



**FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES**  
**Indochina Volumes 1945-1976**  
**Volume Summaries**

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
 Washington

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## Index of Volume Summaries

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*Since 1861, the Department of State's documentary series Foreign Relations of the United States has constituted the official record of the foreign policy and diplomacy of the United States. A staff of historians in the Office of the Historian collects, arranges, and annotates the principal documents comprising the record of American foreign policy. Volumes in the Foreign Relations series are published when all necessary editing, declassification, and printing steps have been completed. In 2006 the Nixon Administration volumes were just beginning to be published.*

RADIX Press has collected those Volumes pertaining to the Vietnam War on a single CD ROM. This remarkable collection of over 11,000 individual documents on the Vietnam War, in its printed form, probably does not get the scrutiny it deserves. Some researchers, myself included, were probably daunted by painstakingly done, but inconsistent individual indexes in the original paper volumes available in most public libraries. Those volumes available on the internet had a slow and limited search capability. The PDF format used on the CD ROM takes advantage of the full text search available through Acrobat Reader.

The volumes collected cover the period from 1945 through 1976; seven more Nixon volumes are yet unpublished, some still far into the future. In selecting the volumes to be included, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand are all included, since the theater of operations encompassed all those territories. Vietnam should not be studied in a geographical vacuum.

As near as I can tell, Volume Summaries began to be prepared around 1992. (It may be that anything older than that has been retired, but, in any event, I was unable to obtain them. Thanks to the Historian at the Department of State, this collection of summaries is offered both as a finding aid and to encourage users to make reference to the original, whether in book, internet or CD format.

*Stephen Sherman*  
*Houston, Texas, 2006*

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### **1945-1953, Harry S. Truman**

- 1945 vol. VI, The British Commonwealth, The Far East (1969)
- 1946 vol. VIII, The Far East (1971)
- 1947 vol. VI, The Far East (1972)
- 1948 vol. VI, The Far East and Australasia (1974)
- 1949 vol. VII, The Far East and Australasia, Part 1 (1975)
- 1950 vol. VI, East Asia and the Pacific (1976)
- 1951 vol. VI, Asia and the Pacific, Part 1 (1978)

### **1953-1961, Dwight D. Eisenhower**

#### **1952-1954**

- vol. XIII, Indochina (1982)
- vol. XVI Geneva Conference (1981)

#### **1955-1957**

- vol. I, Vietnam (1985)
- vol. XXI, East Asian Security; Laos; Cambodia (1990)
- vol. XXII, Southeast Asia (1989)

**1958-1960**

vol. I, Vietnam (1986)

vol. XV, East Asia Regional; Laos; Cambodia (1992)

vol. XVI, SE Asia, Thailand (1994)

**Microfiche Supplements**

vol. XV/XVI, Part 1, Burma; Malaya-Singapore; East Asia Region; Cambodia (1993)

vol. XV/XVI, Part 2, Laos (1993)

**1961-1963, John F. Kennedy**

vol. I, Vietnam, 1961 (1988)

vol. II, Vietnam, 1962 (1990)

vol. III, Vietnam, January-August 1963 (1991)

vol. IV, Vietnam, August-December 1963 (1991)

vol. XXIII, Southeast Asia (1995)

vol. XXIV, Laos Crisis (1994)

**Microfiche Supplements**

vol. XXII/XXIV, Northeast Asia; Laos (1997)

(Volumes [in blue](#) are summarized here)

**1963-1968, Lyndon B. Johnson**

vol. I, Vietnam, 1964 (1992)

vol. II, Vietnam, January-June 1965 (1996)

vol. III, Vietnam, July-December 1965 (1996)

vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966 (1998)

vol. V, Vietnam, 1967 (2002)

vol. VI, Vietnam, 1968 (2002)

vol. VII, Vietnam, 1968 (2003)

vol. XXVII, Mainland Southeast Asia; Regional Affairs (2000)

vol. XXVIII, Laos (1998)

**1969-1976 Richard M. Nixon**

vol. I, 1969-1972, Foundations of Foreign Policy (2005)

**VOLUMES PLANNED FOR PUBLICATION IN 2006 AND LATER**

vol. VI, 1969–1976, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970 (2006)

vol. XX, 1969–1976, Southeast Asia, 1969-1972

vol. VII, 1969–1976, Vietnam, 1970-1971

vol. VIII, 1969–1976, Vietnam, 1971-1972

vol. IX, 1969–1976, Vietnam, 1972-1973

vol. X, 1969–1976, Vietnam, 1973-1975

vol. E-12, 1969–1976, East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976 (electronic volume)

(Volumes [in blue](#) are summarized here)

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## Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960

### Volume XV, South and South East Asia

### Volume Summary

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Following is a summary of the contents of print volume XV, South and Southeast Asia. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text. Volume XV, published in 1992, is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office.

#### *South Asia Region*

There was broad agreement among U.S. leaders that India was by far the most important country in the South Asia region. A government-wide policy paper adopted in August 1959 stated that a "strong, stable, even though neutral, India" was better than a weak India. While President Dwight D. Eisenhower "hoped that India would some day become a great counter-weight to Communist China, he did not believe that we should now base our policy on this specific objective." Assistance to India was to be without strings in the interest of long-term regional stability. (2, 6) Even the U.S. policy of giving aid to private rather than state-owned enterprises abroad was modified in the case of India. (4)

Policy toward Pakistan was sharply different. A longstanding formal military ally of the United States, made its facilities available for some important U.S. military functions. Pakistan exerted constant pressure for the substantial military assistance it believed it deserved in return. The United States, not wanting to intensify the India-Pakistan arms race, adopted a program of limited modernization — replacement for reasons of obsolescence only, rather than increase — of Pakistan arms. (5) This policy, once adopted, proved difficult to implement fully.

Integrating bilateral policies toward remaining countries in the area into a coordinated regional approach presented additional problems. The United States wished to assist Afghanistan from becoming completely dependent on the Soviet Union, while at the same time it sought informally to discourage Afghan support for ethnic Afghan elements in Pakistan. In Nepal the United States recognized India's special position as an influential neighbor, but desired to preserve Nepal's continued independence. U.S. policy in Ceylon sought to bolster its economy with modest aid while getting along with a succession of neutralist governments. (6)

#### *Efforts To Promote Peaceful Relations Between India and Pakistan*

The formulation and presentation to India and Pakistan of a "package plan" for settling major disputes between the two countries occupies the first section of this compilation. The "package" as presented (after coordination with the United Kingdom (28, 29)) in letters in May 1958 from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Nehru of India and President Mirza of Pakistan included a proposal to offer the "friendly assistance" of the United States in India-Pakistan negotiations for the combined settlement of the longstanding Kashmir and Indus Waters disputes and for the prevention of an arms race between Pakistan and India. (34, 36) The "limited modernization" program for military assistance to Pakistan was part of the plan for limiting the arms race. The United States was also prepared to support an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) loan to encourage settlement of the Indus Waters dispute. Although willing to reiterate publicly its U.N. Charter pledge to come to the assistance of either country in the event of aggression, the United States stopped short of a guarantee of the two countries' borders. (8, 12, 26)

Reception of the package plan was disappointing to U.S. policymakers. While Pakistan seemed receptive to U.S. advice to delay reintroducing the Kashmir issue in the United Nations (40, 41), a step the United States believed would undercut any prospect of an India-Pakistan settlement (16, 17), Nehru categorically rejected the package plan. He replied to Eisenhower that all Pakistan Governments based policy on "hatred against India" and that all the specific disputes between India and Pakistan were the result and not the cause of this hatred. Third party negotiations were no solution because the "aggressor" (Pakistan) would be put on the same level as the victim. (44)

The Embassy in Karachi tried unsuccessfully to persuade officials in Washington to put financial pressure on India. (46-52) Pakistan's Prime Minister Noon met with Nehru to no result. (54)

Some progress did gradually materialize, although not in the manner envisaged in the package plan. The IBRD negotiations with both powers on an Indus waters settlement continued on their ponderous and majestic course, warmly supported by the United States, which made a tentative \$500 million long-term grant and loan commitment to the project as its part of the bargain. An Indus Waters settlement was achieved in September 1960. (35, 59-60, 66-67, 69, 74, 76-78, 82, 84-85, 92-93, 95-96, 97-99) Simultaneously Pakistan and India made some progress in their several border disputes. (81, 83, 85, 90)

President Eisenhower retained a deep personal interest in the affairs of the subcontinent. He voiced the hope that Chinese activity in Tibet and potential to cause trouble in Nepal would bring India and Pakistan together. (68) He was reported as believing that the subcontinent's legitimate needs for foreign assistance were "far greater than the United States could meet." (94) During his visit to the subcontinent in December 1959 he did his best to bring about a mutual Pakistan-India declaration that they would peacefully resolve all disputes short of war. This time, it was Pakistan that balked. (88-89)

At the end of the period, the Policy Planning Staff noted the Indus Waters settlement and what it saw as an improved atmosphere in India-Pakistan relations, and held out some hope that these developments might enhance prospects for a Kashmir settlement that would include partition. (99)

#### *Afghanistan*

The object of U.S. policy in Afghanistan was to keep it neutral in the Cold War. Department officials believed Afghanistan was important despite its remoteness, for if "the Russians were in effective control of Afghanistan, they would have driven a wedge between Iran and Afghanistan, be within three hundred miles of the port of Karachi, and be in a position to stir up trouble among all the tribal peoples of Pushtunistan along the Afghanistan-Pakistan" border. Both Pakistan and Iran would be under pressure to accommodate themselves to Soviet power. (105)

During the 1958-1960 period, Afghanistan, under Prime Minister Sardar Mohammad Daud, was gambling that it could receive heavy Soviet aid and Soviet moral support in its drive for ethnic autonomy for the Pushtu areas of Pakistan without becoming subject to Soviet hegemony. In a visit to Washington in June 1958, Daud stated that his country was so poor that it was willing to accept aid from any friendly nation; its friendship with the Soviet Union did not diminish Afghanistan's friendly feelings toward the United States. President Eisenhower assured Daud that the United States "respected completely the middle position of Afghanistan" and would continue to do what it could to help. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles took the same general line but strongly cautioned Daud regarding the potential pitfalls of its relationship with the Soviets. (106-112)

The United States had limited bargaining power in its efforts to keep Afghanistan neutral. The aid program was small, loan-based, slow-moving and, in the opinion of many U.S. officials, poorly administered. The Soviet program was largely grant-based and apparently capable of moving more quickly. (118, 132, 145, 148-149, 154-155, 166-170)

U.S. efforts to encourage better relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, were hindered by the U.S.-Pakistan alliance and U.S. commitment (along with the United Kingdom) to the existing border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Durand Line. Toward the end of the period, President Eisenhower promised Foreign Minister Naim that he would take "another look" at the Pushtu problem, but was unable to come up with any policy initiative satisfactory to Afghanistan. (114-115, 124, 127-131, 141, 146-147, 161-164, 171-178)

The United States was able to make some headway in improving its aid program (169-170), and in December 1959 President Eisenhower made a one-day visit to Kabul where he was warmly received by King Zahir Shah and his ministers and by the populace at large. The President urged his Afghan colleague to be neutral with all his neighbors, Pakistan as well as the Soviet Union. (151) The President was not optimistic. He subsequently told President Francisco Franco of Spain that Afghanistan was the poorest country he had ever seen, that its government was hopelessly oligarchic, that Soviet encroachment into the country appeared well-advanced, and that he believed that "in time" Afghanistan "would be likely to become Soviet dominated." (153)

*Ceylon (Sri Lanka)*

Documents in this compilation reflect growing U.S. concern over economic and political instability in Ceylon, which intensified after the assassination of Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in September 1959. Both Bandaranaike's and successor governments followed a neutral course in the Cold War. The Embassy in

Colombo criticized Ceylonese neutrality as "one of expediency and not of principle," designed to extract economic assistance from both Communist nations and the West. (187) A series of U.S. intelligence estimates stressed that the economy had potential and would have been fundamentally sound if it had not been severely mismanaged. The estimates also show U.S. apprehension regarding the strength and vigor of the various left-wing parties in Ceylon. (182, 188, 192) Ceylonese officials desired to receive budgetary aid, but the Department of State tried to steer them in the direction of long-range grant aid. (184-186)

Overall, the United States wanted to maintain friendly relations with Ceylon but because of the unstable political and economic situation, would not identify itself with any particular government there. After the assassination, the Embassy reported on the weak government of his first successor (193, 195). In July 1960 Bandaranaike's widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, became Prime Minister. The compilation ends with the vigorous opposition of the United States to Mrs. Bandaranaike's proposal to establish a government-owned corporation to control the petroleum industry in Ceylon. (196-198)

### *India*

The India compilation documents primarily the U.S. policy of furnishing India, because of its size and regional influence, with substantial development aid despite its cordial relations with the Soviet Union and India's refusal to align itself with Western policies.

The period opens with the United States and the Inter-national Bank for Reconstruction and Development putting the final touches on a \$225 million aid package to India, including \$75 million from the Development Loan Fund and an Export-Import Bank credit of \$150 million for the import of capital equipment. (199-202, 204) U.S. officials, however, regarded these sums as a drop in the bucket considering India's realistic needs. Somehow it needed to secure at least \$500 million in additional foreign exchange. (205-206, 209) Eugene Black, President of the IBRD, however, wanted India to scale down its development plans. (211-213) In August 1958 the IBRD and the "India Club" of participating countries (including also the United Kingdom, West Germany, Canada, and Japan) agreed on a \$350 million package to supply India's balance-of-payments needs through the winter of 1959. (214-216)

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker stressed in a view that was also the concern of the Department of State and the Eisenhower administration, that India, "as the only large country in Asia being governed by democratic principles," was the "key to the direction things will take in this part of the world." Therefore it was "not in the U.S. interest to see India's economy collapse notwithstanding divergencies in foreign policy." In March 1959, the participating countries indicated their willingness to contribute another \$175 million in aid to India's development program for the fiscal year to end in March 1960. (223)

Support for aid to India had to overcome the distrust of many U.S. officials for the socialistic tendency of the dominant wing in the ruling Congress Party. Clarence Randall, a former steel executive who was a Special Assistant in the White House, proposed a U.S. Government loan to build a steel mill desired by India. The Embassy in New Delhi advocated its construction, but on the condition that the mill be offered to private American companies for operation on a profit-sharing basis. Secretary of Commerce Frederick Mueller also joined in the call for private-sector participation. Ambassador Bunker was adamant that the United States modify its ideological stance in the case of India, and his views were supported in principle by President Eisenhower (although eventually neither the U.S. Government nor American firms participated in financing or operating the mill). (4, 236, 239-240)

U.S. intelligence analysts feared that a breakdown in the development program would lead to instability, which would in turn "result in India's becoming increasingly vulnerable to extremist, especially Communist, influences." (217) In the Indian state of Kerala, a Communist government had caused the United States considerable anxiety since 1957. Following the Indian central government's removal of the Communist cabinet in mid-1959, however, a coalition of anti-Communist parties won a big victory in elections held in the winter of 1960. The number of Communist seats in Kerala's parliament was sharply reduced, and the new coalition took power despite an increase in the Communist popular vote. (235, 238, 250, 252, 254)

Of even more concern to the United States was the Soviet Union's massive economic offensive in India. Just as in Afghanistan, U.S. officials were dismayed by the apparent flexibility and rapidity of the Soviet aid program and by the high proportion of outright grant aid. They realized, however, that the private sector was

still dominant in India, that both Hindus and Moslems had religious hostility to Communism, and that the use of English among the educated classes prolonged and reinforced their cultural orientation toward the West. (228, 233, 237)

Soviet Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev's visit in February 1960, the occasion of the announcement of an additional \$375 million Soviet aid package, was less well received than his visit in 1955, and he was much less enthusiastically received than was President Eisenhower in December 1959. (253) While the policy initiative regarding the Pakistan-India dispute resulting from the President's trip was unsuccessful, his popular reception was not only a personal triumph, it indicated substantial good will toward the United States among the Indian people. (246--248, 256)

Toward the close of the period, U.S.-Indian relations were clouded by India's wish to purchase Soviet helicopters. The U.S. Embassy and the Department of Defense wanted the United States to compete by offering U.S. helicopters to India; the Department of State feared that the ante would rise continuously in this sort of competition. (264-265; 271 272) The problem was unresolved at the end of the period.

### *Nepal*

The documentation shows the United States endeavoring to help Nepal, with modest amounts of aid and with political advice, to act as a counterweight to Soviet influence in the country while avoiding any challenge to Nepal's close relationship with India. King Mahendra of Nepal appreciated U.S. aid but made clear that he would accept aid from the Soviets too. (273) This did not prevent U.S. officials attempting to persuade the Nepalese to forgo certain forms of Soviet aid. (276, 277, 279) From the United States, the Nepalese Government wanted direct financial assistance, an approach that Secretary Dulles and President Eisenhower discouraged in favor of long-term projects in support of the economy and surveys of overall Nepalese needs. (275, 284) As part of a program to project a more visible presence in Nepal, the United States in September 1959 appointed its first Ambassador accredited solely to Nepal. (282)

The United States also hoped to encourage the growth of democratic institutions in Nepal. While disapproving of Nepalese neutralism, it chose to accept it and work within its limitations. It believed that the government was fundamentally pro-Western. (281) aid that the growing electoral strength of the Congress Party was improving the prospect of stable government and a gradual transition to democracy. (283) Partly to encourage this trend, and also as part of the competition with the Soviets, the United States invited King Mahendra to visit Washington, which he did in April 1960. (284)

U.S. hopes for a smooth democratization of Nepal, however, ended abruptly with the King's swift deposition of Congress Party Prime Minister B.P. Koirala in a bloodless coup in December 1960. While there had been some complaints of corruption in the Congress government, the Embassy in Katmandu reported that Mahendra's motive for the coup was "preservation of the monarchy and the Shah dynasty in its absolute form, nor did the coup seem to have any element of anti-Americanism in its makeup. (289)

### *Pakistan*

In the South Asian region, the United States was most closely aligned during this period with Pakistan, its partner in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and its associate in the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). The United States maintained this alliance relationship unimpaired after the governmental takeover in October 1958, first by President Mirza and then by General, later President, Ayub Khan, despite some initial qualms by U.S. officials about the nature of the new regime. In the Embassy's first reaction, a "semblance of democracy [had] been replaced by a semblance of dictatorship." (325) A later and more measured Embassy assessment was that, on the plus side, a strong and unified government had taken charge without bloodshed and with a stated goal of restoring democracy in some "limited" form. On the minus side, freedom of speech and other basic liberties had disappeared, and a police state was possibly in the making. (328) Department of State officials consoled themselves with the hope that "a government can be established which is essentially based on the consent of the governed" and that the form which it took "would appear to be of secondary importance." (333)

Even before the coup, however, the United States was undertaking to moderate the amount of military aid it was giving to Pakistan by adopting a policy of "limited modernization." U.S. military aid to Pakistan was originally designed to achieve the goals of "establishing a favorable psychological climate for the Baghdad

Pact," to provide indigenous forces for potential "defense of the free world," and to obtain U.S. facilities in Pakistan. While these objectives had been achieved, it was also obvious that the Soviet push in the South Asia area was at least as much economic as military. (351, 353) It was also obvious that aid to Pakistan was antagonizing India. Hence the limited modernization program, which proposed to replace but not increase existing Pakistani capabilities. (359) The United States had extreme difficulty in implementing this policy due to repeated Pakistani requests for weapons, the Embassy's strong endorsement of these requests, and U.S. fears of losing its alliance relationship with and facilities in Pakistan. (358, 364, 370, 388–389, 391) In particular, the United States felt forced to approve the sale of Sidewinder missiles and F-104 jet fighters not originally within the limited modernization rubric. (371–372, 378–380, 391)

The compilation closes with Ayub's expression of his apprehensions regarding the possible pro-India stance of President-elect Kennedy. (394)

### *The Philippines*

The visit of Philippine President Carlos P. Garcia to Washington in June 1958 was the occasion of a concerted Philippine effort to increase the level of aid. Garcia stated to President Eisenhower his belief that "the only way of convincing the masses that they should support democratic institutions is to give them a certain measure of economic stability." (414) The Philippine Government sought programs for improvement of agricultural productivity and construction of public utilities, a total of \$229 million over 3 years. The package worked out by the United States was on an annual basis only, but was over \$100 million. Garcia remained ostensibly unhappy that a 3-year figure of over \$200 million could not be announced. (415–418)

After Garcia's visit, the attention of both countries turned to base negotiations involving the important U.S. naval installation at Subic Bay and Clark Air Force Base. For many months these negotiations were impeded by leaks from the Philippine side. (429–430) Significant issues included the Philippine request for reduction of the term of the base agreement, delimitation of the bases boundaries, extent of permissible base utilization by the United States in situations not covered by the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty, and criminal jurisdiction over U.S. servicemen and Philippine nationals working on the bases.

In August 1959 Ambassador Charles Bohlen and Philippine Foreign Minister Federico Serrano reached an Interim Agreement on Bases. The United States gave up, among other areas, the town of Olongapo, whose transfer was completed by the end of the year. (447) In October 1959 Bohlen and Serrano signed a Memorandum of Agreement on Consultation, Duration and Mutual Defense. The United States reluctantly agreed to Philippine insistence that the duration of the bases agreement should be reduced from 99 to 25 years and accepted a new consultation formula giving the Philippines greater control over U.S. use of the bases. The United States, however, did not meet the request for a more sweeping commitment to Philippine defense based on the language of the North Atlantic Treaty, nor did it go as far as the Philippines wished in additional requests for military assistance. (420–423, 425, 428, 433–435, 438, 442, 447) (The Memorandum of Agreement was not formalized until the signature of the Rusk-Ramos Agreement in 1966.) In 1960 Bohlen's successor, John D. Hickerson, and Serrano initiated a new series of talks on the criminal jurisdiction issue (455) that extended into 1961.

In June 1960 President Eisenhower visited the Philippines as part of an East Asian tour. (451) In a general assessment at the close of 1960, the Embassy in Manila reported that it believed ultranationalism was on the wane and pro-Americanism on the rise in the Philippines. (456)

### *Thailand*

The main aim of U.S. policy was to give Thailand sufficient economic and military aid to consolidate close U.S. ties with Sarit Thanarit, who dominated the Thai Government informally through his military posts prior to becoming Prime Minister early in 1959. Thailand desired a reaffirmation of existing U.S. security guarantees to Thailand and the joint formulation of procedures for bilateral consultation in case the civil war in Laos resulted in aggression against Thailand.

During a lengthy visit to the United States in the first half of 1958, Sarit made repeated appeals to U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Dulles and President Eisenhower, for a higher level of aid. (470–471, 474–476) Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson strongly supported a higher level to strengthen political ties. (469, 483, 486) Sarit came home with only face-saving gestures. (491–492, 494) Later in 1958, however, he obtained

modest increases in defense support funds (508), and for the remainder of the period, the United States maintained and even increased aid levels to Thailand, both military and economic, at a time when global allocations were falling. (513, 515, 531, 535, 542, 553-566) These increases included new jet planes and placement of Thailand in the Development Loan program. (531, 536, 540, 543-546)

The increases were obtained despite occasional signs of U.S. uneasiness over Thailand's authoritarian government. The Department of State had concluded that "authoritarianism would remain the norm in Free Asia for a long period," and the Embassy pointed out that this "being the case, the problem of explaining to the American people and to friendly nations which are not sympathetic toward an authoritarian form of government why we support such governments becomes a matter of public relations, not policy." (534) The Embassy believed that "European-style parliamentary government" was "ill-suited to Thailand (as it is to most underdeveloped countries) and has understandably been discredited here." (575)

The fact that Thailand, "as a staunch supporter of collective defense measures with a longstanding anti-Communist policy," served "as the hub of our security efforts in Southeast Asia" (484) was probably more important to U.S. officials than any other single consideration in the relationship. Late in the period, the two countries agreed that if the insurgency in Laos resulted in external aggression against Thailand, the United States would "take appropriate" measures under the SEATO Treaty and co-ordinate its efforts in the area with Thailand to the "fullest possible extent." (563, 565, 568, 570-572)

Relations between the United States and Thailand were furthered by King Bhumibol's State visit to Washington in June 1960. (551) The Embassy in December 1960 evaluated the 5-year trend in U.S.-Thai relations as "favorable to U.S. interests." The 1957 coup d'etat had brought to power a group that had maintained a "more forthright free world posture" than its predecessors and economic stability had resulted from "prudent management [of] fiscal affairs." (575)

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## **Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960**

### **Volume XVI, East Asia-Pacific Region; Cambodia; Laos**

#### **Volume Summary**

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Following is a summary of the contents of print volume XVI, East Asia-Pacific Region; Cambodia; Laos. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text. Volume XV, published in 1992, is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office.

#### *East Asia-Pacific Region*

The fundamental imperatives of U.S. policy in East Asia remained unchanged during the period, but policy toward specific countries in the region underwent several revisions. U.S. policy-makers continued to lay primary emphasis on preventing Southeast Asia from passing into or becoming militarily or economically dependent on the Communist bloc. Economic means to this end remained a familiar mix: bilateral technical assistance and economic aid, combined with regional cooperation within the framework of the Colombo Plan. The military side of the policy continued to emphasize bilateral military assistance to selected countries and added one notable attempt to strengthen the structural utility of the eight-nation SEATO alliance.

A policy paper of January 1958, adopted at the highest level, called for even greater U.S. emphasis on regional economic cooperation, and correspondingly less on massive bilateral aid, than had been previously granted. The notion of an Asian "Marshall Plan" was rejected once again. (1-2) An equally authoritative paper formalized in April left overall policy toward mainland Southeast Asia unchanged but called for closer coordination between Thailand and Laos, particularly with regard to anti-subversion efforts, and for greater Lao military contact with Vietnam, the Philippines, and even Burma. A new section on Malaya muted a previous emphasis on encouraging that new nation to join SEATO, endorsing this objective only if there was no danger of stirring up neutralist sentiment in Malaya. (12)

In November 1959, the administration revised for the first time since 1954 its basic paper on all of East Asia. Like the others adopted during the period, the paper tended to reiterate existing policies. It called for "firm support" to all the "free governments" of the area in their efforts to resist Communist domination and for eventual reunion of the all divided countries. It assumed there was scant chance of any Sino-Soviet split but stated the United States should be alert in looking for ways to bring one about. While anticipating the basing of nuclear weapons in China by 1963, the paper assumed that they would be under Soviet control. At the instance of the Department of State, the President rejected draft language, suggested by the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which would have cautioned against the United States becoming identified too closely with some of the more authoritarian governments in the area. (43, 44, 48)

Formal meetings of the SEATO Council continued to be held, at Manila in March 1958, at Wellington in April 1959, and at Washington in June 1960. The meetings concerned both military and organizational matters, but their principal purpose was the exchange of views among the eight SEATO nations on the East Asian political situation. (3-10, 27-33, 59-63) SEATO military planning intensified during the period and came to supplant much planning which had previously been done in the ANZUS forum. (19) Burma and Cambodia both warmed some-what toward SEATO. (18, 34) In the fall of 1959, however, SEATO confronted the first great challenge of its 5-year existence.

The occasion was the deteriorating situation in Laos (described in a later section of this summary). In September 1959, Laos considered appealing to SEATO for assistance. While the United States discouraged the Royal Lao Government from making such an appeal at that time, it simultaneously worked to set up a framework in which SEATO could give Laos a positive response in the future if such action became absolutely necessary to prevent the collapse of neutral and pro-Western elements in Laos. The vehicle was an existing SEATO contingency plan that specified, in the event of a Lao appeal for aid which the SEATO Council accepted, the appointment of Thailand as an overseer responsible to SEATO for the conduct of operations in Laos by a small SEATO force. The contemplated purpose of such a force was the support of Lao forces rather

than direct engagement with Communist insurgents. The U.S. objective was to obtain political approval of this plan in principle by all SEATO members so that rapid action would be possible in a future emergency.

Over an 8-month period, this attempt gradually failed. New Zealand insisted that SEATO come to the aid of Laos in case of direct external aggression. The United Kingdom, France, and New Zealand all had doubts about the choice of Thailand, with its special concerns and interests in Laos, as the "appointed nation." Australia did not wish to push the proposal against the vehement opposition of its South Pacific neighbor. There was confusion over how large a SEATO force should be planned and who should contribute to it. By the time the SEATO Council met in Washington in June 1960 to discuss the matter, the United States in effect recognized that SEATO contingency planning could go forward on the military level only. (37-42, 45-47, 49-56, 59, 63-64, 67) The difficulties faced by SEATO in coming to a common resolve on this occasion proved to be a harbinger of its performance in future years.

### *Cambodia*

Until his overthrow in 1970, Prince Norodom Sihanouk was the paramount political leader of Cambodia whether he was prime minister, head of state, or in one of his temporary "retirements." Sihanouk dominated Cambodia through his political party Sangkum, his hereditary position as heir to the throne, and his force of character. To most of Cambodia's small elite and virtually all of its large population of peasant farmers, Sihanouk reflected Cambodia's interests to the outside world. During 1958-1960, U.S.-Cambodian relations and the relationship with Sihanouk in particular, were rarely good. At their worst, they were bitter and full of recriminations; at their best, the two nations grudgingly tolerated each other on the ground of mutuality of interest.

It is not surprising that U.S.-Cambodian relations were often severely strained. The major U.S. client-ally in Southeast Asia, South Vietnam, was usually in a state of minor warfare with Cambodia over border issues. Sihanouk held the United States responsible for South Vietnam's border incursions across the long, ill-defined Vietnamese-Cambodian frontier. The underlying reason for this border tension was the spillover of South Vietnamese-Viet Cong armed conflict into Cambodia. In pursuit of the Viet Cong, South Vietnamese troops rarely stopped to check the boundary coordinates. Viet Cong units routinely used Cambodia as a sanctuary and infiltration route.

