ enough military power in the area to deter Hanoi and Peking from this kind of aggression. It cautioned, however, that the leadership in Peking (as well as Hanoi) would profit directly by being able to justify its militant policies with demonstrated success and by having raised "its prestige as a leader of World Communism" at the expense of the more moderate USSR.

E. Sources of Moderate Advice

The strength of the Board's warning was weakened by two significant caveats. The first linked the estimate's less-than-alarmist view to a clearly "worst case":

"This memorandum assumes a clear-cut communist victory in these countries, i.e., a withdrawal of U.S. forces and virtual elimination of U.S. presence in Indochina, either preceded or soon followed by the establishment of communist regimes in Laos and South Vietnam. The results of a fuzzier, piecemeal victory, such as one staged through a 'neutralist' phase, would probably be similar, though somewhat less sharp and severe." 119/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

The second indicated that even in the worst case, the United States would retain some leverage to affect the outcome. They argued that "the extent to which individual countries would move away from the U.S. towards the communists would be significantly affected by the substance and manner of U.S. policy in the period following the loss of Laos and South Vietnam."

The largely moderating tone of this estimate of the degree to which U.S. vital interests were in jeopardy in Southeast Asia tended to be reinforced by the views of the President's highest-level advisers on military matters. On his way to the Honolulu Conference, CJCS Taylor had forwarded without detailed comment the JCS recommendation for courses of action in Southeast Asia. 120/ On 5 June, after his return, he submitted highly critical comments, together with his preferred alternative to the JCS proposal, to Secretary McNamara. 121/ Five days later, the Secretary communicated his approval of General Taylor's views and no doubt conveyed the flavor, if not the details, of them to the White House. 122/

The nature of these views shared by the President's two top military advisers indicates a rejection of the concept of trying to force the DRV to reverse its policies by striking North Vietnam with punishing blows. The JCS had stated the view that only by initiating military actions designed to destroy the DRV's will and capabilities could we reasonably expect to compel it to terminate its support of the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos. But they had expressed their support of certain recommended limited actions as "an initial measure" directed toward causing the DRV "to decide to terminate their subversive support." 123/ General Taylor argued that these two alternatives were not "an accurate or complete expression of our choices." He suggested three patterns from which the United States "may choose to initiate the attack on North Vietnam," in descending order or weight:

"a. A massive air attack on all significant military targets in North Vietnam for the purpose of destroying them and thereby making the enemy incapable of continuing to assist the Viet Cong and the Pathet Lao.

b. A lesser attack on some significant part of the military target system in North Vietnam for the dual purpose of convincing the enemy that it is to his interest to desist from aiding the Viet Cong and the Pathet Lao, and, if possible, of obtaining his cooperation in calling off the insurgents in South Vietnam and Laos.

c. Demonstrative strikes against limited military targets to show U.S. readiness and intent to pass to alternatives b or a above. These demonstrative strikes would have the same dual purpose as in alternative b."

Stating a personal preference for the second, he noted the probability that "political considerations will incline our responsible civilian officials to opt for [the third] alternative." Therefore, his recommendation

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

to the Secretary was that the JCS be asked to develop a strike plan based on the assumption that a decision was made to implement the third alternative. 124/

It is clear that the JCS not only preferred the larger attacks -- directed against both DRV capabilities and will -- but intended that they be implemented in the near future. However, there is no indication that the CJCS urged prompt implementation -- even of the limited measures he linked with pressures against DRV will alone. Neither view was supported with an explanation of why it was expected that the preferred course of action might be successful or with any analysis of what lesser results might lead to in the way of next steps by either side or of likely public reactions.

F. The President Decides.

The Presidential reaction to these various patterns of advice and the different assessments of national interest is not evident in the available documents. However, it can be surmised from the pattern of events surrounding the effort to obtain a Congressional resolution. As will be recalled, a resolution was recommended to the President in late May as one of a series of events to include the Canadian's mission to Hanoi, the Honolulu Conference, and consultations with allies. It also fit in with the emphasis on public information and a firm posture that stemmed from the Honolulu meeting. Its intended purpose was to dramatize and make clear to other nations the firm resolve of the United States Government in an election year to support the President in taking whatever action was necessary to resist communist aggression in Southeast Asia.