In June 1958, after a flagrant border incident, the U.S. Ambassador in Phnom Penh, Carl Strom, suggested that Cambodia was at an international crossroads. Whether or not the United States was at fault for South Vietnamese incursions, Cambodia expected the United States to intervene with South Vietnam to eliminate them. If the United States failed, Strom implied that Cambodia would look to the Soviet bloc as its international mentor and supporter. In effect, Cambodia would all but join the Sino-Soviet bloc. (73) Strom's warning brought a stinging dissent from the Embassy in Saigon: Cambodia's recognition of the Soviet Union, its acceptance of Soviet aid and a Chinese aid mission, and its anticipated recognition of the People's Republic of China, had already placed Cambodia well "past that point [the crossroads] along the road to the left." (74)

As predicted by the Embassy in Saigon, Cambodia recognized China in the summer of 1958. Sihanouk explained to Strom that that "China was a great country nearby and a reality ... Taiwan was only a small island." (76) In Washington, there was talk of punishing Cambodia with reductions of U.S. aid, but Cambodia's eventual reduction was merely proportionate to the general Congressionally-mandated cuts in foreign aid. (78) When Sihanouk made an unofficial visit to Washington in September 1958, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles lectured him on the evils of Communism and its "mechanistic view of the world." Sihanouk could not have agreed more, citing his own anti-Communist propaganda during previous Cambodian elections. (79) In fact, Sihanouk represented a dilemma for U.S. policymakers: within Cambodia he was an anti-Communist, the major bulwark against Marxist penetration, but internationally his neutrality was thought to venture dangerously into the Communist camp. Furthermore, Sihanouk was always at odds with his immediate neighbors, Thailand and South Vietnam.

The Ngo family of South Vietnam was contemptuous of Sihanouk's attitude toward Communism within Cambodia. To President Ngo Dinh Diem, and especially to Diem's brother, Nhu, the head of South Vietnamese intelligence, Sihanouk was a stooge of Hanoi. In summer 1958, Nhu set in motion plans to overthrow the Cambodian leader by the end of the year. South Vietnam tried to enlist U.S. support. When Ambassador Strom

learned of these intrigues, he insisted that the United States dissuade South Vietnam from such a foolhardy course. Strom argued that "despite his faults," removal of Sihanouk "would cause serious instability and provide increased opportunities for Communists." (85, 86, 88, 89)

In Saigon, Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow attempted to dash cold water on the idea of plotting against Sihanouk. He assured the Department in Washington that he had been successful. (91) In fact, Durbrow's efforts failed. In January 1959, Chinese and Soviet intelligence informed Sihanouk that his former Ambassador to London, Sam Sary, who had gone into exile in Thailand, was fomenting a coup. The Department of State assured Sihanouk that the United States was unaware of this plot, and in no way involved. (93, 94) If the United States was in the dark about the Sam Sary coup, the same could not be said about the plans of General Dap Chhuon, Commander of forces in western Cambodia, who was collaborating with South Vietnam to overthrow Sihanouk. As the Sam Sary fiasco proved, Saigon's intelligence operations leaked like a sieve. The Dap Chhuon coup could blow up in America's face, Strom warned. Strom recommended that the United States try to head off the coup in South Vietnam or at least warn Sihanouk.

Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter S. Robertson, was opposed to U.S. pressure on Diem to curb plotting against Sihanouk. Robertson stated that the United States had already made its opposition abundantly clear; any further demarches could only antagonize the Diem government. (95, 96) Without U.S. pressure against it, the Dap Chhuon coup marched toward disaster. Chinese, Soviet, and French intelligence alerted Sihanouk who moved against Dap Chhuon just before the coup was scheduled to begin. Dap Chhuon was caught and killed. (97, 98) Sihanouk firmly believed that the United States was aware of and most likely even a silent partner in the plot. The problem for Washington policymakers became to convince Sihanouk that that was not the case.

When Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs J. Graham Parsons suggested that the United States deny any knowledge of the coup attempt, Strom countered that such would be an "inadequate defense" as Sihanouk was well aware that the "GVN has little capacity to menace RKG exception by virtue of resources supplies by the US." (99) Strom argued that incidents like the Dap Chhuon plot would drive Sihanouk into the Communist camp. The United States should inform Sihanouk of its efforts to discourage Diem and Nhu from meddling in Cambodia, convince the Diem Government that it must live with Sihanouk, and force Diem to make a positive gesture of reconciliation.

After a trip to Southeast Asia in April 1959, Parsons came to a similar conclusion. (106, 114) Yet no matter how much pressure the United States put on Diem, officials at the Department of State realized that South Vietnam would never stop its meddling in Cambodia. If the United States informed Sihanouk of its preventive efforts in Saigon, America would be held responsible for every future act of South Vietnamese subversion. Sihanouk would only be disappointed and bitter *when* the next inevitable incident occurred. (101) Whatever the United States could do to improve South Vietnamese-Cambodian relations would have to be done on a background basis unbeknownst to Sihanouk. (118)

U.S. efforts to discourage South Vietnamese meddling in Cambodia were not productive. When Durbrow suggested termination of South Vietnamese subversive activities and a formal pledge by the Diem government prohibiting anti-Sihanouk dissidents from using South Vietnamese territory, Diem merely stated that he would look into the matter. (122) Durbrow then obtained permission to have a heart-to-heart talk with Diem, and presented irrefutable evidence of GVN plotting. A discomfited Diem listened without emotion. Durbrow predicted that Diem, who was clearly embarrassed, would rein in anti-Sihanouk activities. (125)

Durbrow's estimate proved reasonably accurate. While a legacy of bitterness remained (136, 137), South Vietnam's clandestine pressure against Cambodia lessened. The Eisenhower administration and Sihanouk inched toward better relations. The main vehicle for this rapprochement was Sihanouk's desire to have jet aircraft. Officials in Washington deliberated extensively whether the United States should train Cambodia pilots, provide jets, or allow the purchase of jets from a U.S. ally like Australia. (138, 140, 145, 150, 151, 153) Eventually President Eisenhower decided to go ahead with jet training for six Cambodian pilots and leave the question of the jets for his successor. (155)

Thus, as 1960 ended, U.S. relations with Cambodia were not at the low point of 1959, but they were by no means close or friendly. The Eisenhower administration never felt comfortable with Sihanouk's neutrality,

especially after his trip to Beijing and Chou En-lai's visit to Cambodia. The civil war in Laos between anti-Communist and pro-Communist forces and the steady deterioration of the internal stability of the Diem government in South Vietnam placed a premium on maintaining stability in Cambodia. Believing that Communism thrived where there was political disharmony, the United States reluctantly accepted that, for the time being, Sihanouk represented Cambodia's best bulwark against Communist subversion.

### *Laos*

During the last three years of the Eisenhower administration, Laos was the main crisis in Southeast Asia. America's subsequent agonizing war in Vietnam has overshadowed the role of the United States in Laos. Beginning as a low-level insurgency in the late 1950s, the Communist-dominated guerrilla threat in Laos became a short-lived crisis in 1959; then it erupted into a full civil war in late 1960. The United States and the Soviet Union became participants in this conflict among anti-Communist, neutralist, and pro-Communist factions in Laos. When President Eisenhower left office, he bequeathed John F. Kennedy with a proxy war in which the United States was backing the losing side.

Ever since the end of the first Indochina war in 1954, U.S. officials had cautioned non-Communist Lao politicians about the danger of coalition with the indigenous Communists, the Pathet Lao. Neutralist Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma disregarded such advice by giving two Pathet Lao politicians portfolios in his government in 1957. When Souvanna Phouma came to Washington in January 1958, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles tried again to convince him of the danger. Souvanna responded that the Pathet Lao were only nominally Communists; first and foremost, they were nationalists. Souvanna argued that Laos sought to be the Finland of Southeast Asia, but Dulles was not impressed. (159) During the Souvanna visit, the United States did obtain a promise of monetary reform in Laos. The Lao currency was so overvalued that U.S. economic aid based on the artificially high exchange rate presented a irresistible temptation for graft and corruption. The U.S. Congress refused to grant further aid unless Laos devalued its currency. Although worried about inflationary pressure from devaluation, Souvanna reluctantly agreed. (161)

With the monetary exchange problem slated for improvement, the United States concentrated on the May 1958 supplemental elections for the National Assembly. The campaign for 21 additional seats provided an opportunity to beat the Pathet Lao at the ballot box. The United States allocated \$500,000 in emergency funds to pay for a "crash program of political impact projects" at the village level. "Operation Boostershot" paid for wells, roads, schools, pagoda repairs, and other high-profile projects that demonstrated the "reality of U.S. aid." (162, 164, 169, 171) In addition, the United States directly funded anti-Communist politicians, at the same time urging them to consolidate their candidacies so as not to dilute the anti-Communist vote. (163)

Officials in the Department of State's Office of Southeast Asian Affairs cautiously predicted a conservative electoral victory: the Pathet Lao would win only 4 to 6 seats and the anti-Communists might even take 1 or 2 seats in the two northern provinces, the Communist strongholds of Sam Neua and Phong Saly. (172) When the votes were counted, the political arm of the Pathet Lao, the Neo Lao Hak Xat, won 13 of the 21 supplemental seats. Overall, the leftist coalition, of which the Pathet Lao formed a significant minority, held 21 of the 59 seats in the National Assembly. (173, 174) This disaster at the polls in a fair election, even after "Operation Boostershot" and U.S. direct support for candidates, caused serious reassessments in Vientiane and Washington. As President Eisenhower concluded during a National Security Council discussion, it was a "serious matter if any country such as Laos went Communist by a legal vote of its people." (178)

The consensus in Washington was that the failure was the fault of the anti-Communist Lao leadership. (176, 183, 185) Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles characterized it as the "same old political hacks" that had been running Laos since 1954 and would probably lose it to the Communists. (190) The anti-Communists were sometimes corrupt, usually unenergetic, and addicted to squabbling among themselves. The United States therefore decided on a two-track policy. On one hand, it worked with the old guard politicians to encourage formation of a government without Pathet Lao participation and to create a single conservative political party. On the other, it supported a new element, the Committee for the Defense of National Interests (CDNI), a "young turk" group, drawn from the younger army officers, bureaucrats, and politicians, which tried to act as an energizing force on the more established Lao conservative politicians.

In August 1958, anti-Communist Lao politicians joined an umbrella group, the Lao Horn Lao (Rally of the Lao People), and excluded the Pathet Lao from the new government. A new government under old-line politician Phoui Sananikone gave only a few portfolios to members of the CDNI. Still, U.S. officials hoped that the Lao Horn Lao and the CDNI could work together. As important as improved effectiveness of anti-Communist forces was, the Lao Army (ANL from its French acronym, Armee Nationale de Laos) was the first line of defense against Communism. U.S. Department of Defense officials suggested a top-to-bottom reform of the ANL. (203) They proposed the introduction into Laos of a U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) to replace the Program Evaluation Office (essentially a small MAAG in civilian dress) but the prohibitions against additional foreign troops in Laos written into the Geneva Agreement of 1954 made that plan too difficult. (206, 208) Also, the French, who had sole responsibility for combat training of the ANL, were not keen to share the duty. After protracted negotiations, the French agreed to let the United States provide technical and logistical military training, allowing France to concentrate on combat training. (230)

Just how unprepared the ANL was became clear in late 1959. Two Pathet Lao battalions that had been involved in long acrimonious negotiation over their integration into the ANL revolted in May 1959. Most of the dissident soldiers escaped to the north. (226) The Phoui government declared the Pathet Lao in open rebellion and attacked them in their northern strong-holds. The ANL was unable to make any headway against the Pathet Lao; instead, its garrisons in the north were soon harassed and surrounded. In late summer 1959, the Phoui Lao government claimed that the Pathet Lao, joined by North Vietnamese troops, had begun a campaign to take total control of the two northern provinces, Sam Neua and Phong Saly.

In Washington, this so-called emergency was taken very seriously, but the French and the British believed reports of fighting to be highly exaggerated. (243) U.S. agencies in Washington approved plans to increase military aid to Laos and support for auto-defense forces, the anti-Communist guerrilla forces that were composed of ethnic minorities (mostly the H'Mong) who fought their own campaign against the Pathet Lao. (247) Policy-makers in Washington gave serious consideration to sending Thai, South Vietnamese, and/or U.S. troops to Laos (257), but in September 1959, Eisenhower agreed merely to place U.S. troops secretly at the ready. (258)

The U.S. policy of supporting both the older and younger anti-Communist politicians in Vientiane failed. The Department of State wanted the CDNI to merge with the Lao Horn Lao, while the Department of Defense and other interested U.S. agencies saw the CDNI as competitor and potential successor to the older conservative politicians. (288, 289, 297, 302) Ambassador Horace Smith complained about "dichotomy," but his complaints fell on unsympathetic ears in Washington. The Department believed it was Smith's responsibility as ambassador to prevent members of the country team from following different policies. (295, 298)

The issue came to a head when Smith warned that the CDNI was planning a coup against the government of Phoui Sananikone. The Department of State declared itself no longer prepared to support Lao anti-Communist politicians and suggested it was time for the Lao to work out their own problems. (307, 309, 310) Ambassador Smith objected that such a decision, in effect, meant withdrawing support from Phoui and giving it to the CDNI. (312) Phoui attempted to steal a march on the CDNI by ousting them from his cabinet and then ruling by emergency decree until the forthcoming elections in April 1960. On December 30, 1959, General Phoumi Nosavan and the CDNI responded with a bloodless coup that ended the Phoui government. Phoumi joined a caretaker government to carry on until the April 1960 elections for the National Assembly. (351)

Looking toward the election in April 1960, the United States again supported and encouraged the anti-Communist Lao to join forces against the Pathet Lao. This time the results were rather too successful. The Lao Government placed restrictions that limited Pathet Lao campaigning and gerrymandered the electoral districts to dissipate the Communist political base. The Department of State expressed itself "seriously concerned by indications elections have been so rigged as to invalidate them in eyes of world opinion." (336) The result was a smashing defeat for the Pathet Lao. Allen Dulles told the NSC that the CDNI and their ANL allies might have been "over-enthusiastic." In early June 1960, a new government under Tiao Somsanith, an old line anti-Communist politician, took office. The real power behind the new government was the CDNI, and especially Phoumi Nosavan, the young Minister of Defense.

After only a few quiet months, an event occurred that changed Lao politics dramatically. The ANL's best combat commander, 26-year-old Captain Kong Le, became so frustrated at Lao politics and the shoddy treatment of his parachute battalion—stationed in Vientiane yet never paid—that he took over the capital in August 1960. Kong Le's paratroopers had borne the brunt of the fighting against the Pathet Lao in 1959. Kong Le was thought to be pro-American, yet officials in Washington began to have doubts about him. Under Secretary Douglas Dillon suggested he was a "very bad actor . . . a Castro Communist-type individual." (373) Defense officials suggested encouraging Phoumi and his loyal forces from southern Laos to re-take Vientiane and eliminate Kong Le. Politically naive if not apolitical, Kong Le gravitated toward Souvanna Phouma and the neutralists. With Kong Le's support, Souvanna formed a government that included Phoumi as Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister.

Phoumi was unprepared to go to Vientiane to take up his posts for fear he would be arrested. He consolidated his home base in Savannakhet and formed a "revolutionary committee" with Boum Oum, a prince of the southern Champassak royal family. The two rebels declared their opposition to the Souvanna government. Within the U.S. Government, Souvanna and Phoumi had their champions. The Embassy in Vientiane favored a negotiated settlement between Phoumi and Souvanna in which Phoumi agreed to serve loyally under Souvanna. Much of the Washington bureaucracy remained dubious of Souvanna and preferred Phoumi to take control. (440, 442, 443, 446)

Ambassador Brown in Vientiane complained that Phoumi was receiving advice from high-ranking U.S. military officials contrary to what Brown believed was U.S. policy. (444) Contrary to Brown's advice, the Department of State concluded that "we have no faith whatsoever in Souvanna Phouma and believe he is taking Laos rapidly down the road to a Pathet Lao take-over." (448) They came down on Phoumi's side and lined up squarely with Phoumi's other supporters in the Washington bureaucracy.

Not surprisingly, Souvanna was unable to reach an accommodation with Phoumi. Souvanna then went ahead with negotiations for a coalition government with his half-brother, Souphanouvong, the head of the Pathet Lao. Within a few days, the Soviet Union began a massive airlift of military supplies to Kong Le's forces. In Washington, Soviet intervention eliminated any hope of U.S. support for a negotiated settlement. The United States gave Phoumi extensive support: direct payments for troop salaries, logistical supplies and materiel, and airlift capability. (464, 472, 479) Phoumi's forces moved north toward Vientiane, took the capital in a fierce battle, and sent Kong Le and his Pathet Lao allies scurrying north. Then Phoumi's forces sat in the capital and let their adversaries slip away. Now that Phoumi was in control of the capital, Eisenhower believed, "we have the cover of legality." Support for Phoumi could be open and direct. (487)

In the last days of December 1960, Kong Le and the Pathet Lao began a counteroffensive. By the end of the year, they had taken strategic points on the Plain of Jars and threatened to split Laos in two. Washington received intelligence that new Pathet Lao forces were moving from North Vietnam. Phoumi's forces, lines of communications, and logistics were in chaos. As the year ended, the Eisenhower administration seriously considered sending American troops into Laos to prevent its fall to Communism. (498) The new President, John F. Kennedy, would inherit in Laos his first international crisis, a legacy of fire in Southeast Asia.

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## **Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963**

### **Volume XXIV, Lao Crisis**

#### **Volume Summary**

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Following is a summary of the contents of print volume XXIV, Laos Crisis. Parenthetical citations are to the numbered documents in the text. Volume XXIV, published in 1994, is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office.

Laos was the Kennedy administration's first foreign policy crisis and its introduction to Southeast Asia. Even before the inauguration, Kennedy and his advisers met with President Eisenhower and his foreign policy team. Although accounts of these meetings sometimes conflict, Eisenhower emphasized the seriousness of the crisis and apparently recommended U.S. intervention in Laos. (6, 7, 8, 9, 11) On January 23, just 3 days into his term, President Kennedy heard the views of a hastily assembled task force that had worked through the inaugural weekend. The task force recommended a range of incremental steps to ameliorate the military problems faced by the pro-Western Lao allies in their conflict against the Communist-dominated and North Vietnamese-supported Pathet Lao. President Kennedy realized that as long as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) allies were unprepared to act, the United States could not solve the problem alone. Diplomacy rather than unilateral U.S. military force was the consensus course of action. (10)

Kennedy then met individually with his advisers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) recommended U.S. military support of pro-Western indigenous Lao forces, a military step short of U.S. intervention. (12) Ambassador to Laos Winthrop Brown, who was on home leave, recommended a neutral nations commission to defuse the situation. Kennedy approved this so-called "olive branch" approach, while at the same time offering pro-Western forces in Laos under General Phoumi Nosavan specific U.S. military support, such as airlift and training. The President considered, but rejected for the time being, the idea of dispatching a SEATO force to Thailand. (14, 15)

The Department of State hoped to engage the Soviet Union in neutralizing Laos, but Soviet Ambassador Mikhail Menshikov told Secretary of State Dean Rusk that the Soviet Union considered a neutral nations commission unacceptable. What was required, Menshikov lectured, was for the United States to stop supporting Phoumi and the rightists, to recognize the neutralist leader Souvanna Phouma as the legitimate Prime Minister, and to support convocation of a new Geneva conference. (17, 20) Without the support of the Soviet Union and, by implication North Vietnam, the neutral nations commission idea was stillborn. Prospective neutrals like Cambodia or Burma refused to serve; only Malaya was willing to undertake the commission. (21)

To make matters worse, the right-wing military forces under Phoumi and the figurehead leader, Prince Bourn Oum, were soundly defeated by the Pathet Lao on the Plain of Jars, the strategic central plateau of Laos which was a gateway to the Mekong River towns (in which most of Laos' population lived and where the pro-Western conservative forces had their strong-holds). (24) In response, the JCS presented the President with a concept to retake the plain. Kennedy was very skeptical, noting that for every one U.S. or SEATO soldier dispatched to Laos, the North Vietnamese and Chinese could send five. (25)

Walt Rostow, Kennedy's Deputy National Security Adviser, suggested to the President that there was a "deeper lesson" in the crisis: diplomatic action should be supplemented by military and clandestine action so that the United States was not reduced to relying solely either on a diplomatic or a military solution. (28) This two-track approach would become the hallmark of the Kennedy administration's foreign policy in Laos.

The Pentagon still hoped for a total military solution. Kennedy's military aide, General Chester Clifton, relayed to the President the views of U.S. military advisers on home leave from Laos: Phoumi could retake the Plain of Jars with the help of only eight large transport aircraft supplied by the United States. The Pathet Lao would "bug out" at the first sign of heavy counterattack. Fears of Soviet, Chinese, or North Vietnamese counter-reaction were unfounded. Neither the Pathet Lao nor the Royal Lao Armed forces really wanted to shoot each other. Lao warfare usually relied on artillery bombardments with little actual killing. When the fire got too hot, one side retreated. (29)

For the next few weeks, the Kennedy administration sought a political settlement by a combination of diplomatic, political, and military actions. Rusk contacted Souvanna, while Brown encouraged Phoumi to keep up the military pressure. (30, 32) Rusk also called Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko aside after a long meeting and privately informed him that Kennedy was losing patience on Laos. Gromyko did not seem particularly concerned; Rusk concluded that the Soviets were neither prepared to help nor convinced that the United States would intervene. (34) On March 20, 1961, the Kennedy administration decided if the Pathet Lao agreed to a cease-fire, it would agree to a conference on Laos. If the fighting did not stop, the United States was prepared to move SEATO forces into Thailand and from there into Laos if necessary. (35, 36, 38)

On March 23, President Kennedy went on nationwide television flanked by three maps of Laos showing the increasing Pathet Lao domination of the country. To an overwhelmingly uncomprehending American public, the President called for a neutral Laos based on a cease-fire followed by an international conference. Should the "armed attacks by externally supported Communists" not cease, the President promised that the United States and SEATO would have to "consider their response." (39)

The President soon found, however, that the Western European members of SEATO, France and the United Kingdom, did not favor SEATO military action in Laos. (40, 41) Kennedy talked directly with Gromyko on March 27. Khrushchev passed a message through Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson that the Soviet Union favored a cease-fire and a conference. (43, 46) The conference solution as envisioned by the Kennedy administration included a broad based coalition government with only minor Pathet Lao representation and a neutral Laos supervised by a strengthened International Control Commission (ICC). (47)

Such a solution proved elusive. The military situation in Laos was "falling apart." Kennedy approved a task force program of small military steps—including token U.S. uniformed military advisers, unrestricted use of Lao aircraft against the Pathet Lao, and seeking Thai Government approval for the commitment of two Thai 105-mm. howitzer units—all to help the situation and signal U.S. concern. The British were assured that these "rather minor steps" would not torpedo the prospective conference on Laos. (52, 53, 54)

In mid-April 1961, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom (the co-chairmen of the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina) called publicly for a cease-fire, reactivation of the ICC, and then a conference. The Pathet Lao continued fighting, trying to improve their situation on the ground. With the fall of Muong Soui on the eastern end of the Plain of Jars, Brown requested B-26 bombers and possible U.S. intervention if the Pathet Lao continued toward the Mekong River valley towns or the Royal capital of Luang Prabang. (60)

The consensus in Washington was that Laos was about to fall. Acting Secretary of State Chester Bowles recommended U.S. intervention. (61) The President reacted to the gloomy news by contemplating the loss of Laos. While he officially refused to decide against intervention at this time, he seriously doubted that sending U.S. troops to Laos would be worth the risk. Rather, should Laos fall, the United States would send troops to Thailand and South Vietnam. (62) When the administration consulted congressional leaders, they found the leaders in total agreement that U.S. military forces should not go to Laos. (63) Rusk warned that the United States must not fight alone in Laos and worried such action could result in a wider conflict in Asia. (66)

Key presidential advisers met on April 29, 1961, to review options. Attorney General Robert Kennedy asked if Laos was the best place to fight Communism in Southeast Asia. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara suggested that Thailand and South Vietnam were better places to draw the line. The JCS alone argued that Laos could be saved by U.S. military action. (67) The situation in Laos continued to slide. Kennedy's advisers then presented him with two basic options: to intervene in Laos or to send troops to Thailand or South Vietnam. (73, 74, 76, 77) Although Laos was "one of the least favorable places in the world for direct U.S. military intervention" because of terrain, climate, and problems of logistics, McNamara favored intervention. (72)

The Pathet Lao's timing proved impeccable. Just as the Kennedy administration was again seriously considering U.S. intervention, the Lao Communists accepted a cease-fire. (78) According to Ambassador Brown, the Lao Royal Armed Forces (FAR from its French acronym) were on the ropes. (80) The Geneva Conference on Laos was organized in quick order, with the pro-Western forces very much at a military disadvantage. Rusk strongly argued that unless he went to Geneva with an assurance of U.S. military action if the conference should fail, the Soviets "will chase us around the barn in the negotiations." Kennedy agreed that if the cease-fire was "blatantly violated" the United States must take military action.

The opening of the conference of 13 nations at Geneva was delayed over seating of the various Lao factions. The Soviet Union insisted that the Pathet Lao and neutralists have equal status with the Royal Lao Government, since those two factions controlled large parts of the country. If the United States had any doubts about the "reality of the Pathet Lao movement," Gromyko told Rusk that he "had only to look at a map." (88) Kennedy accepted a compromise where all three factions attended while the United States stated that it considered the Royal Lao Government the only legal government and that Pathet Lao presence at the conference did not confer any status on them. (89, 90)

The Geneva Conference started badly and then deteriorated. The Soviet Union, North Vietnam, and China were at Geneva for the long haul. Rusk noted that "Commies at Geneva are full of confidence and appear to be utterly relaxed about achieving their goals in Laos. Their speeches have been short and moderate, their demeanor friendly and they are purring like cats." (93) There was no progress at the conference; Rusk and the other Foreign Ministers left Geneva to resume their other work, leaving their deputies in Switzerland.