The week of 8 June saw the planning for a Congressional resolution being brought to a head. By 10 June there was firm support for it on the part of most agencies, despite recognition that obtaining it would require a vigorous public campaign, a likely requirement of which would be a "substantial increase in the commitment of U.S. prestige and power to success in Southeast Asia." Therefore, at the meeting held on that day, five basic "disagreeable questions" were identified for which the Administration would have to provide convincing answers to assure public support. 125/ These included: (1) Does this imply a blank check for the President to go to war in Southeast Asia? (2) What kinds of force could he employ under this authorization? (3) What change in the situation (if any) requires the resolution now? (4) Can't our objectives be attained by means other than U.S. military force? (5) Does Southeast Asia mean enough to U.S. national interests?

By June 12, after a temporary diversion caused by Souvanna Phouma's withdrawal and reaffirmation of permission to continue the reconnaissance flights, much of the rationale in support of the resolution was formulated. Even though the Administration did not expect "to move in the near future to military action against North Vietnam," it recognized that significant changes in the local situations in both Laos and South Vietnam were beyond

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

our control and could compel us to reconsider this position." Although our diplomatic track in Laos appeared hopeful, and our now firm escorted reconnaissance operations provided an image of U.S. resolve to complement the Polish negotiating scheme, we needed to be able to augment this posture in the event negotiations stalemated. If Souvanna were to become discouraged, or if Khanh were to view our efforts to obtain a Laotian settlement as a sign of willingness to alter our objectives, we would need additional demonstrations of our firmness to keep these leaders from being demoralized. Since additional military actions in Laos and South Vietnam did not hold much promise, actions or the strong threat of actions against the North might need to be considered. For these reasons, an immediate Congressional resolution was believed required as "a continuing demonstration of U.S. firmness and for complete flexibility in the hands of the Executive in the coming political months." 126/

A crucial interagency meeting was held at the State Department on 15 June to hold final discussions on the recommendation for a resolution to be sent to the President. The meeting was scheduled from the White House and included Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, their principal advisers on the subject, and McGeorge Bundy. 127/ On the afternoon of the meeting, a memorandum was distributed by Bundy to the participants, which provided a rather clear picture of current White House attitudes toward the resolution -- and by implication, of the President's judgment on the issue of preparing to take harder measures against North Vietnam.

The memorandum dealt with one subject only -- "actions that would remain open to us in varying combinations in the event that we do not now decide on major military operations against North Vietnam and do not now decide to seek a Congressional resolution." It then listed under the categories of "military" and "political," those actions which were within an acceptable range of U.S. capability, as follows:

"Possible military actions

- a. Reconnaissance, reconnaissance-strike, and T-28 operations in all parts of Laos.
- b. Small-scale reconnaissance strike operations, after appropriate provocation, in North Vietnam (initially VNAF?).
- c. VNAF strike operations in Laotian corridors.
- d. Limited air and sea deployments toward Southeast Asia, and still more limited ground troop movements. (Major ground force deployments seem more questionable, without a decision "to go north" in some form.)

Political actions

- a. Internationally -- a continued and increased effort to maximize support for our diplomatic track in

TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE

Laos and our political effort in South Vietnam. Higher authority particularly desires a maximum effort with our allies to increase their real and visible presence in support of Saigon.

b. Laos -- an intensive effort to sustain Souvanna and to restrain the right wing from any rash act against the French. Possible increase of direct support and assistance to Kong Le in appropriate ways.

c. South Vietnam -- rapid development of the critical province program and the information program, strengthening of country team, and shift of U.S. role from advice toward direction; emphatic and continued discouragement of all coup plots; energetic public support for Khanh Government.

d. In the U.S. -- continued reaffirmation and expanded explanation of the above lines of action, with opposition to both aggressive adventure and withdrawal, and a clear open door to selected action of the sort included in above Possible military actions." 128/