Kennedy used his Vienna summit with Khrushchev in early June 1961 to try to move the Laos Conference forward. Khrushchev took the offensive against Kennedy at Vienna by charging that former President Eisenhower's support of Phoumi and the rightists was the root cause of the problem. Kennedy tried to move beyond past recriminations and work toward a settlement. Kennedy and Khrushchev both agreed on the concept of a neutral Laos, but there were no specific understandings on such outstanding issues as ICC investigation of cease-fire violations, the shape of a coalition government, or the machinery to supervise the settlement. (107, 108)

There was little movement at Geneva. U.S. policy in Laos fell into the doldrums. The Pathet Lao continued to violate the cease-fire just enough to improve their military situation, but not enough to cause the Western Geneva participants to break off talks. Phoumi and the rightists were demoralized. In their parallel coalition discussions with Souvanna Phouma and the Pathet Lao leader Souphanouvong, they felt very much at a disadvantage. (119, 124, 125)

The visit of Phoumi to Washington in late June 1961 concentrated the Kennedy administration's attention on Laos. Phoumi lobbied strongly for U.S. military intervention against the Pathet Lao, but the NSC recommended that the United States, not Phoumi, should decide how and when to intervene. Kennedy authorized expanded contacts with Souvanna as it was increasingly obvious that he would be the coalition Prime Minister of Laos. (126, 127) Meeting with Phoumi, the President and Rusk emphasized the need to negotiate with Souvanna. (128, 129) Harriman met on July 3 in Paris with Souvanna who asked the United States to support his efforts to form a government. Harriman replied U.S. support depended upon who was in his government. (130)

In early July 1961, the JCS and Kennedy discussed the state of the pro-Western military forces in Laos. The JCS informed the President that while the FAR was making progress, it was still not "an effective fighting force." The President encouraged the JCS to push reforms and improve FAR equipment and supplies. (132, 133, 136) The JCS followed their discussion with the President with a recommendation to Secretary of Defense McNamara that since the Geneva Conference was going nowhere, it was time to introduce SEATO or, if necessary, unilateral U.S. military operations into Laos with the objective of obtaining a neutral Laos. (134)

From Geneva, Harriman was sending the opposite advice. He believed the conference was getting down to the "serious phase of horse trading and compromise." (135, 138) The Embassy in Laos reported that Phoumi believed he had been given in Washington a green light to resume the fight against the Pathet Lao. (139) Walt Rostow summarized these conflicting issues for the President: what did the United States want to obtain from the Geneva Conference; how much pressure should be put on India to strengthen the ICC; should Phoumi be pushed into a Souvanna coalition; how possible was it to get a Souvanna coalition with a real neutralist center; should the United States try for a partitioned Laos? Rostow was convinced that the Geneva Conference could not produce a satisfactory solution until the "other side is convinced we will fight rather than accept a fake settlement." (141, 145)

By late July 1961, President Kennedy seemed to discount any dispatch of U.S. military forces to Laos. As he told Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Arleigh Burke, "Laos was a bad place to fight." (147) In a meeting on July 28, the President worried that Phoumi was trying to drag the United States into military action in Laos. Sooner or later Phoumi must accept Souvanna as Prime Minister. The President reiterated his doubts about

military action in Laos—there were few airfields—and most of the advice he had received argued against it. (148) In attempting to plan for future policy toward Laos, Kennedy's advisers suggested that the President was prepared to accept the risk of a neutral Laos with a tolerably effective ICC, but was not prepared to accept a de facto Communist Laos and a captive ICC. The task was to convince the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese to accept these minimal U.S. requirements. (152)

Although the President had decided against intervention in Laos for the time being, he still ordered preparation of contingency plans. (155) Such planning revolved around whether a unified Laos could be salvaged or whether the United States should consider a partition of the country into Communist and non-Communist areas. (156, 157, 158, 159) The President's key advisers met on August 12 to outline the objectives of military planning should the Geneva Conference fail or the Pathet Lao resume large scale fighting in Laos. They decided on a plan for an operation in the southern panhandle using mostly Thai, South Vietnamese, and Lao forces combined with potential use of SEATO troops to defend the Mekong lowlands should North Vietnam attack the Mekong towns. (161, 162) After much deliberation and negotiation, the planners presented four possible scenarios: continuation of present efforts at Geneva; the achievement of a political solution; no achievement of a political solution and a clearly recognized Communist resumption of military action; and no political solution and a continuation of an ambiguous military situation. (164, 165, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171)

At an August 29, 1961, meeting to hear the report on contingency planning, the President quickly chose the political solution. He favored a coalition government under Souvanna Phouma dominated by true neutrals but also drawing upon conservatives and Pathet Lao. Stating that he only wanted to "get out of Laos" with "an acceptable settlement which does not hand the country over to the Communists," the President approved a series of military actions intended to convince the North Vietnamese that the United States was actually prepared to fight in Laos. (172, 173)

As part of this campaign, the Kennedy Administration used Ambassador George Kennan in Yugoslavia as a channel to Khrushchev in the hopes of enlisting Soviet help, convincing the Soviets that the United States was prepared to support Souvanna, and suggesting that if there was no satisfactory settlement, the United States was prepared to act militarily. (174, 175, 178)

At Geneva, Harriman and the Soviet Delegate Georgi Pushkin met for a private dinner at which Pushkin assured Harriman that the Soviet Union wanted a neutral Laos and would control the North Vietnamese. When Harriman asked what kind of neutrality Pushkin had in mind, Pushkin replied "your kind" and pointed to Finland as a model. Pushkin assured Harriman that Lao neutrality would be permanent. (180)

The next task was to encourage Souvanna to form an acceptable government and to discourage Phoumi from resuming military operations and upsetting the apparent progress at Geneva. The job fell primarily to Harriman who traveled to Laos in mid September 1961. (184, 185) On October 6, Kennedy met with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko to emphasize U.S. concern at the slow progress on Laos and to reiterate that the main U.S. concerns were a balanced coalition government, an effective ICC, Soviet responsibility for North Vietnam's actions, and demobilization and reintegration of the Pathet Lao upon a settlement. Gromyko countered that the main problem retarding a settlement was U.S. unwillingness to accept Souvanna's government. Kennedy responded that the prospective candidates who Souvanna wanted were not really neutrals, but Communists. (198, 199)

By mid-October 1961, Harriman who was back in Geneva was predicting a breakthrough and recommending that Phoumi must be forced to negotiate in good faith with Souvanna. Harriman suggested that Brown establish direct contact with Souvanna. (206, 211, 212) Harriman also recommended a final deal at Geneva since Pushkin was at the "end of the road" and the "West had obtained its objectives while the East received only a facade at Geneva." (215, 217, 218, 219) Harriman's view was not accepted fully at the Department of State. In a "very hotly fought argument," the Department accused Harriman of conceding too much. While Harriman won the policy battle, there were rumblings at the Department that the United States had agreed to "a 1954-type ICC with helicopters." (220)

Harriman took the offensive against Phoumi, suggesting from Geneva that it was time to take a "tough line" with the General who "either from inertia or by adroit deliberate action was leading the US to war in Laos." Harriman opined that "it is fantastic that General Phoumi, who is entirely US creation, should be permitted to

dictate American policy." (221) Following Harriman's lead, the United States cajoled and threatened Phoumi into agreeing to negotiate seriously with Souvanna on a coalition government. The chief object of the negotiations was to keep the Pathet Lao out of critical ministries. (225)

The United States was to discover the truth of the maxim that all politics were local. In the case of Laos, international politics were reduced to a long drawn out squabble among Lao politicians for relative strength and influence in the new government. Policymakers found themselves poring over the names of obscure Lao politicians and assessing formulas for participation by Lao factions in the coalition. (250) The difficulty was to convince Phoumi that he must negotiate with Souvanna in good faith and that the unwavering U.S. support he had enjoyed in the past was no longer certain. (248, 252, 253, 254) After some hesitation, Kennedy authorized Brown to apply sanctions in the form of suspension of financial support of the Lao civilian government. (255, 257) Kennedy then insisted that Brown inform Phoumi that should he break the cease-fire, he could count on greater sanctions up to a withdrawal of U.S. military support. (261)

In early January 1962, Rusk told Kennedy that a coalition government with Souvanna holding the crucial Defense Ministry as well as the Prime Minister's job was the only solution. To convince Phoumi to concede the Defense Ministry the United States would introduce graduated sanctions against Phoumi as well as covert actions to force Phoumi to cooperate. (263) Rusk promoted the Souvanna plan, but the President wanted also to offer Phoumi secret financial support if he agreed to serve under Souvanna. **Director of Central Intelligence McCone put up a vigorous dissent, claiming that supporting Souvanna would be inviting the North Vietnamese to use Laos as a "roadstead" into South Vietnam. Kennedy listened, but supported the Department of State view.** (264, 265, 266)

Defense was not happy with the Souvanna solution. Taking its lead from an intelligence estimate that stated that the FAR was almost the military equal to the Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese forces in Laos (268), Defense officials waged a campaign to shift policy back to support of Phoumi. (269, 272) Phoumi himself began to backtrack on his promises of cooperation with Souvanna much to the exasperation of Brown and the Department of State. (276) The Department sent Brown instructions to give Phoumi a personal message from Kennedy stating that Brown and Harriman spoke for the President. (277, 278, 279) On January 30, 1962, McGeorge Bundy briefed Kennedy on Laos and expressed guarded optimism that the pressure on Phoumi was paying off. (284)

Less than a week later, it seemed as if Bundy had been too optimistic. Phoumi was not cooperating and the FAR had engaged in sporadic skirmishing with the Pathet Lao around Nam Tha, a major town in northwest Laos. At this point the Department of State concluded that it must deal directly with Souvanna and disregard Phoumi. (289, 290, 291, 292, 295) The problem was that relative parity between the FAR and Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese forces depended upon the North Vietnamese not reinforcing their troops in Laos. U.S. military intelligence estimated a sharp increase in North Vietnamese strength: North Vietnamese troops in Laos now numbered 9,000 of whom 6,000 were combat regulars supported by armored vehicles, and the remaining 3,000 were cadres with Pathet Lao forces. Even with improvements, FAR was no match for North Vietnamese. (295, 296)

Kennedy authorized Harriman to make another mission to Southeast Asia to squeeze Phoumi without destroying FAR. Souvanna should be supported by whatever covert and overt means possible. (301) Harriman believed he must not confront the President with a crisis over Laos, but present him with a solution. As Harriman phrased it, we have "got to start skating, even if we don't know how firm the ice will be at the center of the pond." (302)

Kennedy was now following developments with great interest. He did not like the slate of candidates proposed by Souvanna for the coalition and again suggested offering Phoumi a "carrot" of financial aid to join Souvanna. This offer was passed to Phoumi with the warning that if he did [sic] accept it he could forget about U.S. support. (303, 304) Harriman traveled to Bangkok where he hoped the influence of the Thai Government of Marshal Sarit Thanarat could be brought to bear on Phoumi. Not only did the Thais have great influence over the Royal Lao Government, but Sarit was Phoumi's relative and honorary "uncle."

Harriman and Phoumi sparred over who should come to whom. (309, 312, 313, 314) Harriman insisted that he must have some ammunition to use against Phoumi. While Kennedy was reluctant to authorize Harriman to

cut off military aid to the FAR (310), he was prepared to have Harriman inform Phoumi that Harriman could recommend this option to the President. (316) The meetings among Phoumi, Harriman, and Sarit were a dialogue of the deaf. Even with "uncle" Sarit urging cooperation, Phoumi refused to listen to any advice from Harriman whose aloof and icy manner insulted the General. (317, 318)

Kennedy called in the Lao Ambassador to formally inform him that if Phoumi thought he could defeat the Pathet Lao/ North Vietnamese that was his decision, but the United States did not believe it possible and would certainly not send troops to Laos. Congress would not allow it. (326) The President looked for some form of mild sanction that would send yet another message to Phoumi without crippling his armed forces. Kennedy approved the withdrawal of U.S. White Star Training teams attached to Lao forces in forward units effective May 7, 1962. (327, 329, 330, 331) As Kennedy told British Prime Minister Macmillan, "policy on Laos just about run out." (336)

Reports from Bangkok indicated that Phoumi was cracking, but he held out for a promise of U.S. intervention should the Souvanna coalition fail to prevent a Communist takeover of Laos. Kennedy would not agree. (338, 339) Just as it seemed that Phoumi was ready to concede, the Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese attacked FAR positions at Nam Tha and routed them. As predicted, the FAR had "put on its track shoes and was heading southwest" away from the enemy. (343, 344)

The Nam Tha offensive again raised Laos to a crisis. Kennedy worried that Nam Tha would be viewed as another Dien Bien Phu. (345) He instructed State officials to inform Soviet diplomats of U.S. concern and to tell Phoumi that the attack was a result of his intransigence. (346) On May 10, 1962, Kennedy met with his principal advisers to consider ways to impress upon North Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union that the United States was unprepared to accept the loss of all northern Laos. The President agreed to send the Seventh Fleet to the Gulf of Siam, but decided to await the return of McNamara and General Lemnitzer from Thailand before taking further action. (352)

On May 12, Lemnitzer and McNamara joined the Washington deliberations. The President considered sending 1,000 U.S. troops already in Thailand to Nong Khai opposite the Laos border and capital, Vientiane, but agreed to wait for a day or two. The President also insisted that, given Phoumi's lack of military competence, he had best concentrate on military affairs rather than politics. (357) On May 13, Kennedy decided to move the 1,000 U.S. troops to Nong Khai and to send 3,000 additional U.S. troops to Thailand. (362) Before doing so, he discussed the move with former President Eisenhower (363) and a skeptical congressional leadership. (368)

At this point, the Kennedy administration began considering contingency plans for possible intervention in Laos. This long planning process is presented in detail in the volume; it culminated in discussions with President Kennedy. There were hard battles. Defense and the JCS pressed for more extensive commitments and the civilians tried to prevent planning that would force the President to decide between the loss of Laos or war with North Vietnam. (393, 396, 397, 398)

U.S. contingency plans were based on the premise that the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese sought the conquest of all Laos, but this proved not to be the case. The Nam Tha offensive did not lead to a general assault on the Mekong lowlands. Certainly the dispatch of U.S.—and later other SEATO member—troops to Thailand must have sent a signal to the North Vietnamese. In any case, Souvanna and Phoumi agreed upon a coalition government that the United States found tolerably acceptable. (394, 399)

The agreement on the Lao coalition allowed the Geneva Conference to resume discussion of issues still unresolved at Geneva. They were quickly settled. (401, 402, 403, 404) The real issue at the Geneva Conference was would the North Vietnamese agree to withdraw their forces from Laos. To this end Harriman and the Foreign Minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Ung van Kiem, met privately at Geneva on July 22. Harriman asked the Foreign Minister if the North Vietnamese would withdraw. Ung van Kiem said that trainers and military specialists would leave. When Harriman asked about North Vietnamese military units, Ung van Kiem became evasive, but could not help from smiling broadly when Harriman remarked that whenever North Vietnamese troops appeared on the battlefield, FAR fled in terror. (410) One day after this conversation, the Geneva agreements neutralizing Laos were signed. Laos was officially neutral.

Under the terms of the Geneva agreements, foreign troops were to be withdrawn from Laos by October 7, 1962. The United States never really expected the North Vietnamese to withdraw all its forces nor did the United States and its allies disengage fully from Laos. (427) The United States withdrew its 666-man Military Assistance Advisory Group and 403 Filipino technicians, while the North Vietnamese withdrew only about 40 of their estimated 10,000 troops in Laos. The United States provided massive economic aid to the Souvanna Government and continued to supply economic aid to non-Communist Meo (Hmong) guerrillas who had operated behind Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese lines. (440)

As 1963 began, the Souvanna coalition became increasingly shakier. During the first part of 1963, the Pathet Lao supported by North Vietnamese cadres attacked neutralist General Kong Le's forces which held most of the Plain of Jars for Souvanna's government. In April 1963, the NSC recommended increasing U.S. support of Kong Le and tactical deployment of Meo guerrillas on the Plain of Jars against the Pathet Lao. (451) The President agreed. (452) There were further deliberations with the President in which a variety of contingencies were discussed. (457, 458, 459, 460) As a result Kennedy authorized a diplomatic campaign to try to discourage Communist bloc support of the Pathet Lao and instituted a series of precautionary military moves in Thailand. The President declined to decide whether or not to take military action directly against North Vietnam. (461) As part of the diplomatic campaign, Harriman met Khrushchev on April 26. Although Khrushchev showed neither interest nor knowledge of Laos, Harriman still believed that the Soviet Union had the power to control the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao. (466, 467)

In June and July 1963, the Kennedy administration planned a substantial increase of the U.S. role in Laos in three phases. (476, 477) The President approved for action the first stage of the planning (restoration of the coalition or "soft" partition without overt breach of the Geneva accords), and the second stage (same objectives as the first but with military action in direct violation of the Geneva agreements) for planning purposes. Kennedy decided that the third stage (a hard partition of Laos along Communist/non-Communist lines) required further study. (478, 479)

As the implementation of phase I proceeded, it became clear that certain actions in phase II more properly belonged in phase I, since they were either covert or overt actions that did not constitute public breach of the Geneva accords. (481) The President approved. (482) Nevertheless, it took time for these measures to take effect. A year-end CIA special report stated what had been obvious to the Kennedy administration for most of 1963, a real working government composed of the three Lao factions "appears more remote than ever." (490) When Kennedy assured Souvanna that the United States would never accept a Communist Laos (489), he did not foresee how difficult it would be for the United States to keep that promise. Lao neutrality, so painfully and tortuously negotiated in 1961-1962, was short-lived.

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## Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968

### Volume I, Vietnam, 1964

### Volume Summary

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*(Special acknowledgement to the Office of the Historian, Department of State)*

(This is not an official statement of policy by the Department of State; it is intended only as a guide to the contents of this volume.)

Since 1861, the Department of State's documentary series *Foreign Relations of the United States* has constituted the official record of the foreign policy and diplomacy of the United States. A staff of historians in the Office of the Historian collects, arranges, and annotates the principal documents comprising the record of American foreign policy. Volumes in the *Foreign Relations* series are published when all necessary editing, declassification, and printing steps have been completed. Among the most recently published volumes in the series are *Foreign Relations, 1961-1963, volumes III and IV*, which cover in two volumes U.S. policy toward Vietnam in 1963; and 1955-1957, volume XII, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq.

The documents in this volume are drawn from the centralized files of the Department of State and the decentralized Bureau, Office, and other lot files of the relevant Departmental units. The volume also includes records from the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Documents found in the Maxwell D. Taylor Papers at the National Defense University and in the Westmoreland Papers at the U.S. Army Center for Military History were also important. In addition, the editors made extensive use of the Presidential and other papers at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas.

Most of the documents printed here were originally classified. The Historical Documents Review Staff of the Department of State in concert with the appropriate offices in other agencies or governments carried out their declassification.

The following is a summary of the important issues covered in the volume. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text.

#### SUMMARY

At the beginning of 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson reflected on the past year of turmoil in Vietnam and determined to prevent the kind of internal dissension among U.S. representatives in South Vietnam that had plagued his predecessor, John F. Kennedy, during 1963. Appointing a Central Intelligence Agency chief of station, Johnson assured Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge that the new man was a team player. The President told Lodge that "I look to you to ensure the complete absence of backbiting." (3) Looking to energize the government of Duong Van ("Big")Minh, which was showing signs of lethargy and complacency, Johnson hoped to use American political techniques, such as "precinct captains" and "brain trusts." (6, 11) In addition, the President began planning for new pressures against North Vietnam. (4, 13) Everyone realized that covert action had minimal effect, and to make North Vietnam change its policy, much greater force had to be applied. As Lodge stated, "the goal is to convince the rulers of North Vietnam that if they continue their warlike actions in South Vietnam there will be a reaction from our side which will be more and more expensive and destructive for them." (14)

At the beginning of 1964, the Johnson administration also faced almost simultaneous calls for neutralization of South Vietnam from French President Charles de Gaulle and Senator Mike Mansfield. The President polled his main advisers about the idea's feasibility and desirability. All of them rejected the concept. (8, 9) The idea of neutrality also appealed to many South Vietnamese, even some in the Minh government. At the end of January, Nguyen Khanh, Commander of I Corps, told his U.S. military adviser that pro-French neutralist Vietnamese military officers were about to stage a coup. (18) Lodge asked Secretary of State Dean Rusk to alert de Gaulle to this report and to suggest that he call off the plot. (19) Officials in the Department were skeptical of Khanh's motives in passing on such information and were positive that such a blunt approach would fail with de Gaulle. (fns. 3-6, 18; fn. 2, 19) Before Khanh's information could be verified, Khanh himself overthrew the Minh government. Unlike the long-drawn out planning for the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, this

bloodless coup took the U.S. Government by surprise. (20-23) Khanh was a virtual unknown, but as Lodge told him during the first meeting after Khanh took power, "he would rise or fall' on how well he fought the Viet Cong. (24)

February 1964 was a month of assessment of the prospects for Khanh's leadership and the progress of the war against the Viet Cong. Lodge was the most optimistic, suggesting that "Perhaps Khanh is it." (30) Far more typical was the private report of Central Intelligence Agency Station officials to Director of Central Intelligence John McCone that the Viet Cong were winning the war in the countryside. As the report put it, the United States was "trying to mop the floor without turning off the faucet." (38) Other Johnson advisers painted a similarly bleak picture. (42, 45, 49, 50)

Johnson realized that the war in South Vietnam required additional exertion, but wondered how best to focus U.S. efforts. (34) Walt R. Rostow, head of the Department of State's Policy Planning Staff, lobbied hard for "graduated political, military and, possibly economic sanctions on the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam]." Rostow believed Ho Chi Minh was no longer a guerrilla fighter, he had a "industrial complex" to protect. (44) The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) recommended a National Pacification Plan directed and led by Americans. They predicted that if the plan were properly implemented, President Johnson could expect victory in South Vietnam by July 1965, except in the Delta where it would take six months longer. (51) Johnson's immediate response was to create a committee under William Sullivan of the Department State to coordinate policy in Washington. (46) Meeting with the committee, Rusk, McCone, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, and JCS Chairman General Maxwell D. Taylor on February 20, 1964, the President directed that Lodge's request from South Vietnam be given "prompt and sympathetic response" and that plans for increasing pressure against North Vietnam be expedited. (54)

The military planners began to refine contingencies for attacks against the north (65, 66), but Sullivan warned Rusk that "action against North Viet Nam can never be a substitute for the hard, grubby job of routing out the Viet Cong in areas where they have established themselves in the South." (65) At Johnson's request, McNamara had the Department of Defense prepare a two-page paper assessing the situation and presenting options. The assessment was gloomy. The report presented four alternatives: withdrawal, neutralization, sending in the U.S. marines, or continuing to work through the South Vietnamese. McNamara and the Department of Defense favored the last alternative. (67) McCone presented the CIA estimate which was even more pessimistic: South Vietnam was looking at military defeat and a Viet Cong victory. Events had passed beyond the ability of the current resources of the U.S. Military Advisor Assistance Command to deal with the problem; the Khanh government must be strengthened and the war carried to the north. (68)

The visit of McNamara and Taylor to Vietnam in March 1964 became the focus of policy consideration. Meeting with the Joint Chiefs before the trip, Johnson asked for Taylor's off-the-cuff recommendation. Taylor suggested a program of intensification of counterinsurgency in South Vietnam and progressive and selective air and naval attacks against North Vietnam. The President acknowledged the need for "punishing Hanoi," but made it clear that he did not want to lose South Vietnam nor start a war before the November U.S. presidential election. As for Khanh, Johnson employed one his famous Texas metaphors: Khanh must be "our boy." During their trip, the President wanted to see "Khanh in the newspapers with McNamara and Taylor holding up his arms." (70)

The Taylor-McNamara mission to Vietnam had many objectives. It was an on-the-spot assessment, a way of presenting policy alternatives, a means of publicizing the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam, a way to spur on the Khanh government, and a personal presidential assurance to Lodge. (71-74) McNamara's report, well-known since its publication in the Pentagon Papers, was reasoned and balanced, pessimistic but not alarmist, long and comprehensive with his trademark combination of sweeping generalizations and attention to details. The underlying assumption was that the United States could help South Vietnam win the war if the proper mix of assistance, encouragement, technology, and limited military policies were instituted. (84)

The National Security Council accepted McNamara's twelve recommendations as government-wide. (86) Many in the Department of Defense saw an ulterior motive in this policy exercise, a means of delaying the inevitable decision to attack North Vietnam. (82) As one general officer told NSC Staff member Michael Forrestal, if the United States couldn't "make the high jumps in South Vietnam, we should pole vault into the

North." (89) Two distinct camps were forming in Washington the civilians who wanted to win the war in the south and the Joint Chiefs (less Chairman Taylor) who wanted to take the fight to the north. (99)

It was not long before McNamara's report was overtaken by worsening conditions in South Vietnam. The President asked Secretary of State Rusk to make his own brief visit to Viet in April after the SEATO meeting in Manila. In the Philippines, Rusk received some advice from French Foreign Minister Couve de Murville: the United States cannot win in South Vietnam without the support of the Vietnamese people. The French discovered that, Couve continued, to their great cost in 1954 in Indochina and again in Algeria in 1962. (113) Rusk was not dissuaded. His report to the National Security Council on his trip to South Vietnam was cautiously upbeat, consensus being that additional resources could make a real difference in South Vietnam. (124) In a message to Lodge, Johnson encouraged the Ambassador not to hesitate to ask for more money and personnel if he believed they were required to get the job done. (129)

Rusk was also involved in opening up a line of contact with the leaders in Hanoi through a Canadian Commissioner on the International Control Commission, J. Blair Seaborn. Working directly with Prime Minister Lester Pearson in early May, Rusk asked Seaborn to assess the thinking of Ho Chi Minh, convince the Vietnamese leader of U.S. determination, and tell the Hanoi leadership that if the war in South Vietnam stopped, the United States would leave and North Vietnam could take advantage of the peaceful coexistence. The Canadians agreed to present this carrot-and-stick approach in Hanoi. (134, 168)

A series of Viet Cong terrorist attacks on U.S. civilians early in May brought the war to Saigon and rattled nerves. Khanh and Lodge discussed placing the country on a war footing. The Vietnamese leader implied that it was time for the United States to take the war to the north. (136) There was considerable speculation in Washington about Khanh's state of mind, but Lodge defended him, stating he was a soldier who wanted to get on with the job. (137, 140-142) Lodge assure the President that no Dien Bien Phu was possible in 1964, but he did worry that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were capable of taking and holding some or all of South Vietnam's northern provinces. He trusted that if that happened the United States could react immediately. (143)

Lack of progress in Vietnam and the Lodge's uneasy reports convinced the President to send McNamara and Taylor once again to South Vietnam in mid-May. A rush of meetings and briefings took place in Saigon. (147-152) On his return to Washington, McNamara reported to the President that things were still bad and that Lodge was convinced of the need for U.S. air strikes against the north. (155) At a National Security Council meeting also attended by the Congressional leadership, the participants received a strong dose of pessimism. McNamara stated that strikes against the north could probably not occur until the end of the year. South Vietnam would be better prepared for possible retaliation, and "there may be a psychological requirement to hit North Vietnam at a later date." The President ended the meeting with the assessment that "the prospect in Vietnam is not bright." (156)

By May 22, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy reported to the President that "a small, tightly knit group" of senior administration figures was planning new initiatives to confront the problems in Southeast Asia. One group under Sullivan was planning a three to six-month program "for major stiffening of our effort in Vietnam, essentially by marrying Americans to Vietnamese at every level. . . a tall American at every point of stress and strain." Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton was planning for graduated action against North Vietnam designed to "hurt but not destroy" and to change Hanoi's policy of support of intervention in the south. Under the aegis of NSC Staff member Chester Cooper (on loan from the Central Intelligence Agency), the intelligence community was preparing an estimate of Soviet and Chinese reaction to attacks on the north and the south's ability to withstand retaliation. Finally, Under Secretary Ball was preparing drafts of a congressional resolution authorizing such action against the north. (167) These planning documents emerged as drafts for informal presidential consideration. (169-173)

On May 26, Johnson informed Lodge that he had "been giving the most intense consideration to the battle for Southeast Asia" and was calling for a meeting of Lodge and his most senior associates to meet with high-level officials from Washington. The meetings in Honolulu, Hawaii demonstrate the Johnson administration's tendency to talk a problem to the point of inaction. (187-198) McGeorge Bundy briefed the President on the tenor of the talks while his brother William, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, briefed Rusk. (192-193)

In early June, the Johnson administration again tried to enlist de Gaulle's support for U.S. policy in Vietnam, including the potential use of force against North Vietnam. (196) De Gaulle's response was polite, but he was not prepared to give his support and was convinced that the United States was making a mistake in Southeast Asia. (202) Events were moving fast in South Vietnam, but not in the right direction for the Johnson administration. In Saigon and Washington, reports of poor prospects in the war against the Viet Cong increased pressure for some action against Hanoi. Lodge believed North Vietnam was "looking too tall" and should be made to "scream." (198) The Joint Chiefs and Taylor presented Johnson with alternatives for doing so. (191, 199)

Still the President hesitated to take action. He immersed himself in details, such as finding a replacement for Ambassador Lodge. (204, 207, 218) At a White House meeting on June 10, senior presidential advisers discussed some of the larger decisions. They concluded that the administration should ask Congress for a resolution only when military action was required. At that point, the resolution must be absolutely assured of passage. McNamara added presciently that if a dramatic event occurred, then the draft resolution should be reconsidered. (210, 211, attachments 3 and 4 to 214)

In considering successors to Lodge (who was resigning return to Republican politics to oppose Senator Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign), Johnson ignored the list of candidates that McGeorge Bundy suggested (204), and chose Maxwell Taylor. U. Alexis Johnson, a career Foreign Service officer, became Deputy Ambassador (a hitherto unknown title) and Taylor's right-hand man. At a meeting with the two before they left for Vietnam, the President stressed that he wanted them to concentrate on South Vietnam and hold action against the north in reserve. There were plenty of plans and proposals and what was needed now was effective implementation. (225)

Because of his military experience and at President Johnson's direction, Taylor had unprecedented control over the U.S. Military Advisory Command in Vietnam. Taylor's first important recommendation came on July 15. In light of the upward trend in Viet Cong and North Vietnamese activity, he requested an increase in U.S. forces in Vietnam to 21,000 (later revised to 22,000) over the next six months. (233, 236) Although the policymakers were not prepared to make an immediate decision on these additional troops, they were pleased with the first efforts of the Taylor-U. Alexis Johnson team. (235)

At the end of July, Forrestal briefed Rusk on the status of the U.S. planning effort for military action outside South Vietnam. According to Forrestal, Taylor was in no hurry to initiate operations in the Laos Panhandle, but he wanted to begin planning discussions with Khanh and his colleagues about possible incursions into Laos and for military action against the north. (254) In addition, President Johnson received from the Joint Chiefs recommendations for action which would involve a minimum of escalation with a maximum of political effect. (252) Forrestal believed that the President was finally receiving the right kinds of proposals for limited military actions, but events in the Gulf of Tonkin were to change the situation entirely.

During the course of an intelligence-gathering patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2, the U.S. destroyer Maddox reported that it was being attacked by North Vietnamese patrol craft. (255) At 11:40 a.m. that day, President Johnson called a meeting at the White House to discuss U.S. reaction to this incident. (258) Although U.S. officials decided not to respond militarily to the attack, they did transmit a note of protest to North Vietnam and authorized a second patrol to proceed up the Gulf on August 4. In the course of the second patrol, the Maddox and the C. Turner Joy, already alerted by intelligence intercepts, again reported being under attack. In a meeting at 9:25 a.m. at the Pentagon, Secretary of Defense McNamara, believing that a second attack on the U.S. destroyers had occurred, drafted a four-point plan for retaliation against North Vietnamese military installations. (273) At a subsequent meeting at the White House beginning at 12:40 p.m., President Johnson agreed that a "swift retaliatory strike must be carried out." (276)

Directly after this meeting, however, the Maddox reported that there was some doubt that the attack had actually occurred. But McNamara and the Joint Chiefs concluded at a meeting at 4:47 p.m. that sufficient evidence of the attack existed to warrant retaliation. This decision was confirmed at the 538th meeting of the National Security Council, held at 6:15 p.m. (278) Immediately after the NSC meeting President Johnson, briefed congressional leaders on the situation, informing them of the action he planned to take in response. (280) At the same time, the United States explained to NATO and SEATO leaders through diplomatic channels

what had happened and how it intended to respond. Finally, the President addressed the nation at 11:36 p.m., outlining the U.S. response and reiterating U.S. determination to carry out its commitments to the Government of South Vietnam,

Reaction to U.S. air strikes against targets in North Vietnam was immediate. On August 5, Soviet Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev wrote to President Johnson expressing his concern over the deterioration of the situation in the Gulf of Tonkin and stating his hope that the United States would eliminate the causes of tension in the area. (295) The following day, U.N. Secretary-General U Thant indicated his concern about Southeast Asia and asked the President whether the United Nations might play a role in the area. (298) The U.S. Congress, however, showed no such concern, passing on August 7 (with only two negative votes) Joint Resolution 1145 "To Promote the Maintenance on International Peace and Security in Southeast Asia." The Gulf of Tonkin resolution, signed into law on August 10, expressed approval and support for the President's decision to repel any armed attack against U.S. forces. (308) The dramatic event that Secretary McNamara anticipated had arrived; the Gulf of Tonkin Congressional Resolution became in effect the U.S. declaration of war in Vietnam.

With the cessation of U.S. naval activities in the Gulf of Tonkin, and despite Taylor's appeal for further patrols, U.S. policymakers turned their attention to the question of further support for the Government of South Vietnam. (310) In August, Khanh proposed a major reorganization of his government and the drafting of a new constitution. At a meeting with him on August 12, Ambassador Taylor stressed that sweeping changes in the South Vietnamese Government might destabilize the country, and that in any case, the proposed changes needed to be announced publicly as a realignment made necessary by the state of emergency in the South. (312) U.S. concern was further evidenced in a memorandum sent to the President on August 13, which characterized Khanh's chances of staying in power as only 50-50. (313) This paper examined the whole situation in Southeast Asia and went on to propose a series of eight actions that might improve it. The sequence of actions was transmitted to Taylor for his comments, and he suggested that U.S. policy should seek to gain time for Khanh to stabilize his government, to improve morale in the south, to prevent any further buildup of Viet Cong strength, and to escalate the pressure on the north beginning January 1, 1965. (319)

The situation was immediately complicated by Buddhist demonstrations at Hue on August 23 and 24 against the Khanh government and a new draft constitution. In an attempt to prevent the negative consequences of Buddhist disenchantment, Taylor and U. Alexis Johnson met separately with the Buddhist leaders and Khanh, stressing that it would be a mistake let their differences undermine the fragile stability of the government. (322, 324) Khanh's abrogation of the new constitution and dissolution of the Military Revolutionary Council at the end of August temporarily calmed the situation. Khanh, however, had second thoughts about capitulating to Buddhist demands, and on August 28 retired to Dalat and threatened to resign. Taylor and Johnson eventually smoothed Khanh's ruffled feathers, and early in September Khanh returned to Saigon. (338)

In light of the political and military activity of August, Ambassador Taylor asked to return to Washington for consultations. In preparation he submitted a lengthy review of conditions in South Vietnam, stating that although the recent political turmoil was disappointing, the United States should put its money on Khanh barring the unlikely possibility of a "George Washington" emerging in Saigon. (339) Taylor's analysis was seconded in a Special National Intelligence Estimate on September 8. (341)

In meetings at Washington on September 7 and 8, U.S. officials reached a consensus on a course of action for South Vietnam. (342) The new program started from the premise that over the next several months the Government of South Vietnam might be able to strengthen itself, but it was too weak to escalate its activities in the south or undertake any action against the north. Flowing from this the paper was the decision that U.S. patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin should be resumed and that the United States should be prepared to respond "tit-for-tat" against North Vietnam. The program remained silent on political and economic actions to be taken in support of the Khanh regime. Johnson, Rusk, McNamara, Taylor, and other senior administration officials discussed the paper at a meeting on September 9. The President asked Taylor why his recommendations were so modest. (343) Taylor emphasized that the program constituted the realm of the possible, and in response to another question from the President, stated that South Vietnam was weaker politically than at any time since his arrival in Saigon. The military options and the political discussion were formalized in NSAM 314, September 10, which also stated that the decisions would constantly be reviewed. (314)

The next two months saw U.S. efforts to prop up the Khanh government and carry out NSAM 314 foiled by political events in South Vietnam. At the same time, limited military operations against the north were undertaken. Taylor had barely returned to Saigon when he and U. Alexis Johnson had to defuse an attempted coup against the government. Yet another political upheaval prompted a strongly-worded telegram from Washington demanding that South Vietnamese resources should not be wasted on internecine strife, but directed against the Viet Cong. (350) A further patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin on September 18 elicited initial reports of another attack, but subsequent evaluations revealed that North Vietnamese vessels in the area of the patrol "had not attempted an aggressive attack." (356) Defense and intelligence estimates at the end of September both stated that conditions in the south continued to deteriorate despite U.S. efforts because of the political instability. (361, 368) The deterioration was highlighted on October 31 by a Viet Cong attack on Bien Hoa Airfield in which four U.S. servicemen were killed and another thirty wounded. While Taylor opted for immediate retaliation in conformity with NSAM 314 (394), high-level meetings with the President on November 1 and 2 concluded that, because of the proximity of the November elections, a U.S. response need not be immediate. (395, 396)

One of the results of the discussions on November 1 and 2 was the formation of the NSC Working Group on Vietnam chaired by Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy and tasked with yet another review of U.S. policy toward Vietnam. (403) By November 17, Bundy had completed a lengthy draft paper on the subject and a 20-page summary of the longer paper. These were circulated to Secretaries Rusk and McNamara and to Ambassador Taylor, who had been asked to return to Washington for consultations. (416) Preliminary evaluation of Bundy's report began at a meeting with the President on November 19. At this meeting Bundy outlined the following three policy alternative:

"Option A: to continue as at present, but to add to our current efforts reprisals against the Viet Cong and North Vietnam for any 'spectaculars' of Bien Hoa variety; "

Option B: to apply a 'hard/fast squeeze', i.e. a systematic program for attacks of increasing intensity against North Vietnam during which negotiations would not be our immediate goal but which would not be ruled out;

"Option C: to apply a slow, controlled squeeze on North Vietnam in order to bring about negotiations, increasing gradually our present level of operations against the North" (417)

Before selecting any of these options, the President wanted more input from the military.

In light of the discussion with the President and having obtained assessments from the military, Bundy revised and shortened the original paper on November 21 and again on November 26 (418), but each of these revisions included the same three options in more elaborate form and added a section on steps that might be taken in the immediate future. In a meeting with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, the Working Group now called the Executive Committee, reached a consensus that Option A would not be sufficient, but that Options B and C offered significant chances for improvement. (424)

On November 27, the Executive Committee reconvened with Ambassador Taylor present to consider the latest Bundy draft. The following day, it considered Taylor's analysis of the situation in South Vietnam and an additional paper by Bundy, "Scenario for Immediate Action". (431) Further discussion of all these papers led to the Position Paper on Southeast Asia, December 2, which was approved by President Johnson on December 3 and constituted basic U.S. policy on the region into 1965. (433)

Divided into a "Concept" and "Thirty-Day Action Program," the position paper outlined both the political and military steps that would be taken in Vietnam. On the same day that he approved the position paper, the President also approved new instructions to guide Ambassador Taylor on his return to Saigon, requesting him in particular to "bring home to all groups in South Vietnam the paramount importance of national unity against the Communist-enemy". (435)

Back in South Vietnam, Taylor spent two weeks discussing the position paper with the politically important groups, stressing the constancy of U.S. support and the need for a stable government. (447) However, another round of cabinet appointments and an attempted coup by "Young Turks" in the military quickly made a mockery of the possibility of South Vietnamese governmental stability. Taylor's attempts to undo the damage caused by this latest turmoil brought him into direct conflict with Khanh who on December 25 lodged a formal

complaint against the U.S. Ambassador. (467) The difficulties between the two governments now became a major issue. This controversy was not resolved by the end of the year, and the tension in Saigon was further exacerbated by the bombing of a U.S. barracks and the subsequent failure of policymakers in Washington to approve any targets which Ambassador Taylor suggested for appropriate retaliation. (479)

In retrospect, 1964 was a year of disappointment for the Johnson administration. It began with U.S. determination to improve the South Vietnamese political structure and to help South Vietnam fight the war against the Viet Cong more effectively. It ended with relations with Khanh in tatters, the war still being lost in the countryside, terrorist attacks on Americans in South Vietnam becoming more prevalent, and United States increasingly locked into a policy of gradually increasing military pressure against North Vietnam.

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## Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968

### Volume II, Vietnam, January-June 1965

#### Volume Summary

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*(Special acknowledgement to the Office of the Historian, Department of State)*

(This is not an official statement of policy by the Department of State; it is intended only as a guide to the contents of the volume.)

*Since 1861, the Department of State's documentary series Foreign Relations of the United States has constituted the official record of the foreign policy and diplomacy of the United States. Historians in the Office of the Historian collect, arrange, and annotate the principal documents comprising the record of American foreign policy. The standards for the preparation of the series and the general deadlines for its publication are established by the Foreign Relations of the United States statute of October 28, 1991. (22 USC 4351, et seq.) U.S. policies in the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson are the subject of 34 printed volumes. Volumes in the Foreign Relations series are published when all the necessary editing, declassification, and printing steps have been completed.*

*This volume is the first of two for 1965, the year in which the United States committed large-scale combat forces, prestige, and resources to Vietnam, continue the Department of State's expanded coverage of the documentary history of the Vietnam war. The Vietnam volumes for 1965 are extensive and intensive, each documenting 6 months of policy deliberation and decisions. The Foreign Relations volumes on Vietnam are the most comprehensive published collection of documents on the war, surpassing the "Pentagon Papers," which were made public with much controversy during the war. Unlike the "Pentagon Papers," whose authors did not have access to White House files, these Foreign Relations volumes rely heavily on the records of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his aides. They continue the tradition, begun with the first volumes on President Eisenhower's Vietnam policy, of using expanded sources. In addition to extensive research at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, the editors examined and selected records from the Departments of State and Defense and Central Intelligence Agency, as well as the papers of key officials such as General William Westmoreland, Averell Harriman, General Maxwell Taylor, General Harold Johnson, John McNaughton, and Senator Mike Mansfield.*

*Most of the documents were originally classified. The Historical Documents Review Division of the Department of State, in concert with the appropriate offices of other agencies and foreign governments, carried out their declassification.*

*The following is a summary of the negotiations and policy discussions documented in the volume. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text.*

#### SUMMARY

During the first half of 1965, the administration of President Lyndon Johnson debated the feasibility of sending U.S. troops into mainland Asia. The President decided to intervene with a major deployment of ground troops coupled with an intensive bombing campaign, actions that marked a key turning point in American involvement in Vietnam. Several factors, including the deteriorating military situation against the Communist insurgents, the instability of the South Vietnamese Government, and the rising consensus within the leadership circle of Washington to make a stand in Vietnam against the spread of Communism, contributed to intensified American involvement. A Presidential decision to engage the Communists militarily in Vietnam was not a foregone conclusion in 1965. The U.S. Government sought alternative means to shore up the South Vietnamese Government (known as the GVN), to increase the regime's authority in the countryside, and to initiate negotiations with the North Vietnamese in order to end their infiltration southward. When these political and diplomatic efforts to reverse the negative course of the war faltered; the administration moved closer to assuming the leadership of the military struggle against the Viet Cong (VC).

Complicating U.S. efforts to protect South Vietnam was the political crisis that had plagued that nation since 1963. The "Young Turk" Generals, with the support of militant Buddhists, challenged the civilian government

of Prime Minister Tran Van Huong and the real source of power, General Nguyen Khanh, head of the Armed Forces Council. (1, 4) The Embassy in Saigon reported a "seriously deteriorating situation," which could result in the installation of a "hostile" government in Saigon which might not persist in the war against the Communists. Unstable political conditions, the lack of physical security, and widespread "war-weariness" among the people made the situation more tenuous.

Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, and the Chairman of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, Walt W. Rostow, suggested remedial measures including intensified action against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the possible introduction of U.S. combat forces in the south. (9, 11, 13) As the situation worsened, an immediate concern to U.S. officials in Saigon was the safety of dependents. (11, 16) The possible reactions of China and the Soviet Union to the increased American role in the war also raised serious questions. (15, 61) Given these concerns, possible U.S. actions included reprisal bombings for terrorist incidents, intensified pressure on the north through the use of air and naval assets, and evacuation of American dependents (for this last point see 3, 15, 25, 38, 64, 123).

U.S. policy also awaited the resolution of the internal crisis in Saigon. Tired of the inabilities and ineffectiveness of the civilian bureaucracy, Khanh acted to eliminate what he considered to be the irritation of civilian rule. On January 19, he called off the integration of the military into the Huong regime, and tried to force the Prime Minister to resign. (29, 39) When this failed, the Armed Forces Council withdrew its support for Prime Minister Huong and Chief of State Phan Khac Suu. (40, 41) Khanh then entered into a series of machinations designed to install himself as the supreme power in the nation. (46, 47, 49, 59, 63) The U.S. Government did not approve of the changes being made. Taylor saw "no good coming out of a Khanh government." (59) Khanh was seen as a destabilizing force and a possible block to progress against the insurgents. Washington considered the threat of not recognizing his new regime in order to forestall its formation. (59, 60, 63, 68, 73)

On January 27, Khanh formally ousted Huong, but temporarily continued the facade of a civilian administration. Phan Huy Quat became Prime Minister on February 16. Overall, these events underscored the intrinsic weakness of South Vietnam's political structure as a nation and, in the view of the Johnson administration, increased the necessity of a substantial military involvement to salvage the Saigon regime. (42) Only with a durable government in the south would the successes of the VC be reversed. To bolster South Vietnam, Americans would have to take a larger role in the struggle.

Taylor argued for the urgent dispatch of additional U.S. troops, since the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) could not provide for the security of American personnel and their facilities. (11) A new decision had to be made. The head of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), General William C. Westmoreland, contended that allowing U.S. forces to engage in direct combat without being under Vietnamese command and control would be the most effective way to bring about success. Remaining as static targets defending bases would not contribute to victory, and it would eventually lead to defeat.

Westmoreland did not recommend immediate deployment but suggested an increase of the U.S. role in areas of "least political liability." For the present, he wanted to retain the advisory system with a greater American role only at the district level. (13) Nevertheless, a significant number of troops eventually would have to bolster the GVN. McGeorge Bundy, the President's National Security Adviser, informed Secretary of State Dean Rusk that the situation in South Vietnam was deteriorating more rapidly than predicted the previous November, and "some stronger action" was required to save South Vietnam. (15) This thinking was not disseminated outside the top echelons of government. The President told congressional leaders that "more U.S. forces were not needed in South Vietnam short of a decision to go to full scale war," and that the war must be fought by the GVN. (30)

Communist attacks were on the rise. (36) The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), fearing that the lack of response to such attacks could be misconstrued by the other side, wanted immediate reprisals. (51) One such reprisal was the resumption of the covert De Soto patrols off the coast of North Vietnam, a retaliatory mission intended to provide the Americans and South Vietnamese with a "priceless advantage" in terms of intelligence. (53) Rusk supported the reprisal policy, but wanted to avoid a firm commitment. (19, 20) Taylor believed that the reprisals should be undertaken without warning in order to keep the Communists in a state of tension. (22) VC military

and political success was of grave concern to the Johnson administration and drove the course of the debate over intervention toward the eventual decision. Escalation, it seemed, might be the only way to stiffen the GVN to a point where it could survive the VC onslaught.

In the midst of the discussions over a response, in early February McGeorge Bundy traveled to South Vietnam on behalf of the President to assess the situation and recommend action. During Bundy's visit, the Viet Cong attacked an American barracks at Pleiku on February 6. Upon his return to Washington, Bundy told the President that the situation was grim, and he recommended sustained reprisals. The American reaction to the Pleiku aggression came in the form of air strikes against North Vietnam. (76, 77, 78) The attack became the justification for a stronger program of retaliation for which policymakers had been waiting. (80, 81, 87, 88) Soon thereafter, the VC attacked a U.S. installation at Qui Nhon, with resultant loss of American life. An immediate reprisal air attack followed. (106) Despite the assault, North Vietnam remained bellicose. **On February 16, the GVN seized a DRV vessel loaded with munitions off the coast.** (140)

A major concern of the administration was the response of the Soviet Union to the increased use of U.S. military power in Vietnam. The White House showed restraint when Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin visited Hanoi in February. (55, 61, 70) Hoping to keep the Soviet role in Indochina limited, Ambassador at Large Llewellyn Thompson warned Soviet Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin that Hanoi was trying to "mousetrap" Kosygin and get him to support the DRV aggression. (82) The administration recognized the necessity for avoiding an open conflict with the Soviets, and so explained to them why U.S. planes were attacking North Vietnam. (87, 89) However, some like Senator Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) were concerned that the bombing would force the Soviets' hand. (92) In an effort to moderate an expected angry reaction by the Soviets, the Americans wanted to make clear that it was the other side that was escalating; the United States had even canceled the De Soto patrols. (120) Also, Washington would consider any solution that the Soviets proffered to deal with the problem. (135, 136, 138, 150, 151) The desire for Soviet cooperation was paramount for administration officials, who believed Chinese intervention a real danger. (89)

In November 1964, the Vietnam Working Group of the State Department had established a phased scheme for the application of force against the DRV. Phase I consisted of the incremental retaliation for each VC incident, while Phase II involved a sustained program of reprisal with more severe, graduated strikes against DRV territory. By early February 1965, discussions within the U.S. Government focused on the implementation of a Phase II program of concentrated air strikes against North Vietnam. (93, 109, 111) After Pleiku, the administration did not intend to continue its retaliation on a case-by-case basis. It would implement the graduated pressure as conceived in the second phase. Taylor supported the program of reprisal. Graduated pressure, he thought, would cause the DRV to cease its infiltration and would make domestic and international public opinion more manageable. (93)

Perceiving that this piecemeal approach to countering VC attacks was not deterring the Communist insurgency and was undermining the will of the GVN to fight, Johnson administration officials hoped reprisals would boost South Vietnamese morale while bringing world-wide pressure on Hanoi to agree to negotiations. On February 13 the President confirmed the transition to Phase II by giving final approval to the sustained bombing of North Vietnam (limited up to the 19th parallel). There were no objections among his staff. (98, 99, 104) Political strife within South Vietnam delayed the commencement of the bombing program, code-named Rolling Thunder, until March 2. (110)

The VC attacks and the U.S. response represented "a major operational change." The President felt he had to clearly communicate the decision on systematic bombing to the public **without** unnecessarily alarming the nation. (124, 127, 128) He and his closest advisers realized that despite the use of force, no quick resolution to the war was likely, nor would any one strategy bring about a settlement. Therefore, officials within the administration proposed various non-military measures to secure peace. "We sh'd be looking at diplomatic tracks to a bad end," Under Secretary of State George Ball told the President at the start of the year. (17) Through the spring, Ball, who opposed the drive toward military solutions, continued to note the risks attendant to each step in escalation and alluded to the dangers inherent in bombing. Political action was required in conjunction with military undertakings, a combination that would allow the President to opt for a settlement at

any point. (113) Rural reconstruction was another effort that had promise. Ball supported a program of pacification, measured military action, and peace talks as the three-pronged way to achieve a resolution. (115)

Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey joined in Ball's effort to dissuade the President from committing troops, underscoring the need to develop non-military tracks immediately. (134) The President did approve a number of economic and political efforts to mobilize South Vietnam's populace, and authorized the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to explore the feasibility of intensifying covert action. (242)

The President did seek a diplomatic solution while pursuing military measures, but negotiations proved inconclusive and no satisfactory alternative to military escalation. His advisers warned that the DRV leadership was so obstinate that it might never be induced to cease its struggle against the south. (126) If anything, they argued, the negative fallout from bombing might even buttress Hanoi's international political position and serve as a cover for its infiltration into South Vietnam. (139) One diplomatic effort came from the French Government's official contacts with Chinese and North Vietnamese diplomats in Paris, but the French obtained no definitive statements in response to their queries about specific terms of settlement. (48) In the end, there was little evidence to support the contention that the DRV favored a political solution.

Another suggested step toward a settlement was to take the matter of Vietnam to the United Nations. U.S. Representative to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson presented the rationale for American actions in Vietnam to the Security Council, and he pressed Secretary-General U Thant to undertake an initiative. His talks with Thant had begun in 1964. (115, 118, 122, 137, 145, 146, 149) Thant suggested a five plus two nation arrangement for U.N.-sponsored negotiations of all interested parties. He insisted that Hanoi wanted to negotiate privately and directly with the United States, but felt it was Washington that was reticent. (162) Frustrated with his failure to get movement, the Secretary-General made public the discussions that he had carried out with Stevenson, and insisted that the U.S. Government was deliberately deceiving its people about the possibilities for peace in Vietnam. (164) Henceforth, the Johnson administration felt it could no longer fully trust Thant (173), yet it still managed to view Thant's comments as an "inadvertent assist" in terms of generating favorable domestic public opinion that would allow the United States to hold out for meaningful negotiations. (183)

In a related measure, British Ambassador Lord Harlech proposed a revival of the cooperation achieved at the 1954 Geneva Conference by reconvening a conference under its co-chairmen, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. The Soviets were wary of engaging in this role, since the United States had not made public its objectives. (135) No middle ground existed between the United States and the DRV. The CIA contended that the DRV was not flexible, had not changed its position since 1963, and would not do so now. (156, 158) The Johnson administration simply found no way to bring about the proper conditions for direct negotiations. (144, 156)

While the frustrating search for peace continued, South Vietnamese political affairs became even more shaky. On February 19, an attempted coup against Khanh and Quat occurred. The power behind it was Tran Van Don, a former Defense Minister. (141) The U.S. Government hoped to preserve the Quat government, which had the support of militant Catholic elements. (142, 147) The coup against Khanh was suppressed, but the Generals who had put down the insurrection then ousted Khanh. General Nguyen Van Thieu, Quat's Defense Minister, assumed leadership of the armed forces. (148, 152, 153, 154) The Americans persuaded Khanh not to challenge the new clique and instead go into exile with an appointment as ambassador at large. (166, 177) Officially, Quat remained the Prime Minister, although in reality the position was now strictly nominal. The Embassy characterized the Quat government at this point as "cohesive," and reaffirmed the need for U.S. support for the GVN. (169)

The Saigon regime still faced significant challenges. (167) At one point, the administration tried to get the Vatican involved in decreasing the pressure of Vietnamese Catholics on the Quat government. (348) A coup masterminded by a number of elements and led by Catholics was beaten back on May 21. The end was near for the civilian government. After the dissolution of the Armed Forces Council, a series of military reversals in the countryside and a paralyzing struggle between Quat and Suu over the replacement of some cabinet ministers, the military ended the facade with its resumption of power on July 12. The military dissolved the Legislative

Council and put Quat into a caretaker capacity. (349) A stable civilian government in Saigon, so long a goal of the Johnson administration, now seemed unattainable.

The physical security of the GVN declined correspondingly with its civilian government. U.S. Information Agency Director Carl Rowan believed that the lack of protection afforded to Vietnamese citizens by the ineffective government in Saigon was exacerbated by the VC's standing with the peasantry, among whom it enjoyed "a substantial degree of approval." (172) There were indications that VC strength had risen some 20 percent, to 40,000. (177) The administration received reports that the VC held the initiative, were rearming and recruiting, could move at will, and were accelerating the tempo of their attacks on the ARVN. (180, 182) Rumors of American war crimes did no help either. **A false report about the use of poison gas in South Vietnam against the VC provoked world-wide protests.** The White House went to great lengths to counter the charge, but the denial fell mostly on deaf ears. (210, 211, 216)

U.S. intervention no longer hinged on South Vietnam's stability. Administration officials now interpreted the apparently increasing failure of the struggle against the VC as the principal justification for the use of American combat units, because U.S. troops would have to take over from the ineffective ARVN if the Communists were to be stopped. This reasoning dominated the internal debate over intervention that took place during the rest of the spring. Strong action. it was believed, would deter further Communist aggression. Secretary Rusk, for example, called for a comprehensive effort to bring about the end of the insurgency, which would include the stationing of Marine combat units at Danang, a move which along with air strikes hopefully would stiffen the GVN. (157)

On February 26, the President decided to land Marines in Vietnam to secure Danang airfield. (168, 170) The next day, the administration released its White Paper, an attempt to rationalize the increasing U.S. profile in the war and to win over public opinion (171) The Rolling Thunder bombing program, approved earlier but delayed by the tumult in Saigon, began on March 2. The Johnson administration hoped that this use of American power might cause North Vietnam to give up its goal of conquering the south. (175, 188) Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy stipulated that bombing would end only if the North Vietnamese stopped their southward infiltration of men and matériel (181)

In spite of these measures, VC strength grew. According to an assessment by Westmoreland, the VC were making the maximum effort possible against the GVN. (180, 181) They were not being destroyed, and, according to Taylor, the GVN was unable to cope. (186) As U.S. troops were introduced into Vietnam, differences of opinion as to how best to utilize them to reverse the decline continued. Bundy and McNamara saw the chances for a turnaround as "less than even." They recommended the replacement of Taylor and the development of "contingency thinking" in the case of a sharp deterioration of the counterinsurgency program. (183) On March 8, Henry Cabot Lodge, former Ambassador to South Vietnam and now a special consultant to the President, submitted a report advocating an increased pacification effort, economic development, and the establishment of enclaves along the coast as various means for salvaging the mission in Vietnam. (189) John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, tried to clarify U.S. priorities in the war. He outlined as the principal American war aim the avoidance of the loss of American prestige, with secondary goals being the prevention of China's expansion into mainland Southeast Asia and the improvement of the lives of the South Vietnamese people. He argued that the administration needed "a contingency plan to downgrade the apparent stakes" when necessary. (193)

A key turning point was the trip of General Harold K. Johnson, Army Chief of Staff, to South Vietnam in early March. The President asked him to determine how to improve the ground situation. (179) General Johnson concluded that U.S. troops had to compensate for the deficiencies of South Vietnamese forces. He recommended the deployment of American forces to defend several air bases and to secure three highland provinces, a significant change in mission but essential because of the ineffectiveness of the ARVN. (197, 199) The President approved Johnson's additional recommendations for increased bombing in Indochina, but held off on the introduction of large numbers of troops. The change in mission also had a political importance. To achieve an honorable peace, the U.S. Government could only negotiate with the Communists from a position of strength. Thus, the current deteriorating situation in South Vietnam had to be offset by the deployment of U.S.

combat troops. According to the JCS, a large contingent of troops could be useful in bargaining with the DRV. (198, 208)

Weighing the respective advantages and disadvantages of placing troops into static enclaves or sending them inland to the exposed highlands, Taylor recommended careful consideration before taking any action. (204) Most agreed that some bold step was necessary. Taylor supported MACV's recommendation for a 50,000 man force to allow for "territorial clear-and-hold missions." (218) On March 29, the Ambassador returned to Washington where he successfully recommended that American forces already in Vietnam should assume an "active and aggressive posture." (219, 224, 231, 232, 237) In National Security Action Memorandum No. 328 of April 6, the President approved a more active role for the Marines inside South Vietnam and increased the tempo of Rolling Thunder. (237,242)

It was still not clear whether this action would be enough. Washington policymakers concluded that the bombing program had hardened DRV attitudes. (233) The limited bombings would do little to prevent the burgeoning U.S. ground forces in the south from becoming "mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win," noted Director of Central Intelligence John McCone. The only way to avoid such a calamity, he argued, was for the President to order a dramatic widening of the air war against the north and a massive campaign against the VC insurgents in the south. (234) The JCS supported this view by reporting that the air strikes, "while damaging, have not curtailed DRV military capabilities in any major way" over the last month. (241) Air power alone, these advisers agreed, would not bring about a settlement to the conflict. In addition, there were more foreboding developments. Not only was the bombing program disappointing, but heightened concern arose over drawing Communist bloc powers into the conflict. On March 26, Dobrynin informed Rusk about the Soviet decision to send substantial amounts of military assistance to North Vietnam. He warned that a greater U.S. role in the conflict would adversely impact U.S.-Soviet relations. (217) The President also worried about the less discernible but potentially more dangerous Chinese reaction to the expansion of the war. (230)

Decisions on force levels were still pending. In April, McGeorge Bundy informed Taylor that the President considered additional troops an "important if not decisive reinforcement" given the danger faced by the GVN. (256) U.S. soldiers at least could bolster the ARVN while building up strength inside South Vietnam. At Honolulu on April 20, Taylor, McNamara, Westmoreland, the JCS, and the Commander in Chief, Pacific, agreed to recommend an increase in the scale of bombing, an introduction of nine new U.S. battalions, and allied nation involvement. Total allied troop presence in Vietnam would rise to 115,000 men. (264) McNamara sent a report on the Honolulu meeting to the President explaining that the new increment of troops was necessary to protect those already in South Vietnam now exposed to VC attack and that a significant offensive combat role was now envisioned. (265) A series of meetings followed to consider action on the basis of the McNamara report of the findings at Honolulu. (266, 269) On April 30, the President decided to deploy six battalions, with the decision on further battalions delayed until June. (280) Within the week, Johnson had requested an additional \$700 million for the military effort in Vietnam.

In the face of these decisions to commit combat units, the administration's diplomatic efforts to secure a political compromise with the DRV continued with a new emphasis on public diplomacy. In an April 7 speech at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, President Johnson made a major public relations proposal with his statement of U.S. objectives. He vowed to do "everything necessary" to preserve South Vietnam while affirming that he would also undertake anything required for "unconditional discussions" to begin. **In an effort to entice the DRV politburo, he offered a \$1 billion development program for the Mekong River Valley.**

DRV Premier Pham Van Dong responded with a four-point declaration of settlement: U.S. withdrawal, no foreign alliances for South Vietnam, the implementation of the program of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam, and reunification to be decided upon solely by the Vietnamese without outside interference. (245) The President believed that Dong had rebuffed his Baltimore overture, but Ball countered that the statement presented an opportunity to explore a possible negotiated settlement. It was also a chance to take the initiative in the battle for international opinion that Hanoi's rejection of other appeals for peace had allowed. The United States had to search for common ground with the DRV since their positions were so far apart. (267)

The President in fact already was giving Ball's ideas a chance. William Bundy advocated accepting the offer of a peace conference made by Cambodian leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk. (272) The Soviets were lukewarm to the idea, preferring not to negotiate on the DRV's behalf. (263) In any case, a mistaken bombing of a Cambodian village by U.S. planes caused Sihanouk to cancel the conference and to break off diplomatic relations altogether. (284) Other peace moves failed. Ambassador Blair Seaborn, a Canadian member of the International Control Commission, visited Hanoi periodically beginning in April in an attempt to ascertain the DRV's willingness to enter into peace talks. (245) Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh showed little interest in negotiations and remained vague on the significance of the Four Points, which was the DRV's standard response to peace initiatives. (335, 336) Indian President Radhakrishnan unsuccessfully put forth a plan that involved a cessation of hostilities in Indochina followed by the policing of the area by an Afro-Asian force. (285) Nor would the DRV countenance U Thant's idea of a cease-fire at the 17th parallel (233) or a 17-nation appeal for peace. Also, at the end of May, a British initiative with the Chinese Foreign Minister turned out to have little promise for resolving the situation. (321) A significant handicap in this regard was the inability of the Saigon regime to put forth a statement to counter the Four Points. (320)

The most important peace move occurred in conjunction with a brief bombing halt code-named Mayflower. The administration had decided to implement a bombing pause before employing greater force in Vietnam. It was believed that a halt around the time of Buddha's birthday might stir the DRV to soften its hard line. (297) On May 1, U.S. Embassies in London, New Delhi, Ottawa, and Paris received instructions to sound out their host governments concerning the usefulness of a halt to the Rolling Thunder bombings, especially as to whether Hanoi would cease its military activities in the south. (283) The response suggested that a pause could be put to good effect, and so the administration ordered a holiday stoppage. (288, 291, 293, 294) It would test the DRV's intentions about talks, demonstrate U.S. commitment to peace, assuage domestic political criticism, and buttress the decision to send more troops.