The files contain no record of the discussion that occurred at the 15 June meeting, but in this memorandum, the guidance provided from the White House was evident: Unless drastic measures were provoked from "the other side," there were still a number of political and military actions available which appeared to enable the United States to demonstrate an increasingly firm resistance without the need to risk major escalation. Moreover, such actions would not risk embarking on a depth or direction of commitment in which the United States would sacrifice policy flexibility. As the White House memorandum concluded, the actions were listed with the assumption that "defense of U.S. interests is possible, within these limits, over the next six months." 129/

TOP SECRET - Sensitive



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

VI. FOOTNOTES

1. This program was approved by President Kennedy on 11 May 1961, in NSAM 52.
2. "Program of Operations Against North Vietnam" and undated Memorandum for the President, "Operations Against North Vietnam," both attached to Krulak memo to Mr. McNamara, "North Vietnam Operations Paper," 2 January 1964 (In Vietnam 381: Jan file).
3. Attachment to Rusk letter to Secretary McNamara, "Mechanism for Political Control and Guidance of Cross-Border Operations," 11 December 1963 (In file of materials prepared for SecDef prior to SVN Conference, March 1964, CF8 - Sec VII.A.). See also Anthis memorandum for Deputy SecDef, "Division of Responsibility Between CIA and DOD for the Planning and Execution of Operation 34-A," 16 April 1964 (In Vietnam 381: Sensitive file).
4. Memorandum, "Covert Operations Against North Vietnam," December 1963, p.l. (In file of materials prepared for SecDef, "Back-up Book, Saigon Trip, 18-20 December 1963.")
5. Ibid.
6. From NSAM 273, 26 November 1963.
7. CINCPAC letter to JCS, "Combined MACV-CAS Saigon Plan for Actions Against North Vietnam," 19 December 1963. (In 092 North Vietnam, I-35033/63.)
8. Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1967), p.527.
9. "Program of Operations Against North Vietnam," 2 January 1964.
10. Agenda papers (Item E), "OPLAN 34A-64 (North Vietnam)," c. End-February 1964, p.l. (In file of papers prepared for Mr. McNaughton prior to SVN meeting, March 1964, McNaughton VI).
11. CINCPAC letter, 19 December 1962. (In 092 North Vietnam: I-35033/63.)
12. "Program of Operations Against North Vietnam," 2 January 1964, p.l.
13. Memorandum for the Director, CIA, "Probable Reactions to Various Courses of Action with Respect to North Vietnam," 30 December 1963 (Tab D to Ibid.).
14. "Program of Operations Against North Vietnam," 2 January 1964, pp. 6-7.
15. Ibid., pp. 1-2 (underlining added).



TOP SECRET - Sensitive

16. Rostow memorandum to Secretary Rusk, "Southeast Asia," 13 February 1964, p.3. (In State Dept Material, Book I.)
17. Agenda papers - "OPLAN 34A-64 (North Vietnam)."
18. SNIE 50-64, "Short-Term Prospects in Southeast Asia," 12 February 1964.
19. Rostow letter to Rusk, 13 February 1964, p.4.
20. CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Vietnam and Southeast Asia," 22 January 1964 (JCSM 46-64). (In Vietnam 381: Sensitive File.)
21. Rusk letter to Secretary McNamara, 5 February 1964. (In Vietnam 381: February file.) Also Ibid., p.3.
22. White House Memorandum for the Record, "South Vietnam," 20 February 1964. (In Vietnam 381: February file.)
23. Robert Johnson memorandum to William Sullivan, "Alternatives for Imposition of Measured Pressure Against North Vietnam," 13 March 1964. (In 092 North Vietnam: I-35316/64.)
24. Johnson memorandum to Sullivan, "Alternatives for Imposition of Measured Pressure Against North Vietnam," 19 March 1964 (with attachments). (In 092 North Vietnam: I-35343/64.)
25. SecDef memorandum to CJCS, "Vietnam," 21 February 1964. (In Vietnam 381: February file.)
26. Rusk message to Saigon Embassy and CINCPAC, 25 February 1964 (State 1307), giving agenda of Honolulu and Saigon meetings. (In McNaughton VI.)
27. These included a "White Paper" detailing Hanoi's role; a Presidential statement of our rationale and limited intent; a Congressional Resolution; and diplomatic consultations. Annex A to SecDef Memorandum to President Johnson, "South Vietnam," 16 March 1964 (U.S. Military Action Against North Vietnam -- an Analysis), pp. A-1, 2. (In "Pressures Planning," McNaughton V.)
28. Ibid., pp. A-3, A-4, A-6.
29. Ibid., pp. A-7, A-8, A-10, A-11.
30. SecDef Memorandum to President, 16 March 1964, pp. 7-8, 15.
31. SACSA, Agenda Item Number C11, "Modification of Restrictions Placed on Cross Border Operations Beyond South Vietnam's International Boundaries," 27 February 1964 (In McNaughton VI).