The administration viewed Soviet help as indispensable. In Moscow, Ambassador Foy Kohler tried to establish contacts with his DRV counterpart. (298, 299) The DRV Ambassador spurned a meeting with Kohler, preferring instead that the message come through the Soviets, but the Soviets did not want to be intermediaries. They viewed the bombing halt and the peace message as ruses and would not negotiate on behalf of the United States. Rather, they insisted that Washington had to deal directly with Hanoi. (304) An official message from the President was handed directly to an employee of the North Vietnamese Embassy, (299) but the North Vietnamese never replied to the note. In conjunction, journalist Pierre Salinger met with a former TASS Washington bureau chief Mike Sagetallyan, and an unidentified Soviet representative on several occasions in an attempt to garner their assistance. The administration believed that the Soviet offer to help was "genuine" but did not establish a basis for negotiations. This channel collapsed by mid-May. (301, 302)

Stevenson also engaged Thant in conversations about the significance of the pause. He told Thant that the pause would only be extended if there were no leaks. Thant replied that it was necessary to offer NLF representation in the Government of South Vietnam before Washington could get a satisfactory response from Hanoi. (297) The Saigon mission believed the plan to be disadvantageous to the GVN's cause as it would allow the NLF a voice in the governmental apparatus. (310) Even President Johnson doubted the impact of the bombing pause on world opinion or on restraining the Communist insurgency. "No one has even thanked us for the pause," the President noted with chagrin. (304) Bombing resumed on May 18.

The VC continued their offensive while the GVN remained static. (332) Hanoi's unrelenting commitment to the struggle in the south required the administration to employ greater military pressure. Some officials voiced opposition to what seemed inevitable. Ball and former Secretary of State Dean Acheson had devised a settlement plan that focused on economic and cultural programs for strengthening the GVN. (287) In this manner, Ball wanted to move the conflict from the military to the political arena, the only way in which the United States would achieve a lasting and favorable settlement. He favored a suspension of military operations and a general amnesty. (300) Some argued that this would lead to increased infiltration and urged a probe of every opening that would lead to a possible settlement. Military escalation "could be a quagmire," Presidential adviser Clark Clifford stated. "It could turn into an open end commitment on a part that would take more and more ground troops, without a realistic hope of ultimate victory." (307) On June 5, Senator Mansfield asked the

President to limit the bombing and not expand the war. He urged instead that the administration pursue the negotiating track. (341, 344)

But the President would deploy at least some combat troops to Vietnam. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach assured the President that congressional authority was unnecessary for the proposed massive troop dispatch. As Johnson was the commander in chief, he had the authority to commit troops and there was "no need" to go to Congress. (345) The debate at this point centered solely around the numbers of troops that the United States would commit to Vietnam and the specifics of their mission. The military leaders at the Pentagon and MACV recommended doubling the number to over 150,000. On June 7, Westmoreland asked for a 44 battalion force, 34 of which would be American, 9 from Korea, and 1 from Australia and New Zealand, to be sent to his theater of operations due to rapid deterioration in the military situation. (337) The Westmoreland request was discussed by the President's principal foreign policy advisers on June 8.

According to Taylor, there was a need to build up the necessary force gradually or the commitment might get too large and unwieldy. (340) Nevertheless, the top U.S. military leaders supported and approved of Westmoreland's request. (346)

In addition, Westmoreland had asked for a great expansion of his tactical responsibility. He already had the authority to begin minor offensive operations. On Jun 5, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and the Joint Chiefs directed him to commit U.S. troops to combat situations, although the White House publicly stated there was no change in mission. MACV troops could now operate with South Vietnamese forces. The administration tried to minimize the momentous nature of this new role by describing it as in aid of South Vietnamese soldiers "faced with aggressive attack." The overriding necessity for the role change was to support South Vietnamese morale. (339) Further expansion of the air war also followed as the administration considered a proposal to utilize B-52 strikes to destroy IL-28 and surface-to-air missile sites. (342) Deep patrolling and reaction operations in conjunction with the South Vietnamese were needed. "We have reached a point in Vietnam where we cannot avoid the commitment to combat of U ground troops," Westmoreland stated, and U.S. troops had to be deployed in large numbers to aid the ARVN in the fight against Communist subversion. (351)

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## Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968

### Volume III, Vietnam, June-December 1965

### Volume Summary

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*(Special acknowledgement to the Office of the Historian, Department of State)*

(This is not an official statement of policy by the Department of State; it is intended only as a guide to the contents of the volume.)

Since 1861, the Department of State's documentary series *Foreign Relations of the United States* has constituted the official record of the foreign policy and diplomacy of the United States. Historians in the Office of the Historian collect, arrange, and annotate the principal documents comprising the record of American foreign policy. The standards for the preparation of the series and the general deadlines for its publication are established by the *Foreign Relations of the United States* statute of October 28, 1991. (22 USC 4351, et seq.) U.S. policies in the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson are the subject of 34 printed volumes. Volumes in the *Foreign Relations* series are published when all the necessary editing, declassification, and printing steps have been completed.

This volume is the second of two for 1965, the year in which the United States committed large-scale combat forces, prestige, and resources to Vietnam, continue the Department of State's expanded coverage of the documentary history of the Vietnam war. The Vietnam volumes for 1965 are extensive and intensive, each documenting 6 months of policy deliberation and decisions. *The Foreign Relations* volumes on Vietnam are the most comprehensive published collection of documents on the war, surpassing the "Pentagon Papers," which were made public with much controversy during the war. Unlike the "Pentagon Papers," whose authors did not have access to White House files, these *Foreign Relations* volumes rely heavily on the records of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his aides. They continue the tradition, begun with the first volumes on President Eisenhower's Vietnam policy, of using expanded sources. In addition to extensive research at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, the editors examined and selected records from the Departments of State and Defense and Central Intelligence Agency, as well as the papers of key officials such as General William Westmoreland, Averell Harriman, General Maxwell Taylor, General Harold Johnson, John McNaughton, and Senator Mike Mansfield.

Most of the documents were originally classified. The Historical Documents Review Division of the Department of State, in concert with the appropriate offices of other agencies and foreign governments, carried out their declassification.

The following is a summary of the negotiations and policy discussions documented in the volume. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text.

#### SUMMARY

In the summer of 1965, U.S. officials engaged in an intensive debate on the expansion of the American commitment to South Vietnam. Convinced that South Vietnam would lose the military struggle without substantial U.S. ground troop support, General William C. Westmoreland, Commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), requested a large-scale deployment of combat and logistical forces, and predicted a need for additional forces in the future. He foresaw a long war involving an increasing number of troops. (17) Westmoreland's call for more soldiers led to the decision to intervene militarily in Vietnam.

The civilian regime in South Vietnam had been unable to gain any political support for its authority. Thus, the military returned to power, ostensibly at the invitation of Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat, with the formation on June 17 of a National Leadership Council. The chairman of the Council was Nguyen Van Thieu, who also acted as the Republic of Vietnam's Chief of State. Nguyen Cao Ky, vice-chairman of the Council, became Prime Minister. (2, 5) The Embassy in Saigon hoped that the Ky cabinet would promote unity, project an improved image, implement reform, and incorporate opposition groups into the South Vietnamese political process. (9) But any such political progress would be slow in coming. The June 19 Charter stated that until a new constitution could be promulgated, sovereignty would rest with the military. (12)

Contrary to the Embassy's hopes, the situation in the south deteriorated during the summer of 1965. Internal political dissension led by militant Buddhists erupted anew in central Vietnam. The ruling military directorate in Saigon used the continuing Communist threat as an excuse to impose a moratorium on political activity and set back efforts to cultivate support among various elements in the south. (134, 138) Reports that the South Vietnamese national police were using noxious gas to quell dissent exacerbated tensions. Although the gas used was not nausea-producing, its application in crowd control continued with MACV approval. (147, 150) Unlike the demonstrators, most South Vietnamese were, in the words of the Embassy, "fence-sitters," but popular resentment of the large U.S. presence was growing. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, who replaced Ambassador Maxwell Taylor in August, optimistically concluded that just 15 percent of southerners sympathized with the Viet Cong, but admitted that the subversive group had an organizational structure superior to that of the South Vietnamese government (GVN). (165, 166) The country could be salvaged only with an infusion of U.S. troops, the South Vietnamese leadership contended. (60)

As the situation deteriorated, the U.S. military effort in Vietnam expanded. On June 16, 21,000 more troops were ordered to Vietnam, and on June 17, B-52 bombers were used for the first time. On June 18, the President agreed to Westmoreland's June 7 request for airmobile battalions. Under Secretary of State George Ball urged limiting the American role. He wanted a standstill cease-fire and bombing halt followed by internationally supervised elections. Ball had insisted that the President keep control of policy and not let the momentum of the impending intervention overtake other considerations. Since there was little indication that American involvement could make a difference in the long run, the United States would be bogged down like the French a decade earlier. (7) National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy argued for a stand-down in the fighting during June, although not as a way of proceeding along the lines that Ball had recommended. To Bundy, a pause would demonstrate the good faith of the American side while placing the onus for the continuation of the war upon Hanoi and even Peking. Bundy hoped for Soviet leverage upon Hanoi to compel it to negotiate and a lessening of growing U.S. domestic criticism. Such a pause would occur not in place of but in conjunction with the escalation. (8)

Proponents of a bombing halt failed to convince the President, who now worried about the military advantage such action would give the enemy. At the June 23 meeting of the National Security Council (NSC), Secretary of State Dean Rusk warned of Southeast Asia's fall to Communist China, while Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara called for an increased application of military force in Vietnam along with a greater emphasis on negotiations. (16) With such hawkish advice, the President rejected Ball's plan for limits on troop numbers. On June 29, the President ordered additional battalions to Vietnam, which pushed the force level to 125,000.

Now clearly in the minority, Ball countered that such a commitment would result in catastrophe. He believed that the President had to carefully consider U.S. participation in the war. When things turned sour, a withdrawal would have an adverse impact upon American credibility and commitments abroad. (24) Hence, Ball saw this decision as a turning point. "A substantial and careful plan for cutting our losses" would allow the United States to get out of the conflict without a significant decline in prestige. (26) On the other hand, McGeorge Bundy argued that America in 1965 was not colonial France in 1954. "The US in 1965 is responding to the call of a people under communist assault," he asserted. According to Bundy, the position of the administration was strong, even united, at home, and morally justified. The United States could succeed in Vietnam. (33)

Westmoreland was given authority to move his forces anywhere inside South Vietnam. On June 28, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) informed him that he would have an authorized force strength totaling 175,000 men. (28) Westmoreland responded that the projected force of 34 American and 10 allied battalions were insufficient to do the job. Only an overwhelming force could deter Communist aggression in South Vietnam. He wanted more troops to secure the provinces in the central highlands. (31)

On July 1, the President received several important memoranda relating to the likely intervention. McNamara requested an expansion of U.S. forces in Vietnam up to 44 battalions and expanded air strikes. A key part of his strategy for victory would consist of the simultaneous opening of a channel of negotiations with the North Vietnamese, which would assuage the Soviet leadership as well as U.S. public opinion. (38) Rusk

wanted to emphasize a maximum effort on the part of the South Vietnamese, but he acknowledged that U.S. ground forces, air action, "other flags," peace negotiations, and pacification in the countryside could supplement the effort. (39) Ball advocated a dovish line of a compromise settlement wherein the United States would achieve less than its stated aims but would reduce its losses significantly. He wanted the President to move quickly toward a formal conference using the North Vietnamese commercial representative in Paris, Mai Van Bo, as the intermediary. Ball did not want to abandon the South Vietnamese as long as they would fight for themselves, but he wanted to keep the U.S. role minimal. By keeping the stakes low, America would avoid the humiliation of a lost war, which would come if it failed to achieve all but a complete victory. (40) Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy proposed a "Middle Way." This short-term alternative would be a test of the military effectiveness of a sizable number of U.S. forces and the reaction to its performance. At this point, the President should not withdraw the troops, but he should not increase them above the 85,000 level already in place. (41) Johnson continued to keep his options open. He did not approve any specific action but set in motion various elements from each of them.

On July 8 and July 9, the President received strong support for his impending decision for escalation in Vietnam from the so-called "Wise Men," distinguished informal Presidential advisers. The Wise Men met and concluded that Vietnam was a crucial test of the American ability to counter Communism. They suggested the stakes were important enough for the President to authorize whatever combat forces were necessary to prevent defeat. (55) At the same time, the JCS reported that the air strikes were having a minimal impact upon the enemy's ability to wage war. (57) Because of its disappointing results, the air campaign was becoming secondary to the war on the ground. Therefore, the President should proceed with the 34 U.S. battalion (and 10 allied battalion) plan soon, dispatching the troops gradually so as to minimize the impact of the decision. (61, 63) He could even mobilize the reserves, since a joint resolution in Congress could be attached to pending domestic legislation. (80)

At the President's request, McNamara visited South Vietnam to determine whether the large U.S. commitment would force the Communists into a settlement favorable to the GVN and whether it would create an adverse reaction among the Vietnamese people. (54) South Vietnamese leaders asked McNamara for additional U.S. materiel support and the introduction of U.S. fighting units to relieve the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) for pacification duty. (60, 63, 64) After returning from his trip on July 21, McNamara summarized the options at the President's disposal: to withdraw, to maintain the status quo and continue to weaken, or to increase the force levels inside Vietnam and expand the bombing effort, thereby increasing pressure on Hanoi and demonstrating that the odds of winning were against the Communists.

Reinforcing his earlier recommendations, McNamara saw a possible victory in South Vietnam by 1968 with the augmentation of Westmoreland's forces. In conjunction with military measures, McNamara recommended a substantial expansion of the political effort against the Viet Cong (VC) insurgency. These actions would avoid defeat and provide a chance for a favorable settlement. He thought that upwards of 34 battalions, approximately 175,000 U.S. troops (more if there was not a Korean contribution) could satisfy the requirement initially, although an additional 100,000 might be needed by early 1966. He advocated calling up 235,000 reservists and National Guardsmen. (67) Ball predicted that such a massive force risked becoming "lost in the rice paddies." (71)

President Johnson moved cautiously toward a limited effort in Vietnam. (72) His political adviser, Horace Busby, believed that Johnson was walking a dangerous path. What was now proposed was a new type of war: it would no longer be South Vietnam's struggle; it would be "ours." (75) There were, however, no objections to the intervention, and even Ball declared that he would go along with the final decision. On July 22, the President met with his top Defense advisers and Generals. All the Service Secretaries and the JCS believed that it would be a mistake to withdraw. McNamara stressed the new phase of U.S. involvement. "Now we would bear the responsibility for satisfactory military outcome." (76) Troops would be withdrawn only when there was proof that the enemy no longer infiltrated southward. (78) Like McNamara, McGeorge Bundy noted the changed mission with the combat troops now in South Vietnam. The administration had moved from a guerrilla insurgency to a conventional war. (83) On July 24, a North Vietnamese surface-to-air missile (SAM) shot down

an American aircraft for the first time. The President approved an attack on two SAM sites far from Hanoi. (87, 90)

The formal decision on combat troop deployment came at the NSC meeting on July 27. No one opposed the troop deployment. If the United States was going into Vietnam, it would not be a partial war. (93) Later that day, Johnson briefed Congressional leaders. He insisted that there was "no change in policy." (94) Senator Mike Mansfield (D.-Mont.) and other senior Senators believed that America should not be in Vietnam and told the President that American troops should be extricated as soon as possible. (96) Nevertheless, on July 28, the President announced the decision to the public at a midday press conference. The announcement indicated 28 combat battalions would be sent; 6 more were sent on September 1 without announcement.

At the press conference, the President also announced he was ready for unconditional discussions with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). (97, 132) U.S. diplomats encouraged peace initiatives by other countries in the hope that some indirect openings would arise. Relations with the Soviet Union had been improving over the last 2 years, so perhaps the Soviets would help. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko told U.S. Ambassador Foy Kohler that while the Soviet Union was interested in undertaking private approaches to end the war, it could not negotiate with the DRV on behalf of the United States. (23) The Central Intelligence Agency concluded that the Soviets wanted to contain their commitment to Hanoi, and thus had sought to deter further American escalation in Vietnam. (58)

Ambassador at Large W. Averell Harriman heard the most promising indications from Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin. The United States should undertake a peace initiative with Hanoi, which would not interpret it as a sign of weakness. Harriman responded that the President was waiting for a response from the North Vietnamese. Kosygin retorted that "people with the noise of bombs in their ears are not anxious to negotiate." (59) The Soviet Premier believed that Washington had made a mistake in equating Hanoi with Peking. The North Vietnamese would probably bypass the Chinese and go for a negotiated settlement if bombing ended. He urged that Washington make counter-proposals to the DRV's Four Points (settlement terms that Hanoi had espoused in April). (68)

Many third-party attempts to open negotiations failed. In mid-June, the Premiers of the British Commonwealth met in London and decided to form a mission to contact all interested parties with the goal of beginning a de-escalation. Although welcomed by the United States and South Vietnam, the Soviets, Chinese, and North Vietnamese rebuffed the overture. (6) Yugoslav Premier Joseph Tito and Indian Prime Minister Shastri unsuccessfully called for the suspension of the bombing and the opening of a Geneva-style conference to resolve the dispute. (102) President Nkrumah of Ghana desired a temporary halt to coincide with his visit to Hanoi. but his plea was rejected by the United States on the grounds that Hanoi was already a restricted area and the bombing would end simply if the DRV stopped its aggression against South Vietnam. (111)

There was extensive pressure to take the case of Vietnam to the United Nations. Senator Wayne Morse (D-Ore.), the leader of the campaign, pointed out that the United States could not unilaterally end the war. The United Nations could deal with the hostilities in Vietnam before it became a general war and U.N. action would be a viable alternative to escalation. The administration, however, was leery of any move toward Security Council debate, fearing it would have an adverse impact upon Saigon's morale, would make Moscow more hard-line, and would be seen in Hanoi as weakness. "Given these difficulties," McGeorge Bundy noted, "I am inclined to back away from this one." (10, 18, 19)

The Soviets also opposed such a move. Soviet Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin told Rusk that his government did not consider the Security Council "a proper forum" for deliberations on Southeast Asia. A pessimistic Rusk proposed that U.S. Representative to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson sound out Secretary-General U Thant on exploring the possibility for a peace conference with the Soviets. The initiative might be worthwhile if it could influence Moscow to decrease its aid to North Vietnam or help to re-establish the Geneva forum. (52) North Vietnam would insist on separate National Liberation Front (NLF) representation as a precondition for talks, which was unacceptable to Washington. On the other side, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko told Rusk, the U.S. requirement for ending infiltration and attacks forced the North Vietnamese to undertake negotiations from a position of weakness. They would never come to the conference table in such an environment. (158)

Justice Arthur J. Goldberg, who replaced Stevenson at the United Nations, advised a more public display of American intentions. The President could express his desire to seek peace by announcing the intervention and, at the same time, trying to obtain in the Security Council a simple resolution calling for an unconditional peace. (82) Presidential adviser Clark Clifford opposed going to the United Nations on the grounds that it was inconsistent with sending in large numbers of troops. (85) The President thought that it should at least be tried, so he asked Goldberg to investigate the feasibility of such a resolution with Thant, allied nations, and the Soviet Union. Rusk perceived such a resolution as a way to placate critics and bring about a settlement process. (87, 89)

Later that summer, Thant did personally appeal to various parties for opening a conference to establish conditions for the cessation of hostilities. Hanoi refused U.N. involvement, and the Soviets and French were not interested in Security Council action. Goldberg appealed directly to Security Council members, insisting that the United States was prepared to work unconditionally for peace. (99, 114) The British did come forward with a resolution on Vietnam that called for a cessation of hostilities along with a North Vietnamese commitment to end infiltration. Since there was no policing mechanism for the agreement, it was turned down by the United States. (106)

On July 28, the President had sent the U.N. Secretary-General an explanation of his actions in Vietnam and asked him to determine whether the Soviets would be interested in initiating a peace process. On August 12, U Thant proposed a two-part basis for a settlement that included foreign troop withdrawal and supervised elections. (119) The U.S. Government agreed with Thant's suggestions that cessation at first could be de facto, and then formalized later in a conference. Thant transmitted this offer in a note to the Chinese, Soviets, and North Vietnamese (who again rejected the offer). (129) Security Council members questioned whether the United States really wanted negotiations, or if its efforts were for international public opinion. According to Goldberg, the administration had to reiterate strongly the call for unconditional negotiations in order to avoid such condemnation. (175)

In discussions with Harriman, Kosygin had suggested that Washington follow through with some offer to Hanoi. (59, 68) Thereafter, secret talks began with Bo in Paris. Retired diplomat Ambassador Edmund Gullion, a former Deputy Chief of Mission in Saigon, undertook this sensitive assignment, known as the "XYZ Affair." Gullion was codenamed X and Bo became R (or Rupert). In these talks, Bo appeared not to insist upon prior withdrawal before formal discussions. (98) He described the "modalities" of withdrawal as flexible and the Geneva terms as a "valid base" for the settlement of the war, but insisted that only the NLF represent the South Vietnamese people. (113) The United States in turn wanted an "unconditional Geneva Conference" and the withdrawal of all foreign forces. Washington would suspend its bombing campaign only for adequate reciprocal actions and would not allow for an NLF "role as a right" in South Vietnam. (115) Bo wanted the United States to give proof of its acceptance of the Four Points: U.S. withdrawal had to precede unification and the NLF had to be equated with the GVN.

The United States could not accept these conditions. As the war in Vietnam escalated in the early fall, the DRV negotiating position became more intractable. In his August 13 meeting with Bo, Gullion found him "rigid, even retrograde." Bo would not say if the Four Points had to be accepted wholesale before the convening of a peace conference. Gullion found some encouragement in the fact that Bo failed specifically to mention the continued bombardment of North Vietnam as an obstacle to negotiations. Otherwise, there was little progress. (120) Two days later, they had a positive session. Gullion asked Bo what "proofs" were necessary to begin talks. Bo replied that the end of the bombing was "tangible evidence" of U.S. acceptance of the Four Points as a basis for discussions. (122) On September 1, Bo retreated on the terms for ending the fighting in Vietnam. The United States would have to withdraw its troops before any elections could take place and would have to end the bombing unilaterally. (133) By November 1, diplomat Paul Sturm, codenamed Y, had taken over from Gullion. The North Vietnamese representative saw nothing new in the messages that Sturm conveyed, so the contact soon ended. (185) The key DRV requirement remained an unconditional suspension of the bombing campaign.

The intelligence community concluded that the DRV could be persuaded by new air attacks that its goals were unachievable and thus moved toward compromise. But the Director of INR, Thomas Hughes, dissented,

protesting that escalation of the bombing campaign would undermine U.S. insistence that it was fighting in Vietnam for limited objectives. In any case, Hanoi would refuse to negotiate, and the Chinese and Soviets would become more involved. (148) Chester Cooper of the NSC believed that while Hanoi had given an "impression of greater flexibility," it had rejected unconditional discussions and U.N. intervention and insisted on the Four Points as the "sole correct basis" for a settlement. (152) The Soviets may have had a real interest in seeing negotiations begin, but China was pressuring Hanoi not to negotiate. (154, 158)

Based on discussions with the North Vietnamese, Hungarian Foreign Minister Janos Peter told his American counterparts that as long as the bombing went on, the DRV leaders would not entertain the idea of negotiations. The United States could seize the initiative by ending military operations in Vietnam and, according to Peter, the DRV would surely reciprocate. Rusk disagreed, pointing out that the **Communists did not reduce their activities in Laos after the 1962 Geneva Accords**. (159) Lodge argued that following Peter's advice to cease the bombing would be "a very serious blow." The Romanian Government also claimed that Hanoi no longer insisted upon withdrawal of U.S. troops before negotiations, although the DRV had kept its requirement of recognition of the NLF program as the basis for these talks. (168)

U.S. domestic dissent became a complicating factor in the attempt to open negotiations. Significant antiwar protests began in August. Lodge advised the administration to convince the public that it had left no stone unturned in its pursuit of peace talks over the last 6 months, but he remained a hard-liner who publicly encouraged the idea of total military victory and non-recognition of the NLF. (124, 162, 174, 176) The President shared Lodge's views that the United States would not accept anything that allowed a Communist takeover. (192)

Contacts between the Embassy in Saigon and the NLF, however, did take place in the fall of 1965. (45, 46, 47) The Embassy was at first reluctant to parley with the NLF, believing that any such contacts would demonstrate an "overeagerness to negotiate" and undermine South Vietnamese morale. (47, 48, 50) The overture from the NLF came through the auspices of the Vatican. Archbishop Palmas, Apostolic Delegate to Saigon, told Lodge that a "former Vietnamese cabinet minister" had contact with an NLF representative who wanted to see him. This individual headed a faction within the NLF opposed to Hanoi's domination and was seeking an end to the fighting in South Vietnam. Lodge viewed the approach as possibly significant. Any leak of this contact would damage relations with the South Vietnamese, so Rusk authorized "a very cautious probe of this feeler." (191) The individual's credentials were delivered first in order to ascertain his validity. (193)

Lodge agreed to receive an NLF representative, provided he was a high-ranking official. Rusk hoped that the meeting would result in splintering the NLF by bringing about important defections. (217, 219) It never materialized. Palmas believed that his informant had been "cheated and deceived" by the VC or that Hanoi had quashed the effort. (232) Lodge and Palmas met again on December 5. The individual was ready to see Lodge, but the Ambassador demurred, insisting that he had to meet with someone identified in advance as holding senior rank. On December 31, Palmas informed Lodge that the NLF "minister" was unable to meet with him. Despite the disappointing results, the United States continued to hope that a split would develop within the NLF that could be exploited in the future. (276)

U.S. policymakers were also forced to respond to NLF threatened and actual terrorist acts. The administration had asked the South Vietnamese to delay a scheduled execution of VC cadres in response to what it considered as "blackmail" for the non-execution of U.S. prisoners. It failed to dissuade the VC leaders, who subsequently **executed one of the American soldiers held captive**. The next day, the VC bombed the My Canh restaurant, an establishment popular with U.S. personnel, killing 23 Americans (20, 21, 22) An attempt to prevent VC reprisal executions of U.S. prisoners of war was made by trying to secure International Red Cross, British, or other third-party protection for American prisoners. However, the Embassy predicted that Hanoi would reject any such designation. (167, 173)

Leaks to the press about various peace initiatives and the resulting public pressure did result in a Christmas holiday pause. In November, Professor Giorgio LaPira went to Hanoi at the request of Italian Foreign Minister Amintore Fanfani. On November 20, Fanfani told President Johnson that the North Vietnamese strongly desired a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Ho Chi Minh simply wanted a cessation of hostilities and adherence to the Geneva protocols, (205) Fanfani said that Hanoi actually had a "very deep suspicion" of Peking and was not

bound by China to continue the military struggle. Furthermore, the DRV had omitted any stipulation of U.S. withdrawal as a prerequisite to talks. (207) All the United States had to do was issue a statement in support of the Geneva principles, and pledge eventual withdrawal. The DRV, however, would not negotiate with the GVN. (210, 211) LaPira's identity was soon leaked to the press, however, causing North Vietnam to disassociate itself from his initiative. (263) In addition, the Stevenson-U Thant talks of 1964-1965 were also revealed by journalist Eric Sevareid in a *Look* magazine story. (203)

The peace moves did not deter U.S. military efforts. The military buildup that occurred during the fall of 1965 proved insufficient, and the JCS wanted its operational authority expanded and more troops placed at Westmoreland's disposal. Upon the advice of Admiral Ulysses Sharp, Commander in Chief, Pacific, the JCS recommended a stepped up military campaign against the north. (125, 130) The military wanted to expand the bombing beyond its present pattern to include the Hanoi-Haiphong area, IL-28 and MIG airbases, and SAM sites within the capital and port area. (136) The JCS recommended bombing the SAM sites and airfields in the previously restricted area around Hanoi. (140) McNamara became concerned that while the bombing had some usefulness in terms of interdiction, it failed to deter overall VC capabilities in South Vietnam and was causing significant damage for the United States in public opinion terms. (100) McNamara therefore opposed the JCS-recommended strikes for late September. The President supported him, and the strikes were not approved. (142) The President opted for a graduated bombing program in the hope that Hanoi would become more conciliatory over time as America demonstrated its will to persevere.

In mid-July, McNamara had devised a plan, based on recommendations from MACV, for the phased use of U.S. troops in Vietnam. Phase I would be an attempt to reverse the losing trend by deploying a total of 175,000 troops in strategic defense. In Phase II, beginning in early 1966, 100,000 more troops would be deployed to engage in strategically offensive operations against the enemy in high priority areas. In Phase III, additional forces might be needed to eradicate the enemy if it still maintained a military force. (67, 132) But now, MACV and the JCS wanted an increase in force levels to 210,000 from 175,000 men, while McNamara was reluctant to go above 200,000 men. (149, 153) Agreeing with McNamara not to exceed the mark of 200,000, the President approved an increase in force levels to 195,000 men. (155)

During the fall, some of Johnson's key advisers called for a temporary cessation of the fighting. On October 22, William Bundy argued for the feasibility of a second pause during 1965. Washington had to "play down the element of threat" to make the pause credible, yet the underlying assumption was that bombing would resume when the pause expired. (178) Three options existed: 1) a pause followed by Phase II deployments, 2) no pause and deployments, or 3) halting all deployments but continuing bombardments. (181) McGeorge Bundy realized that the nature of the war would change drastically with the Phase II deployments in which U.S. troops would assume the dominant role, and so recommended a pause at this point before moving forward. (183)

On November 3, McNamara told the President that Phase I would be completed by early 1966, and the "favorable outcome" predicted in his July 20 memorandum would be achieved. McNamara's preference was thus for a "hard-line pause" with resumption of U.S. bombing followed by troop deployments if concessions were not forthcoming from the DRV. A bombing pause would gain favorable public opinion, which would lead to an easier acceptance of additional troop deployments. He did concede, however, that the enemy had an excellent chance of hanging on. (189) Rusk opposed the continued escalation in bombing because the enemy was "weakening." He wanted the bombing "leveled-off." (194) Thus, agreement existed on the dispatch of combat personnel, but not on the proposed pause. (198)

In mid-November, the first major battle between U.S. and Communist main force units occurred in the Ia Drang Valley. Given the number of enemy casualties, the U.S. military concluded that attrition could work and that it should continue its policy of seeking out the enemy. Continued infiltration of troops from North Vietnam, however, made up for attrition, matching the U.S. build up and pushing up the costs of escalation. MACV's requirements kept rising. At the end of November, Westmoreland estimated that the forces he needed for Phase II had risen to 200,000, thereby increasing the total required force level from 275,000 outlined in July to 410,000.

Following a short trip to Saigon, McNamara presented to the President a stark account of the deteriorating military situation in which he predicted the existing troops would be inadequate for military progress. In

conjunction with a significant augmentation of forces, he recommended a bombing pause, since this greater strength could not guarantee success. (212, 222) He had lost confidence in the U.S. ability to succeed militarily in Vietnam without great costs. If the President was going to keep U.S. forces in Vietnam, he would eventually have to send 600,000 men by the end of 1967.

McGeorge Bundy was "marginally against the pause," (202) but his feelings changed within the week due to the Ia Drang fighting and an article by Eric Sevareid in *Look* magazine claiming that the United States rebuffed a U Thant peace initiative which had the support of North Vietnam. It appeared as though the United States had not gone far enough, and there was a political necessity to show that Washington was as serious about peace as it was about fighting on the battlefield. (208) By December 4, there was a "favorable consensus" within the administration on the bombing pause. "We think this is the best single way of keeping it clear that Johnson is for peace, while Ho is for war," Bundy asserted. Also, if the pause did indeed lead to negotiations, then implicitly Hanoi would have relented on its stipulation that Washington must accept the NLF's program as a pre-requisite. There was "no trap;" a defensible reason could be found to restart the bombing when necessary. (215) But the administration did not define what constituted a favorable response from Hanoi and what would trigger a bombing resumption. Nevertheless, Bundy contended, the pause would be a bona fide peace initiative; a way of moving toward a diplomatic settlement of the war. (220)

Others wavered over the suitability of the pause. After traveling to South Vietnam, Senator Mansfield and a fact-finding party concluded that the pause would not be effective "unless coupled with broader U.S. initiatives in other fields." (227) The pause was the best hope for peace, as it might divide North Vietnam from China, but it had its risks. "This is a conflict in which all the choices open to us are bad choices," he summarized. (233) Special Assistant to the President Joseph Califano was opposed to the pause "as a dramatic gesture," especially when the JCS objected to it. However, some overture was "necessary." (228) Ball wanted to end the bombing of North Vietnam altogether. (229) He presented his "heretical view" to the President, arguing that the bombing program had extreme negative consequences, especially in terms of hardening the will of the North Vietnamese people and government, and should be terminated.

President Johnson was convinced that the pause could be a first step toward peace and that any discussions that arose would moderate the growing discontent over the war "The weakest chink in our armor is public opinion," the President confided to his advisers, and a bad public image was something that could undermine his entire agenda. (231) Califano thought that a Christmas-through-Tet pause, in conjunction with diplomatic moves, would be a sincere expression of the administration's interests in peace talks. The President approved this time-frame, and on December 17, he decided tentatively on a month-long pause, although he would determine the continuance of the halt as it progressed. (226, 228, 231)

A protracted discussion on the eve of the pause, weighing its advantages and disadvantages, indicated Johnson's doubts. The risks were minimal, McGeorge Bundy assured the President. "We can resume bombing at any time." On the other hand, Clifford believed that the pause would be ineffectual. McNamara noted that the pause would give the Soviets, who did not want to confront the United States over Vietnam, a "way out" and allow them more latitude in any effort they might undertake to resolve the conflict. (234, 235) The JCS worried about the military impact of an extended cessation (238) Despite the reservations of the JCS, Lodge, and Rusk, the President enacted a 30-hour truce on Christmas eve. (242) Military operations in South Vietnam resumed on December 26, but the bombing of North Vietnam did not. On December 27, Johnson decided to continue the pause for a week and soon thereafter decided to defer resumption of the bombing until later in January. (254)

The pause generated a number of new diplomatic contacts. The administration believed that it demonstrated that the United States was not the obstacle to peace; encouraged Soviet help, and revealed Hanoi's intransigence. (241, 251, 253) Walt Rostow, Chairman of the Policy Planning Staff, recommended establishing contacts with North Vietnamese representatives during the pause. (243) On December 23, Rusk asked the Hungarian Government to follow up on Peter's October inquiry as to what the DRV would do if the United States stopped bombing. On December 27, Hanoi responded to the overture by insisting that the United States would have to negotiate on conditions presented by the NLF. The administration replied that it would not enter into direct negotiations with the NLF, but would instead allow it representation in the talks if Hanoi ceased its

aggression. The United States did need an indication of what Hanoi would do to reciprocate when direct talks commenced. (257, 258)

The peace overture during the extended pause became known as Pinta. Washington wanted to make clear that the halt was a serious move toward peace which required a suitable concession from North Vietnam to keep the process moving forward. The President sent representatives to 34 countries in an effort to get through to the North Vietnamese. The Vatican, Britain, France, Canada, Italy, the United Nations, Australia, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Laos, New Zealand, and the Philippines were informed directly of the U.S. peace initiative. (263, 265, 268, 271, 273, 275) The most significant contacts the multi-pronged effort included the resumption of Sturm's meetings with Bo in Paris, Harriman's discussions with Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki, and Ambassador Henry Byroade's parley with DRV representatives in Burma. (261, 262, 266, 269)

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## Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968

### Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966

### Volume Summary

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*(Special acknowledgement to the Office of the Historian, Department of State)*

(This is not an official statement of policy by the Department of State; it is intended only as a guide to the contents of this volume.)

Since 1861, the Department of State's documentary series *Foreign Relations of the United States* has constituted the official record of the foreign policy and diplomacy of the United States. Historians in the Office of the Historian collect, arrange, and annotate the principal documents comprising the record of American foreign policy. The standards for the preparation of the series and the general deadlines for its publication are established by the *Foreign Relations of the United States* statute of October 28, 1991 (22 USC 4351, et seq.). Volumes in the *Foreign Relations* series are published when all the necessary editing, declassification, and printing steps have been completed.

Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966, is one of seven *Foreign Relations* volumes that will present the official record of U.S. policy in Vietnam during the Johnson presidency. Volumes I through III (already published) and volumes V through VII document U.S. policy during the following periods: volumes I, 1964; II, January-June 1965; III, June-December 1965; V, 1967; VI and VII, 1968.

Most of the documents in Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966, were originally classified. The Information Response Branch of the Office of IRM Programs and Services, Bureau of Administration, Department of State, in concert with the appropriate offices of other agencies and foreign governments, carried out their declassification.

The following is a summary of the policy discussions and negotiations documented in the volume. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text.

#### Summary

##### Introduction

Publication of the voluminous "Pentagon Papers" in 1971 made instantly available a rich body of sensitive documentation on the shaping of U.S. policy in Vietnam, including the year 1966. But the authors of the Department of Defense study had no access to White House files and only partial access to State Department and CIA records and thus could document only part of the story. Based on full access to Executive Branch files, including the White House files of the Johnson presidency as well as Central Intelligence Agency records made available exclusively to State Department researchers, Vietnam 1966 draws extensively on documentation that was unavailable to the "Pentagon Papers" authors. Moreover, Vietnam 1966 is the first *Foreign Relations* volume to include substantial portions of President Johnson's taped telephone conversations with top advisers and other confidants on foreign affair topics. The transcripts of the 17 conversations selected and declassified for the volume illuminate the views and concerns of a President who rarely expressed himself in any substantive way on paper. In addition to these sources, the volume makes extensive use of State and Defense Department records and the personal papers of several major U.S. policymakers: George Ball, Averell Harriman, John McNaughton, General Maxwell Taylor, and General William Westmoreland.

##### The Bombing Pause and Renewal of the Bombing

The year 1966 began on a comparatively quiet note in Vietnam. On December 24, 1965, President Johnson ordered a temporary cessation in the bombing of North Vietnam to demonstrate U.S. interest in a negotiated settlement and to entice North Vietnam into direct negotiations. During the 37-day pause, the President communicated his intentions to 115 countries and sent special emissaries to 34 of them, seeking to explore every possible avenue for opening negotiations.

The worldwide reaction to the peace offensive was favorable; but since the North Vietnamese not only rebuffed the overture but at the same time increased their attacks in South Vietnam, the administration faced a dilemma. "Our position will erode here if we wait much longer to resume the bombing but abroad we will lose support if we resume," Secretary of State Dean Rusk observed. (7) The Joints Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the

Commander in Chief of Pacific Forces (CINCPAC), the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam (MACV), and Johnson's Special Consultant General Maxwell Taylor all favored a resumption due to the "disadvantage" placed upon American troops in the field. (13, 14, 17, 26) National security adviser McGeorge Bundy wanted bombing restarted, although **unlike Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, he was not in a hurry to "get cracking."** (34)

Others in the administration argued against a rapid resumption of the bombing campaign. U.S. Representative to the United Nations Arthur Goldberg stressed the "danger" that an appearance of bad faith could have if Washington did not thoroughly exhaust every opportunity for peace. (8) Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy and Ambassador at Large Averell W. Harriman also advised against resumption, noting that the administration would lose the international goodwill that the pause had generated. (9, 12) There were more dire consequences if the pause ended too soon, contended Under Secretary of State George Ball, who warned that renewed bombardment could lead to war with China by June. (41)

For its part, Hanoi responded negatively to the bombing pause, insisting that the United States halt its bombing unconditionally and subscribe to the program put forth in its Four Points of April 8, 1965. Three of the points were acceptable: Vietnamese territorial integrity, abrogation of foreign military alliances, and peaceful reunification. However, the U.S. Government could not accept the third point, namely reconciliation according to the program of the National Liberation Front (NLF). (25) On January 24, President Ho Chi Minh of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam labeled the overture a "sham peace trick." (55) The President felt he was left with little choice. "Not from 115 countries have I gotten anything," Johnson remarked in a January 29 meeting with his advisers. (54) Bombing resumed at the end of January. U.S. contacts with Communist diplomats in Rangoon, Moscow, and Vientiane had been unsuccessful in forestalling the restart of the bombing since, as William Bundy noted, "the total picture was negative." (8, 25, 29, 30, 51)

### **The Senate Hearings on Vietnam**

Disturbed by the resumption of air attacks, prominent U.S. Senators, led by J. William Fulbright (D.-Arkansas), called for a public debate on Vietnam. The first of five televised hearings by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on President Johnson's request for \$415 million supplemental Vietnam aid for fiscal year 1966 took place on February 4. Particularly damaging to the administration were testimonials by General James Gavin and senior diplomat George F. Kennan, both of whom urged that there be no further escalation in the war and instead argued that Washington had to liquidate its involvement in Vietnam.

On February 18, Rusk (soon followed by Taylor) publicly defended administration policy under a grueling examination by Fulbright. In a telephone conversation with the President's Special Assistant Larry O'Brien, Johnson termed the Fulbright hearings "a very, very disastrous break." (64) Although other officials echoed the President's feelings about the hearings, Johnson's former White House Press Secretary, George Reedy, told him that he thought the "Gavin-Kennan concern" was actually sensible" since Vietnam policy did need to be formulated within the context of overall American global strategy. (21, 78, 86)

Fulbright's televised forum pre-empted an administration effort to submit to Congress new legislation that would more specifically justify U.S. intervention in Indochina. In light of the ensuing domestic political climate, Presidential confidant Clark Clifford argued that the administration should simply stand on the broad Tonkin Gulf Resolution. (82) Nor did disaffection with Johnson's Vietnam policy exist solely in the Senate. White House Press Secretary Bill Moyers labeled the drastic decline in the President's popular approval ratings since January the "first signs of American impatience with [the] long war." (86) Following the Senate hearings, dissent and antiwar activity became increasingly a part of the American political mainstream.

### **The Honolulu Conference and the Buddhist Protest**

On the eve of Fulbright's first televised hearing, the President telephoned Rusk to inform him that he had decided to go to Honolulu in two days to hold talks with the South Vietnamese leaders and General Westmoreland, Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. (63) At the Honolulu Conference, which met on February 7 and 8, the administration offered support for the regime of Premier Nguyen Cao Ky and Chief of State Nguyen Van Thieu. In addition, the leaders of the United States and South Vietnam jointly proclaimed their commitments to social, economic, and political reforms in the Republic of Vietnam and to the search for peace. (69, 71. 83)

To buttress the new focus on internal reform in South Vietnam, the President issued National Security Action Memorandum No. 343 on March 28, which named Robert W. Komer as his special assistant to coordinate nonmilitary programs in Vietnam. (102) Komer saw curbing inflation and expanding the pacification and police cadres as the key steps to take in 1966. (141) In addition, he pushed major reforms in the Commercial Import Program, the chief U.S. economic aid program, to curtail corruption and reverse the "rising tide of criticism" it had engendered. "Keep it up & Keep it Hot," the President told Komer. (145)

But there was disagreement over military policy. On March 17 Westmoreland recommended an intensification of the air war in North Vietnam and Laos, prompting a comprehensive review of the air campaign's effectiveness and a debate over increased pressures against the North. (98, 104, 101, 104, 106, 108) The debate was quickly suspended, however, due to the eruption of the Buddhist Struggle Movement in South Vietnam. A major political confrontation had begun when Premier Ky dismissed the Buddhist Commander of I Corps, Nguyen Chanh Thi. Localized Buddhist protests soon turned into large anti-government demonstrations, and the dissidents took control of Hue and Danang. (92, 99, 100)

When Westmoreland reported that the dissidents were verbally abusing U.S. military personnel, Johnson telephoned his dismay to Rusk: "If our people got the idea that the Vietnamese are insulting our men--Marines up in that northern area that are dying for 'em--why they'll jump ahead of Bill Fulbright and Morse and tell us to get the hell out of there." (103) The President doubted Ky's ability to survive the crisis (112), and policymakers gave some thought to disengaging from Vietnam (109, 111, 114, 124), but both Rusk and McNamara believed the situation had not deteriorated to the point that such a drastic response was warranted. (126) Chief of State Thieu's mid-April promise of free elections for a constitutional convention helped calm the troubled political waters. (122, 123)

The crisis ended in May after Ky's forces subdued dissident groups in Danang. (138, 144) South Vietnam took a significant step toward the establishment of representative government with elections in September, which created a Constituent Assembly that would draft a new constitution in 1967. (229, 230)

### **Escalation of the Bombing**

As the unrest in South Vietnam subsided, discussions of the U.S. air war against North Vietnam picked up in intensity. On June 15, the Central Intelligence Agency released its review of Rolling Thunder (the air campaign against North Vietnam) at one year. The report concluded that in spite of the many sorties launched, damage to North Vietnam's war machine had been light because of restrictions placed upon the bombing. However, the strategy did force Hanoi to divert much of its manpower resources into repair and support functions. (157)

White House Special Assistant Walt Rostow (McGeorge Bundy's successor) contended that the best application of American air power was against petroleum, oil, and lubricant (POL) targets, and it was these restrictions that had to be lifted. (133) At the National Security Council (NSC) meeting of June 17, both Westmoreland and Ambassador to Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge argued for the inclusion of POL targets. McNamara believed that such a step would limit North Vietnamese troop infiltration and convey the seriousness of U.S. intentions while the negative consequences were minimal. Goldberg, however, asserted that the Chinese and Soviets at a minimum would make up any loss in POL stocks and, far more ominously, the Chinese might move in troops. The new bombing also could isolate the U.S. internationally and would cause an adverse domestic reaction. He suggested deferring the POL decision until the conclusion of a concurrent peace feeler to Hanoi. Rostow insisted, however, that a sustained POL offensive would seriously affect Hanoi's ability to infiltrate into the south. The NSC recommended approval. (159) At the President's instruction, the JCS authorized strikes against POL targets near Hanoi and Haiphong in late June. (164)

The POL bombings fell short of their stated goals. Military leaders pressed for an amplified bombing schedule, but McNamara, in a September telephone conversation, told the President that he thought the United States should end Rolling Thunder after the 1966 midterm elections. (240) Even pro-bombing advocates Komer and Rostow recognized that while the bombing had hurt the enemy and ground forces had frustrated Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops, the United States had failed to force Hanoi to accept negotiations "on our terms." In September they proposed an accelerated pacification program and sustained political and psychological appeals to disintegrate the Viet Cong and its political arm, the National Liberation Front (NLF). (241)

**Reorganization of Pacification and Appeals to the Viet Cong**

Policy-makers in Washington and Saigon debated how a strengthened pacification program should be organized. McNamara proposed centralization of the program under a single military command in order to eliminate split civilian and military responsibilities. (245) Komer agreed, noting that the military had the bulk of the assets needed to "get pacification moving." (249, 262) But officials at State, CIA, the Agency for International Development, and the Embassy in Saigon strongly opposed removing civilian controls. (248, 252, 263, 271) After returning from an October trip to Vietnam, McNamara compromised by proposing a dual management system with consolidation of political functions under a civilian manager and military responsibilities under MACV. (268) This system became accepted policy. (304, 310)

Efforts to undermine the National Liberation Front (NLF) had started early in the year. In February, Under Secretary of State Ball asked the CIA to undertake a sensitive covert action program against the NLF to exacerbate the perceived regional divisions within the NLF and between the NLF leadership and Hanoi. Ball hoped that ethnic southerners could be induced to defect from the tightening control of their northern counterparts. (62, 234) The administration keenly followed the defection schemes orchestrated by State and CIA during 1966. "A defection by some of the key Liberation Front leaders could be worth many battalions to us," Rusk told Lodge in August, and could help jar Hanoi into a negotiating frame of mind. (206, 214)

In one such operation, codenamed Elmtree, Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson and former South Vietnamese leader Nguyen Khanh arranged meetings in Paris between a U.S. representative and Le Van Truong, who purported to be among the leadership of the NLF. Truong proposed that the NLF might come over to the non-Communist side through the mechanism of a transition government, which in effect would be guaranteed by the continued presence of American troops. The channel terminated when Truong, who had exaggerated his stature in the NLF, could not deliver on promises he had made to secure the release of American prisoners of war. (165, 173, 181) Another episode, codenamed Thrush, involved Permanent Secretary of the Vietnamese Red Cross Nguyen Huu An, who claimed to be an uncle of NLF Chairman Nguyen Huu Tho but was actually a distant cousin.

In September, An contacted American officials in Saigon and told them that Tho would defect if the U.S. government could guarantee his safety. (204) The President was kept abreast of unfolding Embassy efforts to work through An. It turned out, however, that An was a fraud who had purposely deceived the U.S. Government about the entire scheme. (25, 243, 289) Despite these setbacks, other defection efforts proceeded apace (234), while officials in Washington and Saigon sought to work out a comprehensive program of national reconciliation between the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese Government. (180, 196, 203, 213, 258, 276, 300)

**The Manila Conference and the Debate Over Military Strategy**

While trying to strengthen both its military and non-military programs in Vietnam, the administration held an international conference to reaffirm the commitment of South Vietnam's fighting allies and to bring increased pressure on South Vietnam to pursue the goals enunciated at Honolulu. (256) The Manila Conference took place on October 24 and 25 with the leaders of the United States, South Vietnam, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and the Philippines in attendance. (282) "I think we got what we wanted," Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton reported to McNamara: a "display of not-US-aloneness, of resolve, of beginnings of an awakening responsible Asia," without expanding U.S. commitments. The final communiqué expressed the South Vietnamese Government's commitment to Revolutionary Development, national reconciliation, and forward political steps, and pledged that American combat forces would be withdrawn within six months after North Vietnam ceased its aggression against South Vietnam and withdrew its own forces. (284, 300)

Unity at Manila, however, masked serious differences among U.S. policy-makers over military strategy. Following his October trip to Vietnam, McNamara told the President that he saw "no reasonable way to bring the war to an end soon." His solution was to adopt a military posture that could be sustained indefinitely, thereby discouraging a "wait us out" policy on Hanoi's part. This meant stabilizing U.S. force levels and the bombing program, installing an infiltration barrier across Vietnam, pursuing a vigorous pacification program, and pressing for negotiations. Extending from the seacoast across the neck of South Vietnam into Laos, the

barrier would comprise fences, wire, sensors, artillery, mobile troops, air-laid mines, and bombing attacks. (268) The JCS, while agreeing that the United States needed to prepare for a "long-term, sustained military effort," immediately expressed doubts about McNamara's force level goal and argued forcefully for an expanded bombing program with only "minimum constraints," starting with the approval of Rolling Thunder 52. (269)

Before October was out, Westmoreland and Sharp both weighed in on the Chiefs' side on the bombing, emphasizing that an expanded air campaign was an essential element in U.S. strategy. (282, 283) When the JCS renewed its call for Rolling Thunder 52 in early November (295), the President told McNamara, "I want a limited, very quiet, expanded program," a view also articulated not only by McNamara but by other top advisers who feared the diplomatic repercussions of a major escalation. The President approved a scaled-down Rolling Thunder 52 program, which was initiated on November 22. (295-299) Backed by the President, McNamara held firm on the issue of stabilizing force levels at about 470,000 and rejected the JCS request for an additional 50,000 personnel by June 1968. (301, 312)

### **Peace Initiatives**

Throughout 1966, while pursuing the war in Vietnam, the administration continued concurrent diplomatic efforts to precipitate peace negotiations. Washington attempted peace initiatives during 1966 indirectly through Hanoi's patron, the Soviet Union, and through other third parties and directly to Hanoi through public pleas for discussions. In March, Pham Van Dong, Premier of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, suggested to retired Canadian diplomat Chester Ronning that bilateral talks might begin if the bombing ended. (97) But the U.S. Government insisted upon reciprocal action from Hanoi before it terminated the air attacks. When Ronning returned to Hanoi in June, the North Vietnamese refused to countenance the preconditions. (161, 167.) The next month, however, Jean Sainteny, an emissary sent to North Vietnam by French President Charles de Gaulle, found the politburo possibly willing to terminate its southward infiltration in exchange for a complete bombing cessation by the United States. (182)

Prospects were brighter as a result of contacts with the Soviets. On September 22, in a speech at the United Nations, Ambassador Goldberg stated that the United States would cease bombing if Hanoi responded promptly with a de-escalatory measure. This formula would consist of assurances from Hanoi committing it to a reduction in hostilities prior to a bombing cessation. (244) The Goldberg statement generated discussions between Rusk and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in late September and early October. Rusk informed Gromyko that the "bombing can stop, literally within hours, if something can be done to stop the attacks of North Viet-Nam upon South Viet-Nam." (247) While remaining non-committal, Gromyko did extend an offer of possible future Soviet assistance. (251) On October 10, the President, Rusk, and Rostow met with Gromyko and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. The President remonstrated that he had done all he could to get talks moving, pointing out that "when we called, the other side hung up the phone." Gromyko countered that the United States needed greater specificity in its formula for a halt. (264)

These discussions generated a North Vietnamese response communicated through the Swedish Government. Hanoi's Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh told Swedish Ambassador to Peking Lennart Petri that in order to terminate hostilities in Vietnam, Hanoi wanted the NLF to take the lead in the formation of a coalition government preceding reunification and wanted the United States unconditionally to halt its bombing. (303) On November 17, the U.S. Government gave Petri points for his discussions which included requests for clarification on the nature of the reciprocity Hanoi would undertake and on the status of the NLF in relation to other groups in South Vietnam. (314) Trinh offered no response to Petri's queries.

Throughout the rest of the year, the Johnson administration refined Goldberg's statement into what became known as the Phase A-Phase B formula. In Phase A, the suspension of bombing would occur if Hanoi had rendered private assurances in advance. This step would be followed by Phase B, a period during which the execution of previously agreed upon mutual de-escalatory actions would occur. The key was that Hanoi could view its own reduction of hostilities as a response to American actions in Phase B and thus not conditionally dependent upon the halt. This formula was developed with the assistance of British and Polish intermediaries. In November 1966, British Foreign Secretary George Brown carried a message from the American government requesting that the Soviets determine from Hanoi exactly what conditions would lead to peace talks. (300)

Brown reported that North Vietnam's previously intransigent position based upon its Four Points was now described by Gromyko and Kosygin as a flexible "basis for discussion." (317)

### **Marigold**

The most intense secret diplomatic activity, codenamed Marigold, began in late June when Poland's representative to the International Control Commission, Janusz Lewandowski, conveyed the first of many messages from Hanoi to Lodge through Italian Ambassador Giovanni D'Orlandi in Saigon. (167) The President confided to a friend, "Yesterday I had the most realistic, the most convincing, the most persuasive peace feeler I've had since I've been President," but Johnson still doubted that "it amounts to anything" because "I don't think they've had enough yet." (170)

Although Lewandowski was not authorized to represent the positions of the U.S. Government to Hanoi, Lodge pursued the channel to see if the maverick diplomat could clearly communicate the Phase A-Phase B formula. (305) In turn, Lewandowski presented North Vietnamese concerns over several issues: whether Saigon would have to control areas not now held, possible American interference in the creation of a new South Vietnamese Government, and the broader issue of reunification. (306) Washington's response was that while the mechanics of negotiations would be worked out during the initial de-escalation, the United States would abide by the free choice of the South Vietnamese and would not interfere in South Vietnam's internal affairs. (308) As a result, on December 1 D'Orlandi informed Lodge that "something big had happened." Lewandowski had reformulated the American position into ten points. After submitting this list to Pham Van Dong, Lewandowski was told that the United States should send an envoy to enter into discussions over its positions with a North Vietnamese representative in Warsaw. (322)

Lodge informed Lewandowski that the ten points he had formulated did "broadly represent" the American position yet there was a difference of interpretation on particular points. Nevertheless, Washington instructed Ambassador to Poland John Gronouski to contact his North Vietnamese counterpart, but Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki told Gronouski the question of interpretation raised by the U.S. Government "put in doubt" the whole basis for talks with the North Vietnamese. (326, 327) Not only semantic difficulties endangered these contacts, however. In early December, the heaviest aerial bombardments in the Hanoi area since the summer occurred. Although American planes hit targets that had been authorized on November 10 as part of Rolling Thunder 52, the missions had inauspiciously been delayed due to weather problems. (324) Lewandowski expressed grave concerns about the timing of the bombing and its impact on the attitude of Hanoi.

On December 7 Rapacki threatened Poland's withdrawal as a go-between if the bombing continued. (332) A week later he told Gronouski that the attempts to open talks in Warsaw had failed. (342) Further discussion with Rapacki and other U.S. peace moves, including a cessation in late December of bombing within 10 miles of Hanoi's center, failed to regenerate efforts to open talks. (345, 346, 348, 349) In a New Year's Eve telephone conversation with Goldberg, the President expressed his frustration with the peace process: "How can a commander in chief stop his men from fighting unless the other side is just willing to do something?" (356)

### **Planning for 1967**

As 1966 neared its end, several of the President's White House and State Department advisers prepared comprehensive recommendations for conducting the war in 1967 that reflected the changes wrought during 1966. Acutely aware of the Presidentially-imposed ceiling on troop deployments and Johnson's reluctance to expand the air campaign, they emphasized other strategies that had been proposed during 1966: aggressive pacification and national reconciliation programs; promotion of a popularly-based South Vietnamese Government and a land reform scheme; reliance on the barrier to help reduce infiltration: the vigorous pursuit of negotiating leads; continuation of the air war and the "spoiling offensive" against main enemy forces; and improved management of the war effort in Saigon. None of these advisers predicted victory in 1967, but neither did they express doubts that a satisfactory conclusion to the war could be achieved. (318320, 336, 347)

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## Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968

### Volume V, Vietnam, 1967

### Volume Summary

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*(Special acknowledgement to the Office of the Historian, Department of State)*

(This is not an official statement of policy by the Department of State; it is intended only as a guide to the contents of this volume.)

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*The documents in this volume are drawn primarily from the Department of State Central Files, the papers of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his advisers at the Johnson Library in Austin Texas (including excerpts from tape recordings of the President's phone calls), the decentralized lot files of the Department of State, the historical files of the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the files of the National Security Council, the records of the Secretary of Defense and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, the Official Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the files of the Central Intelligence Agency.*

*Almost all of the documents printed here were originally classified. The Information Response Branch of the Office of IRM Programs and Services, Bureau of Administration, Department of State, in concert with the appropriate offices in other agencies or governments, carried out the declassification of the selected documents in accordance with the applicable provisions of Executive Order 12958.*

The following is a summary of the most important issues covered in the volume. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text.