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

32. CJCS Memorandum for SecDef, "Steps to Improve the Situation in Southeast Asia with Particular Reference to Laos" (JCSM-159-64), 26 February 1964. (In Vietnam 381: February file.)
33. Draft Memorandum for the President, "Stabilizing the Situation in Southeast Asia," 25 February 1964. (In Vietnam 381: February file.)
34. SecDef Memo to Pres, 16 March 1964, p.18.
35. Ibid., pp. 6-7, 15, 18, Annex D.
36. NSAM 288, 17 March 1964.
37. JCS msg to CINCPAC, "Planning Actions, Vietnam," 18 March 1964 (JCS 5390). (In "South Viet-Nam Back-up Material for 12 McNamara Recommendations, as of 8 May 1964," CF9 - Sec 12.)
38. "Recommendation No. 12 -- Status Report on 12 Recommendations," 5 May 1964. (In file of materials assembled for Secy McNamara prior to Saigon Conference, May 1964, CF10 - Sec 3.)
39. William Bundy (Ass't Sec. of State) letter to Ambassador Lodge, 4 April 1964 (Section C in "Pressures Planning," McNaughton V).
40. "Political Scenario in Support of Pressures on the North (Third Draft)," 31 March 1964 (Section B in McNaughton V). Also referred to as Tab A in the Bundy letter to Lodge, 4 Apr 1964.
41. Rostow memo to W. Sullivan, "The External Element in Vietnam," 26 February 1964. (In Vietnam 381: February file.)
42. Lt. Gen. J. F. Carroll memo for SecDef, "North Vietnamese Support to the Viet Cong and the Pathet Lao," 29 February 1964. (In Vietnam 381: February file.)
43. JCSM-159-64, 26 February 1964.
44. JCSM-46-64, 22 January 1964.
45. CJCS memo to SecDef, "Removal of Restrictions for Air and Ground Cross-Border Operations," 2 March 1964 (JCSM-168-64). (In Vietnam 381: Sensitive file.)
46. "Political Acceptability of Cross-Border Operations Involving Laos and Cambodia," attachment to Rusk letter to McNamara, 11 December 1963. (In "SecDef : South Vietnam March Conference," Vol II, CF8 - Part VII.)
47. CIA msg to OSD, 10 December 1963. This policy view prevailed, as Secretary McNamara decided, on 21 December, not to recommend operations across the Laotian border. See CIA memo for SecDef, et al, "Operations into Laos," 7 February 1964. (In CF8 - Part VI.)