#### **Introduction**

At the beginning of 1967, the Johnson administration began to re-examine its policies as the war in Vietnam continued to escalate. Extensive bombing and large troop increases over the previous 2 years had failed to bring about victory over the Viet Cong (VC) insurgency that was supported by the Communist regime in the North. President Lyndon Johnson and his advisers faced tough choices. Would more U.S. soldiers and less restricted American bombing break the will of the enemy? Would a greater emphasis on the political and civil side of the struggle against the VC, namely the pacification of the countryside and the installation of a civilian regime in Saigon, bring better results than the military effort? Or would a third party effort to open peace negotiations between the United States and North Vietnam alter the fundamental nature of the conflict? The documents presented in this volume capture the dilemma faced by the administration during a year in which it faced increased domestic opposition to an unpopular war. The documentation demonstrates that while the United States went to great ends to end the war, it was determined to preserve a non-Communist South Vietnamese state and thus would continue to act to deter the North Vietnamese and VC at costs that were becoming exceptionally high for each side.

#### **Sunflower**

The year opened on a somber note in the aftermath of the failure of a major peace initiative known as Marigold, an effort to open peace talks with the North Vietnamese through Polish intermediaries. The Poles blamed this failure on renewed U.S. bombing raids around Hanoi. (4, 9) On the heels of Marigold's failure, a more complex opportunity, code-named Sunflower, emerged. On January 2 journalist Harrison Salisbury, who visited Hanoi, reported that the North Vietnamese no longer regarded their Four Point statement of April 1965

as the precondition for talks; they were willing to negotiate seriously. (3) The Johnson administration decided to explore this channel.

In its first phase, Sunflower established direct contact with a North Vietnamese diplomat in Moscow. (7) Beginning on January 10, John Guthrie, Deputy Chief of Mission in Moscow, held several meetings with his North Vietnamese counterpart, Le Chang. Guthrie transmitted a letter from President Johnson to President Ho Chi Minh of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) calling for the opening of talks. (8) Le Chang expressed considerable interest and the administration responded with a further clarification. (16, 18) On January 28 North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh told Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett that talks "could follow" a halt to the bombardment of North Vietnam. (29) Trinh's formula paralleled a similar statement made by DRV Premier Pham Van Dong during a January 12 meeting with two American professors, William Baggs and Harry Ashmore. (20) Trinh's statement represented the most promising peace initiative to date from Hanoi. Another Presidential message followed, insisting upon more direct assurances of reciprocal action in the event of a bombing halt. (40)

The second part of Sunflower began with the arrival of Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in London on February 6. (39) British Prime Minister Harold Wilson believed that he could arrange for the Soviet and British Governments, Co-Chairmen of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Conferences on Indochina, to act as guarantors of peace negotiations between the DRV and the United States. Wilson put forth his own version of a formula to cease hostilities and open the way for peace talks: an initial halt to the bombing after which the DRV would cease its southward infiltration. (41, 46) His interpretation of the U.S. position, combined with increased infiltration during the Tet truce, disturbed the President. Johnson asked Wilson to submit a new and more stringent definition of reciprocal actions expected from Hanoi in event of a halt to the bombing. (50, 51, 54, 57)

Despite Heath's strenuous efforts to keep the initiative alive, a last minute extension of the Tet bombing pause failed to allow the time that Wilson thought Kosygin needed to obtain Hanoi's response. (58, 59, 64-67, 69, 74) On February 13 bombing resumed in full force, causing an immediate end to Sunflower. Ho Chi Minh responded harshly to correspondence received from the President. (79, 81, 83)

### ***Domestic Support***

While the administration remained determined to stay the course, U.S. anti-war dissent continued to build. Johnson pushed the passage of a 6 percent war surtax to overcome spending difficulties and requested large appropriations for spending on the war. (11, 26) An amendment to the appropriations bill, first put forth by Senator Joseph Clark and then modified by Senator Mike Mansfield, contained a statement of Congressional support for the armed forces in Vietnam but called upon the President to end the war through a negotiated settlement based on the Geneva Accords. (94-96) On January 30 the Senate Foreign Relations Committee began hearings supporting the contention of Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright that the administration's direction of the war was flawed. (19, 23) On March 2, after receiving word from the French Government of the North Vietnamese proposals during Sunflower, Senator Robert F. Kennedy came out publicly in favor of a bombing suspension. Kennedy proposed a three-step program for a unilateral halt, international supervision of a cessation of hostilities during the discussions that would follow, and a final settlement that would include the participation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in national elections. (96)

In order to avoid generating renewed criticism, Secretary of State Dean Rusk continued to refuse to appear before Fulbright's committee. (393) Johnson, who retained the support of the majority of the American people, remained convinced that he would prevail in Vietnam in spite of the fact that the war was consuming his administration's domestic programs. The President attempted during the fall to counteract the criticism by sending the Commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), General William C. Westmoreland, and Ambassador to Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker on a tour to engender public support for the war in Vietnam. (400)

### ***Pacification and Internal Reform***

In South Vietnam, changes in the Embassy staff signaled a new direction. After an abortive effort to designate McGeorge Bundy, the President's former Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, or Westmoreland as Ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker assumed the post in April. (97) Presidential Assistant Robert Komer became the sole manager of pacification and Revolutionary Development (RD), an appointment

designed to unify the old system which had been divided between civilian agencies and the military. (150) On May 9, as a result of National Security Action Memorandum No. 362, the Embassy's Office of Civil Operations and MACV's own RD support personnel were placed under Komer, who in turn came under the direct command of Westmoreland. (167) Komer's first action was to centralize the programs under his purview into a project called Takeoff, which involved the expansion of the RD teams and of increased Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) involvement in support of RD. (215) The top priority became the Infrastructure Intelligence and Exploitation Program, a means of identifying and eradicating the Viet Cong infrastructure in conjunction with the Government of Vietnam (GVN). (199, 254, 257) The program later was expanded and re-titled Phoenix. (446)

Efforts were made to fight corruption in the GVN, although Embassy staff recognized that progress in this area was bound to be slow. (258) One success story was the negotiation of a new economic package that set the currency exchange at roughly 118 piasters to the dollar. (114) In August the Embassy staff completed an extensive and wide-ranging report entitled "The Blueprint for Vietnam," which focused on improving the political, economic, and military areas of the war effort. It remained a broad, comprehensive statement of policy but offered little in the way of useful practical action. (323)

### **Elections**

South Vietnamese politics evolved despite the war. The GVN changed from a military directorate to a constitutionally-elected presidency with a new constitution on March 18 that established a strong executive backed by a military advisory council. (100) Local and national-level elections were scheduled during 1967. Despite assurances of unity to President Johnson during a summit conference in Guam, both Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky, the two leading military officers of the Young Turk group that had seized power in South Vietnam in 1965, wanted to be President of the new government that would be put into place on October 31. (31, 99, 115, 118, 125, 132) During the ensuing power struggle, Chief of the National Police General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, Ky's strongest supporter, used his position to aid Ky's campaign. (136, 138, 164, 205) Hoping to give the election the appearance of fairness, Bunker called for the removal of Loan from the political process, but the Department opposed the idea. (211-213) Under pressure from Ambassador Bunker, Ky did manage to restrain Loan. (218) Although Bunker recommended that the United States support Ky, Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach refused to permit direct funding of the Prime Minister. (209, 224)

The United States officially adopted a neutral position in the struggle between Thieu and Ky. (143, 144, 202, 219) The dispute came to a head at the end of June when, during the course of a key meeting of all the leading military GVN officers, Ky backed down in favor of the more senior Thieu and agreed to run as Vice President on his ticket. (226, 229, 230) This move assured a unified military candidacy and victory in the September 3 election and but meant that the new government would only nominally be civilian in character. (271)

Although the outcome was pre-ordained, Bunker sought to maintain the appearance of a fair and free election. On July 11 he submitted to Washington a proposal for a covert advisory role with the military ticket in order to steer it away from counterproductive political maneuvers. (235, 250) Three days later, he also suggested the creation of a front group to generate broad public support for the military ticket. While supportive of the idea of a national political organization, the Department denied direct monetary support to the Thieu-Ky campaign. (241, 242) Even without U.S. support, the Thieu-Ky ticket had enormous influence and manipulated the electoral process. Eighteen presidential slates submitted to the Constituent Assembly were disqualified, including that of former leader General Duong Van Minh. (236, 249) A plane load of the remaining opposition candidates was diverted from Quang Tri to Dong Ha by the GVN, causing them to miss a key campaign appearance. (282) In mid-August Washington rejected Bunker's proposal for funding opposition candidates as well as the military slate. (289) As expected, on September 3, the military ticket won the election, with only 35 percent of the vote. (303) On October 31 Thieu and Ky were sworn into office. Soon thereafter, peace candidate Truong Dinh Dzu, who ran second to Thieu in the election nationwide but actually outpolled Thieu in the major cities, was jailed. (332)

The American role in South Vietnamese politics intensified after the installation of the new government. In November, following an appeal by the new GVN, the 303 Committee approved funding for political party

development in South Vietnam. (398, 417, 424) Earlier, the Committee had considered but then shelved a plan to establish a left-wing political group in South Vietnam as a means of attracting VC supporters to the mainstream political process. (288)

### **Rolling Thunder Unleashed**

The United States intensified its air war against North Vietnam's military, industrial, and power-generating resources. On February 17 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) General Earle Wheeler recommended the obliteration of the electrical power system of the DRV. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, however, believed that the JCS program would be ineffective because of the agrarian nature of the North Vietnamese economy. The President approved not only the expansion of the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign, but also naval actions along the North Vietnamese coast, a moderate increase in the number of U.S. troops, and covert ground operations in Laos. (84) Beginning in March attacks occurred on the Thai Nguyen steel mill and several power plants, MiG bases, a cement plant, and the Hanoi thermal power plant. Another round of heavy bombing began in late April. (139)

The increased level of hostilities encouraged outside efforts to get both sides talking to each other. On March 2 UN Secretary-General U Thant met with North Vietnamese diplomats and suggested a mutual stand-down of hostilities. (98) Within a few weeks, U Thant proposed a three-point step-by-step plan consisting of a standstill truce, the convening of preliminary talks, and the reconvening of the Geneva conference forum. (107) On March 9 McNamara sent to the President a memorandum in which he proposed a bombing restriction to encourage the North Vietnamese to negotiate. (105) On March 18 the United States released an aide-mémoire written in response to Thant's proposal, which stated that it was prepared to cease military hostilities as the first step toward peace. (112)

Hanoi refused to talk as long as it was being bombed. The North Vietnamese rejected the Thant offer, believing that it equated the victim with the aggressor. (123) On April 11 Paul Martin, a Canadian Government official, resuscitated Thant's earlier suggestion by proposing a mutual pull back from the demilitarized zone (DMZ), a measure that Rusk supported in a public statement of April 19. (133) When strikes occurred around Haiphong that day; however, the North Vietnamese rejected the Canadian proposal. (140) On June 25, during the U.S.-Soviet Summit in Glassboro, New Jersey, Johnson gave Kosygin a statement to transmit to the North Vietnamese stating for the first time that an end to North Vietnamese Army (NVA) infiltration into South Vietnam would not have to precede a bombing halt. The United States never received response to this proposal. (216, 217) The North Vietnamese insisted they would not talk while bombs fell on them. In this diplomatic exchange, code-named Ohio, the Norwegian Ambassador to China, Ole Algard learned from his DRV counterpart, Ngo Minh Loan, that the DRV's only condition for beginning talks was an end to the bombing of the North. (201) In addition, a North Vietnamese diplomat in Paris, Mai Van Bo, told Senator Claiborne Pell that bombing was the sole condition for talks. (214)

### **Troop Augmentation**

On the ground in South Vietnam, General Westmoreland held to a strategy of forestalling large enemy assaults on U.S. forces by attacking the Viet Cong (VC) in their base areas. He relied on large search-and-destroy operations, such as Junction City, in conjunction with increased bombing attacks on North Vietnam. (130) In the field, the NVA regulars and the VC forces eluded pitched battles and instead fought in a guerrilla fashion designed to protract the war. Westmoreland hoped that at some point the costs of pursuing the war in the South in terms of men, materiel, and physical destruction would exceed the enemy's desire and capability. He believed that with more troops he could reach this point within 2 years. On March 18 Westmoreland requested that additional troops (100,000 minimum-200,000 maximum) be sent to Vietnam. He predicted that with this increase in troop strength he could speed up the timetable for destroying enemy main force units in the border areas as well as the enemy base camps. (110) On April 20 the JCS sent a memorandum to McNamara supporting Westmoreland's request for more troops. (141)

Westmoreland's request set off a debate in the government among the President's senior advisers. At the end of April, Westmoreland returned from Vietnam for meetings at the White House. He insisted that while U.S. forces were in no danger of defeat, without the additional troops the situation would be "nip and tuck" as far as being able to oppose the enemy's own reinforcements. If the enemy's will could not be broken, Westmoreland

argued, the war could last another 5 years, but if he received another 200,000 men, the maximum number he wanted, the war could end within 2 years. He also opposed any idea of halting the bombing, believing that such a move would give considerable military advantage to the enemy. In addition, Wheeler recommended bombing North Vietnamese ports and launching offensive operations against enemy concentrations in Laos and Cambodia, as well as a possible amphibious assault against North Vietnam. (149)

### **Opposition to Escalation**

Some administration officials were skeptical of what they viewed as another step in the further escalation of the conflict. In a May 1 memorandum, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs William P. Bundy opposed increased troop levels in Vietnam. (154) Defense Department analyst Alain Enthoven also criticized MACV's strategy as playing into the enemy's hands and allowing the North Vietnamese and the VC to "wait out" the United States. (155) Secretary McNamara advised the President against the large troop augmentation, although he recommended other means for applying greater pressure on the North Vietnamese, especially bombing power plants around Hanoi and Haiphong and possibly involving the Soviets in securing a settlement. (154, 156) In a memorandum to the President the next day, McGeorge Bundy similarly recommended against such a drastic augmentation which would have little impact on the fighting and only serve to inflame an increasingly uneasy American public. Bundy also favored a continuation of the current bombing program, but limited to the area south of the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel. (157) On May 5 Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John McNaughton pointed out that supplying MACV with any troop increase at the present time would only lead to future requests from Westmoreland. (161) In a memorandum the next day, Special Assistant Walt Rostow concurred in shifting the bombing southward. (162) On May 9 a memorandum from William Bundy in conjunction with another from McNamara and Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance further supported limiting the bombing to the area below the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel. (170, 171)

On May 19 McNamara submitted a Draft Presidential Memorandum (DPM) to further encourage the wide-ranging policy debate in Washington. McNamara rejected Westmoreland's plans for the large augmentation and attendant expansion of the war effort, which he termed Course A. Instead, he recommended Course B, a much smaller augmentation (about 30,000) and a cap on the total number of troops in Vietnam, a restriction of the bombing to the area of the DRV below the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel, and active pursuit of a political settlement. While this strategy would not bring about military victory in the traditional sense, it would improve the environment for conducting negotiations to end the war. (177) As an alternative to the costly bombing, McNamara pushed separately the implementation of a technological anti-infiltration barrier, part of which went into effect on November 1. (121, 177, 313) McNamara, the former architect of the war, was now the leading opponent of escalation. (121)

McNamara asked for assessments of the DPM. (177) Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms replied that the CIA believed that none of the programs recommended would be able to reduce infiltration enough to affect the war. (180, 181) Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitze supported McNamara's call for restrictions on the bombing. Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown recommended against cutting back the bombing since it would allow the enemy to increase infiltration, and he supported Westmoreland's Course C with a modified target list. The JCS generally agreed with Brown's assessment but instead recommended increased concentration of bombing of the DRV and closing the port of Haiphong. They also believed that the reserves would have to be mobilized. (187) On June 12 McNamara sent the President a revision of the DPM, listing the three options: Alternative A--intensified attacks on the Hanoi-Haiphong logistical bases, Alternative B--emphasis on the infiltration routes south of the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel, and Alternative C--extension of the current program. (194)

### **The Decision on Augmentation and Bombing**

The President delayed a decision until McNamara, along with Katzenbach and Wheeler, returned from an inspection trip to Vietnam. (201) Johnson hoped that they would work out a compromise with Westmoreland. Although Westmoreland insisted that he needed at least 100,000 men, McNamara, during the course of several meetings, held to the figure of approximately 45,000. (233) The delegation, including Westmoreland, returned to Washington. In a July 12 meeting that Westmoreland did not attend, McNamara, Wheeler, and Katzenbach briefed the President thoroughly on all aspects of the war in Vietnam. During this meeting, McNamara posited

that Westmoreland could "get by with less" in Vietnam since there was "some waste and slippage" in the way troops were being employed. (237) Westmoreland attended two subsequent meetings with the President and his advisers on July 13. At the first meeting, the President noted the complete agreement of the delegation and Westmoreland on the augmentation. (239) It was during the second meeting that the President made the decision on supplying Westmoreland with only 45,000 additional troops. (240) The same middle course applied to the prosecution of the air war. On July 18 the President approved only a few new targets, thereby neither greatly expanding nor curtailing the current bombing program. (249)

In an effort to get the troop-contributing countries of Asia to send additional forces to Vietnam, Johnson sent Clark Clifford and Maxwell Taylor on a mission to Asia at the end of July. (244, 253) Clifford and Taylor reported that the allied nations would contribute an additional 65,000 men to MACV. Noting that the leaders of these nations had called for increasing pressure on the North Vietnamese, Clifford and Taylor championed a recommendation made by Wheeler for the immediate bombing of all military targets that had been previously excluded, narrowing the restricted zone around Hanoi and Haiphong, and the preparation of plans for the closing of North Vietnamese ports. (269) Based primarily upon this advice, the President considered greatly stepping up the bombing of North Vietnam, and approved a number of targets, including some in the DRV's buffer zone with China. (283, 294) On August 18 the President decided to suspend the bombing inside the 10-nautical mile zone around Hanoi for the period August 24-September 4, a prohibition extended indefinitely on September 7, because of hints that Hanoi might want to talk. (290, 305)

In August McNamara testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee. In apparent contradiction to military leaders and to the dismay of the hawkish Committee, McNamara argued that the bombing had not reduced infiltration and had not broken the will of the enemy. (287) McNamara's view found support from the CIA, which reported to the President that the bombing had failed to impede southward infiltration. (298) Two weeks later, Helms told the President that although the impact of defeat in Vietnam would be significant, "the risks are probably more limited and controllable than most previous argument has indicated." (316) Despite Helms' conclusion, there was no administration discussion of the disengagement option.

### **Enemy Order of Battle**

According to MACV intelligence analysts, U.S. military operations were hurting the enemy, but other intelligence analysts doubted the validity of MACV's statistics on the enemy order of battle. While MACV insisted that total enemy strength in South Vietnam was under 300,000, the CIA believed that enemy strength was probably double that figure, since the North Vietnamese could replace its losses and increase its assets in South Vietnam through recruitment and infiltration. (297) The discrepancy became so glaring that a conference of intelligence analysts from several agencies was held in Saigon in September. CIA officials wanted to incorporate enemy irregulars, thus raising aggregate enemy strength to over 400,000. MACV refused to budge from its insistence that the figure for the enemy's order of battle did not surpass 298,000. (314) The conferees finally agreed upon order of battle figures that implied an actual drop in enemy strength. (325, 370) These statistics were used in Special National Intelligence Estimate 67.14-1 which estimated the total number of opposing enemy forces at well below the politically acceptable level of 298,000. (397) The estimate's figures implied progress in the war effort, but CIA was convinced it was underestimating the real numbers of NVA/VC combatants inside South Vietnam. (399)

### **Pennsylvania**

One of the most significant secret peace initiatives, code-named Pennsylvania, employed Henry Kissinger, a professor at Harvard University and a consultant to the Johnson administration. Through two French academic colleagues who had connections with the North Vietnamese, Herbert Marcovich and Raymond Aubrac, Kissinger proposed to bring about direct talks between the DRV and the United States. After Marcovich and Aubrac visited Hanoi in late July, Rostow convinced the President to explore the channel to determine its viability. (263, 267, 272) On August 11 the President approved a message for Kissinger to give to his intermediaries in Paris which stated that the United States would end bombing north of the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel if this would lead "promptly" to discussions and assuming that the North Vietnamese "would not take advantage" of the cessation. (277) Kissinger, joined in Paris by Chester Cooper, an assistant to Ambassador at Large W.

Averell Harriman, passed the message to Marcovich and Aubrac, who after a semantic change in the formula planned to carry it to Hanoi. (286)

To make the formulation more attractive, the Johnson administration suspended bombing within a 10-mile radius of Hanoi, but before the halt began, intensive U.S. bombing strikes caused Hanoi to cancel travel permits for Marcovich and Aubrac. (293) On September 9 Kissinger returned to Paris to press for a meeting between himself and Mai Van Bo, the DRV representative in France. As long as heavy bombardment continued around Haiphong, Bo indicated, through the intermediaries, that there could be no discussions. (315) In spite of the rebuff, Kissinger recommended that the channel should remain open, but Rusk warned that ending the bombing merely for the sake of discussions might be unproductive. North Vietnam had to make reciprocal actions in turn. (317) While Johnson approved the continuation of Pennsylvania, he was surprised by Hanoi's failure to accept what he regarded as a reasonable proposal. (318) Kissinger again requested a private meeting with Bo, pointing out that the DRV's rejection was based upon a misunderstanding since the bombed targets were nowhere near port or urban areas. (322-324) In response, Bo urged Kissinger to have patience while he awaited instructions. (329) As Katzenbach noted, Bo had been careful to not slam the door on the channel. (336)

President Johnson then issued a public statement that he believed might engage the North Vietnamese. In a speech in San Antonio, President Johnson proposed a new formula for ending the bombing and opening negotiations. It was in fact a re-working of the same formulation put forth earlier at Glassboro and more recently given to the North Vietnamese in August. There were two operative parts. The first involved a promise that the United States would halt the bombing if it received private assurances from the DRV that productive discussions would follow promptly the cessation. Second, the bombing halt was based upon an assumption that the North Vietnamese would not take advantage of the cessation by infiltrating men and materiel southward. In spite of the President's belief that the San Antonio formula was more than reasonable, the North Vietnamese continued to reject the offer. In an October 2 meeting with Marcovich, Bo termed the formulation "insulting" since the offer to end the bombing remained conditional upon "prompt and productive discussions." (340, 343)

The administration tried again to modify semantics in hopes of swaying the leadership in Hanoi. On October 5 Rusk presented a reworked formula. To make it more palatable to Hanoi, this message did not include the assumptions about the DRV taking advantage of the pause; it included a reference to setting a specific date for a halt and added the new phrase "without expression of condition." Johnson insisted, however, on reinserting a reference to the clause in the earlier message on "no advantage." (348) Kissinger passed the new message to Marcovich and Aubrac who in turn relayed it to Bo on October 8. In a move designed to maximize pressure for a North Vietnamese response, Kissinger immediately returned to Boston. (349)

Pennsylvania quickly unraveled. On October 17 Bo replied that he would never meet with Kissinger as long as the United States continued a policy of escalation. Kissinger told an unenthusiastic President Johnson that the last message could be interpreted as a desire by the North Vietnamese for de-escalation. (357) The President authorized Kissinger to deliver another message that harshly criticized the lack of a positive response from the North Vietnamese. (258) However, Bo thereafter refused even to meet with Aubrac and Marcovich. (362) On October 23 the President concluded Pennsylvania was a dead end; he ordered the lifting of the 10-mile restriction around Hanoi and an attack on the Phuc Yen airfield for the first time. (363, 364)

### **The Wise Men**

By mid-October the administration began re-examining its policies in Vietnam after the JCS asked to bomb a large number of new targets. (341, 346, 348, 355) At the same time, McGeorge Bundy cautioned the President to resist measures to expand the war. (254) Faced with such competing advice, the President decided to reconvene the Wise Men, a group of veterans of the foreign policy establishment who had advised the President on Vietnam in the past. Their task was to consider how to deal with the competing demands for an expanded military program and a de-escalation of the conflict. (376) On November 2 the Wise Men met to review current policy and make recommendations on several matters: military actions against North Vietnam, initiatives for negotiations, the definition of the ultimate goals of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and better presentation of the administration's position to the American people. After receiving mostly optimistic briefings, the Wise Men generally lauded the progress being made inside South Vietnam in political and military terms and urged continuation of current measures. They also advised against limitations on the bombing of the DRV, since

Rolling Thunder exacted a price from Hanoi for its involvement in South Vietnam. North Vietnamese obstinacy meant negotiations would have little impact under the current climate and thus should not be sought at the present time. They also advised the President to remain steadfast in spite of growing criticism and counseled him to engage in vigorous action to stabilize declining public support for the war. (377, 380, 382)

### **McNamara's Denouement**

In marked contrast to the Wise Men's endorsement, McNamara made a strong case for a new direction. On November 1 McNamara sent to the President his last major memorandum critiquing the war effort. He argued against any future troop augmentations. Pouring in more men, he claimed, would not alter the military situation but would mean only increased casualties and erosion of public support. He reiterated that the bombing had failed to prevent the flow of infiltration and suggested that the resultant frustration would lead to calls for expanded attacks on population centers and non-military targets in North Vietnam. In McNamara's view, a paradox had arisen: a growing lack of support for the struggle in Vietnam encouraged an attendant increase in pressure for either widening of the war or getting out. McNamara contended that the U.S. intervention in Vietnam likely would become untenable under current policies. He recommended that the President stabilize force levels, end the bombing of North Vietnam, and lessen the intensity of the fighting in South Vietnam. Perhaps then peace negotiations, and ultimately extrication from Vietnam, would occur. (375)

Other administration officials reacted strongly. Rostow told Johnson that implementing such steps would be regarded as "a mark of weakness" in Hanoi and would make the war more difficult to terminate. (378) Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Abe Fortas, a close adviser to the President, seconded the need to continue applying pressure on the enemy. (387) Clifford agreed that a de-escalation would retard any prospect of concluding the conflict on acceptable terms. (388) In a November 20 memorandum, Rostow reported Westmoreland's opposition to an announced policy of stabilization and to a bombing stand down. (404) Katzenbach took up McNamara's torch by proposing a similar but more limited program that he believed would be acceptable to the American people and prepare them for the extended commitment. (401) Others like McGeorge Bundy and Rusk suggested that the President adhere to the same policies he had been following so far: dribbling in a few more troops and maintaining the bombing campaign while avoiding a drastic expansion in either. (393, 403)

Gradualism won out in the debate because, although the President did not want to widen the war, he was determined not to pull out. On November 28 Johnson announced that McNamara would leave his position in the Cabinet and assume the presidency of the World Bank. Johnson selected Clifford, one of the most ardent hawks among the Wise Men, to be McNamara's replacement. In a December 18 memorandum for the record, the President noted his outright rejection of McNamara's call for a bombing halt. He also opposed a public announcement about stabilizing force levels and thus left the door open for the future dispatch of troops to Vietnam. Surprisingly, he favored several other of McNamara's proposals, such as not increasing the number of troops in Vietnam, not permitting the expansion of ground operations into Laos and Cambodia, and examining ways to reduce casualties and making the war in South Vietnam less destructive. (441)

### **Further Peace Efforts**

Other efforts to end the war through negotiations abounded. Throughout the year, members of the Senate made extensive efforts to involve the United Nations in the peace process. (151, 152, 311, 317, 319) On October 25 Mansfield introduced Senate Resolution 180, which declared that it was "the sense of the Senate" that the United States bring before the Security Council a peace initiative on Vietnam. A month later, the full Senate adopted Mansfield's resolution by a vote of 82-0. (373, 421) Fearing a public reaction and rebuff in the Security Council, the President became less eager about the proposal and made no decision on the matter. (428) In addition, the prospect of the resolution had placed a political strain on allied governments regarding their commitment to the U.S. effort. (427) During December Goldberg continued to find little support among Security Council members; in the end, the resolution was never introduced. (428, 435)

There were other attempts to bring about peace. On November 11 Johnson proclaimed his readiness to meet aboard a "neutral ship on a neutral sea." (395) Thieu launched an abortive attempt to approach the DRV through the auspices of the Japanese Government. (356, 361, 365, 367, 402) The exiled former Premier of South Vietnam, Nguyen Khanh, offered to explore settlement terms with his contacts in the National Liberation Front

(NLF) and the DRV. (407) Spurred by a Viet Cong announcement of their own cease-fires at Christmas, New Year's, and Tet, the administration and the GVN, in conjunction with a public appeal by the Pope, implemented a 24-hour truce beginning on December 24 and an extended truce for 3 days over New Year's. (412, 415, 442, 445, 447) At the end of the year, Trinh issued another statement that asserted that the DRV "will" engage in discussion with the United States after an unconditional halt to the bombing. (451) Trinh's statement had been preceded by another promising peace initiative known as Packers. In October meetings in Hanoi, Dong told Romanian Prime Minister Ion Maurer that peace discussions would follow the unconditional cessation of bombing. Maurer informed Harriman of this new development when the latter visited Romania at the end of November. Harriman asked the premier to arrange peace talks between the DRV and the United States, adding that he could inform the North Vietnamese that after a halt was declared the United States would recognize its right to continue re-supplying its forces in South Vietnam so long as normal levels were not surpassed. (411)

### **Buttercup**

There was also an attempt, later known as Buttercup, by the NLF to open direct contacts with the United States. It began with the National Police's arrest of a VC courier who was carrying a letter from Tran Bach Dang, a member of the NLF Central Committee, which proposed a prisoner exchange. Bunker encouraged the GVN to explore this approach by releasing a VC cadre, Truong Binh Tong, on September 9. Tong soon returned from NLF headquarters in Cambodia, carrying a message stating that Dang was prepared to negotiate. During a temporary cease-fire undertaken specifically for Buttercup, Tong was sent back to NLF headquarters along with radio equipment that could be used to transmit any further messages from Dang. Tong brought back to Saigon a message from Dang stating that prisoner exchanges could lead to exploration of larger issues. (348, 369, 371)

The covert contact became a major issue in U.S.-GVN bilateral relations. So strongly did the United States want the exchange to become an informal mechanism for the reciprocal release of prisoners of war that Bunker even advised Thieu to begin releasing VC prisoners before the NLF released any Americans. (386) The South Vietnamese were anxious, however, about the damage that could occur if its involvement was revealed. (389) U.S. pressure on the GVN mounted after the release of three U.S. servicemen on November 11, but Thieu refused to allow the original courier and other VC prisoners to go free prior to a "guarantee" of a reciprocal release by the NLF. (405, 406) By late November Loan threatened to resign over U.S. prodding on Buttercup since he felt the contact was contrary to the GVN's interests. (423) In early December, with the story partially broken in the press, Bunker finally achieved Thieu's agreement on releasing Tran Bach Dang's wife and the courier. (432, 437) They were released in Tay Ninh province early the next year. (438, 449, 450, 452) The political discussions for which the administration hoped did not ensue from Buttercup.