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

48. Vientiane Embassy msg to SecState, 1 March 1964 (Vientiane 927).  
(In CF8 - Part VI.)
49. Vientiane Embassy msg to SecState, 13 December 1963 (State 682).  
(In CF8 - Part VI.)
50. CJCS memo to SecDef, "Vietnam," 2 March 1964 (JCSM-174-64). (In  
Vietnam 381 : Sensitive file.)
51. Lodge msg to SecState, 17 March 1964 (State 1767). (In Vietnam 381:  
16-31 March file.)
52. President's msg to Ambassador Lodge, 17 March 1964 (State 1454).  
(In Dept of State Material, Book I.)
53. Ibid. See also Lodge msg to President, 15 March 1964 (State 1757).
54. President's msg to Ambassador Lodge, 20 March 1964 (State 1484).
55. Tab A, Bundy letter to Lodge, 4 April 1964.
56. Scenario drafts prepared on 31 March, 8 April, 17 April and 20 April.  
(In "Pressures Planning," McNaughton V.)
57. Clay memo to Ass't SecDef (ISA), "Political Scenario on Vietnam,"  
13 April 1964 (w/attachments). (In "Pressures Planning," McNaughton V.)
58. SecDef memo for Chairman, JCS, "Draft Scenarios for Recommendation 12  
(NSAM 288)," 23 April 1964. (In Vietnam 381 : 16-30 April file.)
59. Saigon Embassy Conference Memo, "Meeting of April 19, 1964," 22 April  
1964. (In Dept of State Material, Vol I.)
60. Lodge msg to President Johnson, 20 February 1964 (State 1594);  
Lodge msg to McGeorge Bundy, 15 March 1964 (State 1757).
61. All in Embassy Conference Memo, 22 April 1964.
62. Ibid.
63. "Summary of Rusk's Recommendations for Additional Steps in South Viet-  
nam," 20 April 1964. (In CF10 - Yellow Tab.)
64. Rostow memo to Secretary Rusk, "On How Much Flesh and Blood Can Stand:  
Laos and Vietnam," 23 April 1964. (In Vietnam 381 : 16-30 April file.)
65. Lodge msg to President Johnson, 15 May 1964 (State 2212). (Excerpt  
in back-up notebook.)
66. CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Draft Scenarios for Recommendation 12  
(NSAM 288)," 16 May 1964, JCSM-422-64. (In Vietnam 381 : 16-30 May  
file.)

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

67. Khanh's proposals were reported in Lodge msg to Secretary of State, 4 May 1964 (Saigon 2108). (In CF10 - Orange Tab)
68. Talking Paper for Secretary of Defense, "General Khanh's Conversation with Lodge," 7 May 1964. (In Vietnam 381: 1-15 May file)
69. Baltimore Sun, 22 May 1967.
70. JCSM-426-64, referred to in McNaughton memorandum to Deputy SecDef, "North Vietnam Operations," 25 May 1964. (In Vietnam 381: 16-31 May file)
71. CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Readiness to Implement NSAM 288," 23 May 1964 (JCSM-445-64). (In Vietnam 381: 16-31 May file)
72. CJCS memorandum for SecDef, "Air Campaign Against North Vietnam," 30 May 1964 (JCSM-460-44). (In Vietnam 381: 16-31 May file)
73. Rusk msg to Ambassador Lodge, 21 May 1964 (State 2027).
74. Lodge msg to Secretary Rusk, 26 May 1964 (State 2318). (Excerpt in Back-up Notebook)
75. From a draft memorandum to President Johnson, "Scenario for Strikes on North Vietnam," 23 May 1965. (In State Dept Material, Vol I)
76. Ibid.
77. Rusk msg to Ambassador Lodge, 22 May 1964 (State 2049). (In file of materials prepared for Secretary McNamara, "Honolulu Conference on Southeast Asia," CF11)
78. Draft memorandum to President, 23 May 1964.
79. Memo for Record, "Possible Items for Back-up Book," 27 May 1964. (In Vietnam 381: 16-31 May file)
80. SNIE 50-2-64, "Probable Consequences of Certain U.S. Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos," 25 May 1964.
81. Ibid., pp. 2-3
82. Ibid., pp. 5-6 (underlining added)
83. McGeorge Bundy memorandum to Secretary Rusk, et.al., "Draft - Basic Recommendation and Projected Course of Action on Southeast Asia," 25 May 1964 (w/Attachment). (In State Dept Material, Vol I)
84. Attachment to Ibid., p. 1
85. Ibid., pp. 1-2

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

86. CJCS memorandum to SecDef, "Scenario for Strikes on North Vietnam (Noise Levels - Telegraphing Actions)," 30 May 1964 (JCSM-469-64). (In Vietnam 381 : Sensitive file.)
87. Attachment to Bundy memorandum to Rusk, 25 May 1964, pp. 2-5, passim.
88. Canadian delegation (Saigon) msg to Dept of State, 20 June 1964. (In Vietnam 381 : 11-30 June 1964.)
89. President's msg to Ambassador Lodge, 26 May 1964 (State 2087). (In CF11.)
90. Attachment to Bundy memorandum to Rusk, 25 May 1964, p.3.
91. State msg to Secretary Rusk (New Delhi Embassy), 29 May 1964 (State TOSEC 36). See also Ball msg to diplomatic posts, 29 May 1964 (State Circular 2229). (In CF11.)
92. State msg to Saigon and New Delhi Embassies, 27 May 1964 (State 2095). (In CF11.)
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. Taylor msg to Admiral Felt and General Harkins, 28 May 1964 (JCS 2625-64). (In CF11.)
96. Taylor memorandum to SecDef, "Transmittal of JCSM-471-64, 'Objectives and Courses of Action -- Southeast Asia,'" 2 June 1964 (CM-1450-64). (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June 1964.)
97. JCS memorandum to SecDef, "Objectives and Courses of Action -- Southeast Asia," 2 June 1964 (JCSM-471-64). (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June 1964.)
98. Ibid.
99. Rusk (CINCPAC) msg to State, "Highlights of General Khanh Conversation with Secretary, May 31," 2 June 1964 (SECTO 37). (In State Dept Material, Vol I.)
100. Enclosure to CINCPAC letter to SecDef, "Summary Record of Plenary Session, Special Meeting on Southeast Asia, 1-2 June 1964," 8 June 1964. (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June file.)
101. Ibid.
102. Wm. Bundy Memo for Record, "Tuesday Afternoon Session in Honolulu, June 2, 1964," 3 June 1964. (In State Dept Material, Vol I.)
103. Ibid., pp. 2-4, passim.

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

104. Ibid., p.4.
105. Ibid., pp. 4-7.
106. Ibid., pp. 7-9.
107. Wm. Bundy memorandum to Secretary Rusk, "Highlights of Honolulu Conference," 3 June 1964. (In State Dept Material, Vol I.)
108. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
109. Bundy note to Secretary McNamara, General Taylor, Mr. McCone, with Ibid. attached, 3 June 1964. (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June file.)
110. SecDef Mil Ass't memorandum to Chairman, JCS, 3 June 1964. (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June file.)
111. SecDef Mil Ass't memorandum to General Burchinal, 4 June 1964. (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June file.)
112. Burchinal memorandum to Army Chief of Staff, "Actions Stemming from Honolulu Meeting, 1-2 June 1964," 4 June 1964 (DJSM-941-64). (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June file.)
113. See New York Times, 21 June 1964.
114. Manning memorandum to Secretary McNamara, "Southeast Asia Information Requirements," 10 June 1964. (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June file.)
115. Memorandum for discussion, "Alternative Public Positions for U.S. on Southeast Asia for the Period July 1 - November 15," 10 June 1964. (In State Dept Material, Vol I.)
116. Rostow memorandum to President Johnson, "Southeast Asia: June 6, 1964," (w/Attachment: Draft Presidential Statement -- Southeast Asia). (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June file.)
117. See Washington Post, 15 June 1964, for coverage of the Rusk speech; New York Times, 24 June 1964, for the President's news conference.
118. Kent memorandum for Director, CIA, "Would the Loss of South Vietnam and Laos Precipitate a 'Domino Effect' in the Far East?" - 9 June 1964, pp. 1-2. (In State Dept Material, Vol I.)
119. Ibid., p.2.
120. CM-1450-64, 2 June 1964.
121. Taylor memorandum to SecDef, "Comments of the CJCS on JCSM-471-64, Objectives and Courses of Action -- SEA," 5 June 1964 (CM-1451-64). (In Vietnam 381 : 1-10 June 1964 file.)

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

TOP SECRET - Sensitive

122. McNamara memorandum to CJCS, 10 June 1964.
123. JCSM-471-64, 2 June 1964.
124. CM-1451-64, 5 June 1964.
125. Memorandum for discussion, 10 June 1964.
126. Wm. Bundy memorandum to discussants, "Probable Developments and the Case for a Congressional Resolution," 12 June 1964, pp. 1-6, passim. (In State Dept Material, Vol I.)
127. McGeorge Bundy memorandum to SecState and SecDef, 15 June 1964 (w/attachments). (In Vietnam 381 : 11-30 June 1964 file.)
128. Memorandum for meeting on June 15, 1964, "Elements of a Southeast Asian Policy that Does Not Include a Congressional Resolution," 15 June 1964. (In Vietnam 381 : 11-30 June 1964 file.)
129. Ibid., p.2.