### **Planning for 1968**

In a November 13 memorandum to the President, Katzenbach proposed a six-part high priority program that focused on internal reform of South Vietnam and an increased Vietnamese role in combat operations. (395) Johnson shortly thereafter discussed plans for the reform of the GVN during the coming year with his foreign policy advisers; these plans likewise emphasized reform of the GVN. In addition, the **President agreed to small-scale raids into Laos**, but nothing in the way of major ground operations. He also was concerned by the bombing around Hanoi and Haiphong since the loss of aircraft associated with raiding these areas proved too great. (409) The military now called for a maximum effort in Vietnam. On November 27 Wheeler, at the behest of Westmoreland recommended a number of such actions, including the dispatch of patrols into the DMZ, extensive operations in Laos and Cambodia, naval bombardment along the North Vietnamese coast, expansion of the bombing in the DRV, and the laying of mines to close the major North Vietnamese ports. (418, 420) William Bundy countered that these were measures designed to escalate and widen the war. (426) On bombing, the President approved a list of new targets, but rejected the JCS request to decrease the size of the prohibited zones around Hanoi and Haiphong. (428) Johnson opposed anything resembling a unilateral halt. Such a move, he believed, would simply increase domestic pressure for withdrawal. (441)

But ominous signs appeared on the horizon. The NVA/VC had launched a series of attacks on a number of **northern** border outposts such as Loc Ninh and Dak To. Considerable enemy military activity began around Khe Sanh during November. (400) Captured enemy documents indicated that a major enemy offensive planned

around the time of Tet 1968. Saigon analysts confirmed that the enemy would try to force a crippling defeat on the GVN with an eye to strengthening their bargaining position at talks that would begin later in that year. (440) For his part, Westmoreland was aware that the enemy offensive would occur, but he thought that the major objective of the offensive would be the highlands and labeled any attacks that might take place in the lowland urban areas "diversionary." (443) In any event, little could be done to staunch the enemy preparations. A study submitted to McNamara by the Jason division of the Institute for Defense Analysis concluded that it was not possible to deny the enemy's ability to infiltrate adequate men and supplies southward. (439) Despite the grim news, while visiting his troops in Vietnam at year's end the President pledged to persist in the military struggle (442)

### **Conclusion**

Although subject to intensive debate, Johnson's war aims remained basically unchanged throughout the year. The President continued to stress compromise between the competing views of his advisers. He defined his Vietnam policy by approving some expansion in the bombing but also in refusing to bomb the DRV's ports and not extending the ground fighting into North Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos. Also, he deployed to Vietnam only a fraction of the troops MACV had requested but did not set a ceiling on later augmentation. He could point to political progress in South Vietnam and a new emphasis on pacification that he believed would bode well for the future. Yet every effort to engage Hanoi in a dialogue with an end to securing a peaceful settlement of the conflict proved to be unsuccessful. Continuing to believe that victory was within reach, Johnson was not prepared to alter the direction of the war. Other policymakers did not share his commitment. Secretary of Defense McNamara, one of the principal architects of the intervention in Vietnam in 1965, left the administration after several frustrating attempts to get the President to deviate from what he perceived as an ultimately ruinous course in Vietnam. In the end, 1967 remained a year of unfulfilled promises and continuing involvement for the United States in Vietnam.

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## Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968

### Volume VI, January-August Vietnam, 1968

### Volume Summary

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*(Special acknowledgement to the Office of the Historian, Department of State)*

(This is not an official statement of policy by the Department of State; it is intended only as a guide to the contents of this volume.)

*Since 1861, the Department of State's documentary series Foreign Relations of the United States has constituted the official record of the foreign policy and diplomacy of the United States. Historians at the Office of the Historian collect, select, arrange, and annotate the principal documents that make up the record of American foreign policy. The standards for preparation of the series and general guidelines for the publication are established by the Foreign Relations of the United States statute of October 28, 1991. (22 USC 4351, et. seq.) Volumes in the Foreign Relations series are published when all necessary editing, declassification, and printing steps have been completed.*

*The documents in this volume are drawn primarily from the Department of State Central Files, the papers of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his advisers at the Johnson Library in Austin Texas (including excerpts from tape recordings of the President's phone calls), the decentralized lot files of the Department of State, the historical files of the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the files of the National Security Council, the records of the Secretary of Defense and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, the Official Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the files of the Central Intelligence Agency.*

*Almost all of the documents printed here were originally classified. The Information Response Branch of the Office of IRM Programs and Services, Bureau of Administration, Department of State, in concert with the appropriate offices in other agencies or governments, carried out the declassification of the selected documents in accordance with the applicable provisions of Executive Order 12958.*

The following is a summary of the most important issues covered in the volume. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text.

#### **Continuing Peace Initiatives**

As 1968 opened, President Lyndon Johnson remained convinced that progress was being made in the war against what he perceived as Communist aggression in Vietnam. Two and one-half years of direct U.S. military intervention in the Southeast Asian conflict, at great monetary, domestic, and international cost to the Johnson administration, had apparently frustrated the enemy's designs to overthrow the Republic of Vietnam. While the President remained steadfast in his personal commitment to use force to prop up the southern regime, he also maintained a "diplomatic offensive" in order to provide the North Vietnamese with a face-saving way of ending the war short of their objective of the total conquest of South Vietnam. Although the prognosis for the war was for a long struggle with no end in sight, in his annual State of the Union message to Congress on January 17, the President publicly remained hopeful. (13)

The Johnson administration pursued a variety of channels to engage North Vietnam in peace talks. In an initiative known as Packers, Romanian diplomats carried messages between North Vietnam and the United States. (3, 5, 8, 9, 18, 71) An initiative known as Buttercup, which had begun in 1967, involved prisoner exchanges with the National Liberation Front (NLF) as an intermediate step toward dialogue. (6) Another channel, code-named Ohio, involved contacts by the Norwegian Government with a North Vietnamese diplomat in Peking. (66) A further initiative involved contacts between Italian and North Vietnamese diplomats at Prague. (86) In addition, U.S. policymakers deliberated over whether North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Dinh Trinh's statement at the beginning of the year regarding conditions for substantive talks marked something novel. (1, 4) These signs and contacts seemed to suggest that direct negotiations might occur. According to a January 18 assessment by the Board of National Estimates of the Central Intelligence Agency

(CIA), "Hanoi's current estimates on the military and political fronts can be seen as one last push to gain the best possible terms in an early settlement." (19)

### **Impact of the Tet Offensive**

The entire situation changed at the end of January with North Vietnam's massive offensive during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. The Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) had known in advance of a likely offensive by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) sometime in the late winter of 1967-1968, but the exact location and scope of it was undetermined. An initial enemy assault on January 22 at Khe Sanh near the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Vietnam seemed to mark the initiation of the enemy's military plans. Khe Sanh soon began to consume a great deal of the personal attention and time of the President and his staff. Johnson's top military commanders assured him that Khe Sanh would be held against the NVA forces holding the outpost under siege. (22, 23, 26, 30, 31) But in a January 30 attack, which changed the future course of the war, NVA forces and Viet Cong (VC) cadre attacked, and in many instances temporarily held, nearly all of South Vietnam's major cities and provincial capitals. (33, 34)

In strictly military terms, the Tet Offensive backfired on the Vietnamese Communists. The attack was not a surprise and indeed had been predicted by the U.S. intelligence community. (32) In a February 1 telegram to General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), General William Westmoreland, MACV Commander, noted that because of a rapid allied response the full force of the offensive, had been rebuffed almost immediately. The NVA and VC forces suffered severe losses in terms of men and materiel, and their hopes for a South Vietnamese popular uprising against the South Vietnamese Government (GVN) failed to materialize. (43) In spite of myriad other attacks throughout South Vietnam, Johnson kept a vigilant focus on the battle for Khe Sanh. (51) He was encouraged in his belief in Khe Sanh's preeminence by officials such as Assistant Marine Corps Commandant General Lewis Walt, who argued that the fire support base there was of vital tactical and psychological importance to the United States. (61) Despite the Communist military losses and the still raging battle at Khe Sanh, the negative political impact of the Tet Offensive upon the United States became much more significant. Tet, coupled with the *Pueblo* crisis, which followed the seizure of a U.S. Navy vessel by North Korea, forced the administration into a siege mentality (58, 59)

### **Debate Over the Deployment of Additional Troops**

In the immediate aftermath of Tet, Johnson attempted to shore up the situation in Vietnam. After Westmoreland requested additional troops, the President approved the dispatch of 10,500 men to Vietnam partially to meet Westmoreland's requirements. (65) Despite the enemy's overwhelming military defeat at Tet, the CIA predicted that NVA and VC military offensive would continue for the balance of the year. (72, 95) Westmoreland, like many U.S. senior military and civilian officials within the administration, believed that the enemy likely would continue to press the attack in South Vietnam, and he soon requested reinforcements considerably above his authorized ceiling of 525,000. The JCS supported and encouraged his request. (62, 63) The subsequent massive call-up of reservists quickly became a primary issue of concern within the government. Outgoing Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara noted that because the enemy had always managed to match any U.S. build-up, such an augmentation would only serve to involve the United States deeper in the Vietnam conflict. During a meeting of the President's foreign policy advisers on February 12, McNamara commented that Westmoreland wanted more troops not to exploit the military situation but as a means of avoiding defeat at Khe Sanh. He advised that the troops be sent, but opposed any "permanent augmentation." (70) Nevertheless, as a stop-gap measure, that same day the President dispatched the first units of a smaller allotment to fulfill part of Westmoreland's new request. (73)

At the direction of the President, General Wheeler visited Vietnam at the end of the month to evaluate Westmoreland's request. Based on Wheeler's assessment, the JCS asked for a reserve call-up of 205,179 men, even though only half of the amount would be assigned to Vietnam. Wheeler believed that this addition not only would regain the momentum in Vietnam lost during Tet, but would also strengthen the GVN and replenish the worldwide strategic reserve of forces. (90, 91) Despite concerns that it would appear to the public as contradictory if the President ordered reinforcements to Vietnam while at the same time proclaiming the defeat of the enemy at Tet, the JCS perceived a unique opportunity to call up reserve forces in order to bolster American military commitments throughout the world. (96)

On February 28 the President turned to incoming Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford to evaluate the request within the context of a broader reassessment of America's goals in Vietnam. (92) Although acquiescing in a much reduced augmentation to Vietnam, Clifford's Task Force concluded that the reserve call-up was much too massive and should be deployed based on a week-by-week evaluation of progress in South Vietnam. Clifford recognized that a victory through conventional means was not only unattainable but carried with it severe domestic economic and political risks. (100) On March 4 the Clifford Task Force submitted a Draft Presidential Memorandum which recommended the dispatch of approximately 22,000 new troops to Vietnam and a reserve call-up. It made a final decision on meeting Westmoreland's full request dependent on improved South Vietnamese military performance as well as a complete review of U.S. policies in the conflict. (103) Clifford's stance was persuasive; the President on March 4 authorized the augmentation of only 22,000 men and withheld a final decision on Westmoreland's full request for 205,179 troops. (104)

During the balance of March, administration debated whether to retreat from the policy of massive intervention or investigate other policy options that might promote South Vietnamese security. A proposal, championed especially by Clifford, arose for using a bombing halt as one inducement to bring about peace talks. (105) On March 9 Wheeler reported to Westmoreland on the mood among the highest levels of government: "I feel I must tell you frankly that there is strong resistance from all quarters to putting more ground force units in South Vietnam." (115) President Johnson was arriving at the conclusion that he had to press Hanoi hard to induce negotiations, yet he hoped to utilize the occasion of a halt to justify a smaller than requested troop augmentation for Vietnam. (120, 130)

The tide had turned. At the apparent suggestion of former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, the President decided to convene a meeting of the "Wise Men," the group of venerated statesmen who had assisted him in an informal advisory capacity throughout the Vietnam war. (135, 142) The President's advisers also began working on a major speech that would announce the limited bombing halt in exchange for negotiations, although the exact tenor of it was yet to be set. (145, 146) At a meeting of his senior foreign policy advisers on March 22, Johnson came out clearly for the bombing halt, which would occur in the rainy season during which bombing was usually curtailed anyway, and accepted varying opinions from his staff on how best to make this move toward peace. (149) Westmoreland's reassignment as Army Chief of Staff offered a further signal that Johnson had adopted a new approach on Vietnam. (151)

The Wise Men met March 25-26 to deliberate Vietnam policy. On the first day, they received four briefings from representatives of the military, the CIA, and the Department of State. (156) In meetings with the President and the Wise Men on March 26, General Creighton Abrams, Westmoreland's replacement, gave a much more optimistic appraisal of the situation. (157) However, the majority of the Wise Men, with notably Acheson in the lead, basically came down on the side of Clifford in advising the President to begin a strategy of disengagement from what they regarded as an unwinnable war. (158) The recommended troop augmentation for Vietnam, aside from the initial emergency dispatch and those scheduled for deployment before Tet, amounted to an addition of only 13,500 men. (159) On March 30 Johnson announced to his advisers his firm decision on the dispatch of these troops to Vietnam and a call-up of reservists that was much less than what the military had wanted. (167) In an address to the nation on March 31, the President, realizing that victory could not be achieved in the conventional sense, announced a unilateral halt to the bombing of North Vietnam exclusive of an area near the DMZ, named Ambassador at Large W. Averell Harriman as his representative to any resultant peace negotiations, and declined to become a candidate in the upcoming Presidential election. (169)

### **Selecting a Site for the Peace Talks**

The expected peace talks with the North Vietnamese did not convene immediately, but would take more than a month to arrange. On the day after Johnson's speech, U.S. planes bombed the village of Thanh Hoa, over 200 miles north of the DMZ. In the aftermath of a public reaction to this seeming violation of the partial halt, Johnson restricted the bombing in the remainder of North Vietnam significantly away from the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel. (173) The North Vietnamese leaders' response to the U.S. proposal announced their interest in beginning talks, but required the "unconditional cessation of bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV so that talks can begin." (175, 184)

Because Johnson could not in practice fulfill his pledge to meet at any location, a month-long bargaining over the talks site ensued. The United States first suggested Geneva, which the North Vietnamese quickly rejected and countered with Phnom Penh. (182, 184, 185) Because the United States did not have diplomatic relations with Cambodia, Johnson rejected that suggestion. (190) The United States also rejected Warsaw on the grounds that it was the capital of an Eastern bloc country. (191, 192, 195) On April 18 the Johnson administration proposed the capitals of Laos, Burma, Indonesia and India, and suggested a secondary list of six other Asian and four European capitals, as acceptable sites for the two-party talks. (200) Hanoi eventually turned down a total of ten Asian and six European capitals proposed by the United States. According to an April 23 memorandum from Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, the Johnson administration was prepared secretly to accept either Bucharest or, preferably, Paris, the most likely site that purposefully was left off both sides' lists. (203) That same day the Embassy in Vientiane passed a note to the North Vietnamese requesting additional capitals not previously put forward. (204) Four days later, the North Vietnamese responded, but again called for Warsaw as the meeting site (211) In a note passed in Vientiane, the President categorically rejected Warsaw and again insisted on alternate venues. (213) Offers from India, Indonesia, and the Vatican to negotiate sites put further pressure on the North Vietnamese. (216) Finally, in a note delivered to the Embassy in Vientiane on May 3, the North Vietnamese offered to meet Paris. The tentative date for the start of the "Official Conversations" between the United States and North Vietnam, the first ever direct and official talks between the two nations was set for "May 10 or several days thereafter." (221)

### **The Beginning of the Paris Talks**

A debate then ensued within the administration as to the make-up of and the agenda for the U.S. delegation to the Paris talks. President Johnson appointed Harriman and veteran Johnson administration official Cyrus Vance to lead the U.S. delegation. Before dispatching the delegation to Paris, the President decided upon a tough, hard-line approach to negotiating with the North Vietnamese. He refused to countenance a complete stoppage of the bombing of North Vietnam until the North Vietnamese guaranteed that a halt would not be used for increased re-supply and infiltration. (225, 226, 227) The delegation arrived in Paris on May 10 and the first procedural meeting occurred the next day. (229) Following the first plenary session of the "Official Conversations," it was apparent that the North Vietnamese delegation, headed by North Vietnamese diplomat Xuan Thuy, would refuse to discuss substantive issues prior to the full cessation of bombing, a position totally unacceptable to the American side. (230) In addition, the enemy undertook a second but smaller scale offensive at the end of May. (222, 228) As a consequence, the formal talks in Paris devolved into insignificance. (232, 233, 241)

But there were hopeful signs in Paris. On May 28 Vance reported to the President and his senior foreign policy advisers the necessity to initiate private talks to overcome the deadlock in Paris. (253) Thereafter informal chats during breaks for tea and coffee began in assume importance. Hanoi dispatched to Paris a member of its politburo, Le Duc Tho, with authority to speak on behalf of the North Vietnamese leadership. This move temporarily forestalled consideration of extending the bombing back up to the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel. (258) While the North Vietnamese continuously refused to countenance what they regarded as American insistence upon "reciprocity," another development arose that signaled progress toward peace, meetings outside the conference hall. (275) Initially these involved exchanges at lower levels of the delegations; soon they blossomed into intensive discussions of issues by the principals at various safe-houses around Paris. (285, 299)

The Soviet Union became directly involved in order to move the talks off dead-center. Initial contacts between Harriman and the Soviet Ambassador in Paris, Valerian Zorin, while not particularly fruitful, appeared to have some promise in clarifying the respective negotiating positions of both sides. (240, 247, 252, 273, 281, 286, 322) Also, on June 5, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin sent President Johnson a letter noting "grounds to believe" that a complete stoppage of the bombing would lead to a "breakthrough" at the talks. (260) The President refused to soften his stance on the bombing halt until he had more assurance than just the word of the Soviet leader, but the contact demonstrated the presumed eagerness of the Soviets to help end the war in Vietnam. (265, 269)

### **Complicating Issues in the Peace Process**

As a result of encouraging signs in Paris and an apparent lull in the fighting in South Vietnam, optimism about the prospects for some sort of breakthrough began to pervade the Johnson administration. But by mid-July, reports of preparations for a third enemy offensive and the CIA's assessment of the lull as a North Vietnamese tactic began to disturb Johnson. (311) At the direction of the President, Clifford and Wheeler visited South Vietnam in order to ascertain the likelihood of enemy actions. During his visit, Clifford also sought to impart to the GVN leadership the diminishing political support within the United States for the war and the consequent necessity for the South Vietnamese to take on more of the war effort. Clifford delivered his assessment -- pronouncing the war as unwinnable and the GVN as hopelessly inept and corrupt -- to the President and his other advisers on July 18 in Honolulu, which also included meetings with the South Vietnamese leadership through July 20. (302) Johnson urged upon GVN President Nguyen Van Thieu the importance of replacing U.S. forces with South Vietnamese troops. But Thieu extracted from the President assurances that he would insist upon the removal of NVA troops from South Vietnam prior to reaching any settlement at Paris and also demand equality between GVN and NLF representatives at the expanded Paris meetings. (303) The President emerged from the Honolulu meetings with stronger support for the GVN and an even more hardened stance on the negotiations. (316, 318) The United States also began to subsidize a nascent political front movement known as the "Lien Minh" to compete with the NLF in the struggle for allegiance of the South Vietnamese people. (342, 343)

On July 29 Harriman and Vance weighed in from Paris. They urged the President to terminate the residual bombing in North Vietnam on the assumption that the NVA and VC would not take advantage of the halt. (312) The administration, however, decided not to alter its policy while, in the words of Secretary Rusk, "Hanoi, Moscow and others are trying to mount a concerted campaign to force us to stop all of the bombing without any corresponding action at all from Hanoi." (313) During an August 4 meeting with the President, Clifford reiterated the necessity for a bombing halt, but Johnson rejected a unilateral halt under certain stated conditions out of a preference for a policy of "firmness." (316, 318) Three days later, Clifford and Vance also approached Rusk, but again encountered little desire to take the risk of halting the bombing. (326) In an August 19 speech, the President stated his willingness "to take chances for peace" but qualified that the United States would not "make foolhardy gestures for which your fighting men will pay the price by giving their lives." Johnson further stiffened his policy regarding the North Vietnamese by declaring, "We are not going to stop the bombing just to give them a chance to step up their bloodbath." (332) This tough line was reinforced after General Creighton Abrams, Westmoreland's replacement, sent a telegram to Johnson on August 23 noting that casualties as well as infiltration of enemy men and supplies would dramatically increase if a full bombing halt was put into effect. (337, 338)

### **The Shadow of Domestic Politics**

Throughout the year, the approaching Presidential election increasingly impacted on the administration's Vietnam policy. In a meeting with Clifford on March 14, Senator Robert Kennedy proposed that if a Presidential commission was appointed to re-evaluate the administration's Vietnam policy, then he would not become a candidate for the Presidential nomination of the Democratic party. The President strongly rejected the offer. (123) Following his withdrawal from electoral politics on March 31, Johnson tacitly supported Vice President Hubert Humphrey for the Democratic nomination. He continued to insist throughout the spring and summer of 1968 that, in spite of calls by his campaign staff, Humphrey not split with the administration's Vietnam position and thus maintain a hard-line position on the Vietnam negotiations. (330) Likewise, in meetings with Republican candidate Richard Nixon on July 26 and August 10, the President secured from him a promise to avoid criticism of the administration's policies. (310, 327) Johnson also kept tight control over the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, primarily through his proxies in attendance there. Although rioting outside the convention hall precluded the President's planned public appearance, his personal involvement at Chicago ensured the adoption of a Vietnam plank strongly echoing the position of his administration. (339, 345) In spite of the dramatic events of 1968, by the end of the summer, peace in Vietnam appeared little closer than it had before the Tet Offensive.

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## Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968 Volume VIII, Vietnam, September 1968-January 1969 Volume Summary

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*(Special acknowledgement to the Office of the Historian, Department of State)*

(This is not an official statement of policy by the Department of State; it is intended only as a guide to the contents of this volume.)

*Since 1861, the Department of State's documentary series Foreign Relations of the United States has constituted the official record of the foreign policy and diplomacy of the United States. Historians at the Office of the Historian collect, select, arrange, and annotate the principal documents that make up the record of American foreign policy. The standards for preparation of the series and general guidelines for the publication are established by the Foreign Relations of the United States statute of October 28, 1991. (22 USC 4351, et. seq.) Volumes in the Foreign Relations series are published when all necessary editing, declassification, and production steps have been completed.*

*The documents in this volume are drawn primarily from the Department of State Central Files, the papers of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his advisers at the Johnson Library in Austin, Texas (including excerpts from tape recordings of the President's phone calls), the decentralized lot files of the Department of State, the historical files of the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the files of the National Security Council, the records of the Secretary of Defense and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, the Official Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the files of the Central Intelligence Agency.*

*Almost all of the documents printed here were originally classified. The Information Response Branch of the Office of IRM Programs and Services, Bureau of Administration, Department of State, in concert with the appropriate offices in other agencies or governments, carried out the declassification of the selected documents in accordance with the applicable provisions of Executive Order 12958.*

The following is a summary of the most important issues covered in the volume. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text.

### **Introduction**

This volume covers a period of 4½ months culminating in mid-January 1969 when the Johnson administration finally achieved, after much agonizing deliberation and consultation, formal four-party peace talks on Vietnam. In the fall of 1968 peace seemed beyond President Johnson's grasp, even though talks were taking place in Paris between the United States and its North Vietnamese adversaries. These two-party peace negotiations were deadlocked over Johnson's insistence on reciprocal guarantees for the complete cessation of the bombing of North Vietnamese territory. Within weeks, dramatic changes created the groundwork to bring together the two parties in formal talks on substantive issues of a peace settlement. The peace talks struggled to move to formal session while the United States held its Presidential election amid suspicions by the Democratic and Republican candidates, and the President himself, that their respective opponents were using the peace process to influence the election.

### **Movement Toward Final Peace Talks**

President Johnson firmly believed that a hard line approach to the negotiations would compel the North Vietnamese into an agreement on formal four-party peace talks that would justify a bombing halt. "If we can stay for a few weeks with our present posture in Vietnam, we can convince the North Vietnamese that they won't get a better deal if they wait," he confided to his staff during a September 4, 1968, meeting at the White House. (4) The North Vietnamese had refused to discuss any assurances of reciprocity throughout the late spring and summer of that year. During the fall, however, the impasse slowly began to ease. One minor but significant indication was the so-called "nuanced language" used by the North Vietnamese during a private meeting on September 15 with the American negotiators in Paris, W. Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance. The general feeling was that this might represent a breakthrough. (14) In a subsequent meeting of his foreign policy

advisers, Johnson insisted that any breakthrough meet his three minimal requirements for a halt: withdrawal of enemy forces from the demilitarized zone (DMZ), a termination of attacks on major South Vietnamese cities, and admission of the South Vietnamese Government (GVN) to a seat at the conference table. Johnson was also adamant about not stopping the bombing without concessions from Hanoi. Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford had tried repeatedly without success to persuade the President to end the bombing for the sake of moving the peace process forward. (15) The Soviet Union began to exercise greater initiative in pressing the North Vietnamese to moderate their stance on reciprocity for a bombing cessation. A meeting between Presidential Special Assistant Walt Rostow and Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin on September 10 led to a message from the Soviet Government that appeared to indicate readiness on the Communist side to move forward if the United States terminated its bombing and related military actions. (9)

In separate meetings with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, the President, and the rest of the Cabinet, Harriman, who had returned from Paris during the third week of September for consultations in Washington, failed to convince Johnson that termination of the bombing, the only trump card he held, would be worth playing without firm assurances of DRV reciprocity. (19, 20) The doves within the administration remained convinced that the North Vietnamese had gone more than far enough to ensure that a bombing halt would not be in vain. (22) On September 18 the Department of State instructed the delegation in Paris to press the North Vietnamese for agreement on the issue of South Vietnamese representation at the talks as an important element in "facilitating" a complete bombing halt by the United States. (23) Harriman and Vance responded that a more direct link had to be established between agreement on South Vietnamese representation at expanded talks and the termination of the bombing of North Vietnam. On September 25 the delegation submitted a revised proposition to the North Vietnamese delegates. (32) Meetings between Harriman and Vance and Soviet diplomats in Paris, as well as other indications through third-party sources in Norway, suggested that the Soviets were prepared to pressure the North Vietnamese into substantive peace talks. (26, 27, 28, 29, 33, 34)

North Vietnamese reluctance to negotiate on terms acceptable to Johnson was not the only problem he had to contend with during the period covered in the volume. The United States was involved in a bitter Presidential election campaign in which Vietnam was the principal issue. In a September 30 speech at Salt Lake City, Democratic Presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey, the sitting Vice President, began to distance himself from Johnson's Vietnam policy by publicly stating a unilateral U.S. bombing halt was an "acceptable risk for peace." (40) Although Johnson refrained from public criticism of Humphrey's new position, his lack of any political assistance or public support of Humphrey during critical moments of the campaign made it clear how he viewed his Vice President's public statement. In a private conversation with Senator Everett Dirksen (R-Illinois), the President questioned Humphrey's speech but acknowledged that Humphrey's position did not diverge too far from the position of the administration. (42) What most annoyed the President was Harriman's tacit approval of the Humphrey speech. (50, 51)

### **Toward a Breakthrough on Negotiations**

The last weeks before the election brought a dramatic breakthrough at Paris. In an October 2 meeting with Harriman and Vance, the North Vietnamese delegates requested further clarification on the three prerequisites for a complete bombing halt. (45) In expectation that a breakthrough would soon follow, Vance immediately returned to Washington for a brief round of consultations. (49) On October 9 the U.S. delegation in Paris reported that the North Vietnamese had addressed the issue of GVN participation in the talks, the issue that had remained deadlocked for months. (54) Two days later Hanoi's representatives requested a clarification from the U.S. delegates as to whether the United States would end the bombing of North Vietnam if Hanoi accepted the Saigon government's presence at the talks. (58) The next day Vance received a message from the Soviet Embassy in Paris, which more strongly reiterated the North Vietnamese agreement to hold substantive talks after a complete bombing halt. (60) During this period, the President called upon his top advisers, and South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu as well, to review the North Vietnamese proposal. (61) Ambassador to South Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker assured the President that Thieu concurred. (62, 64, 66)

The road to peace talks was still not clear. On October 14-15 the administration debated a new condition for a halt. Wary of a last-minute effort to take advantage of any halt, hawks within the administration convinced the President to insist upon a 24-hour maximum interval between the cessation of bombing and the start of the

expanded talks. (67-70, 72, 73) Hanoi's representatives reacted strongly to what they perceived as a "new condition." (76) In an October 16 conference call briefing the three primary Presidential candidates, Humphrey, Richard Nixon, and George Wallace, Johnson cautioned them not to say anything publicly that would undermine the ongoing negotiations. All three candidates expressed unanimous support for the negotiating process. (80)

President Thieu, however, began to equivocate on his previous commitment to the peace process by raising a series of objections and procedural concerns. Starting with concerns regarding participation of the NLF as a "separate entity," his objections only increased as the days went by. Thieu insisted that the National Liberation Front (NLF) should not have an equivalent status to South Vietnam and should appear at the Paris negotiations only as a part of the North Vietnamese delegation. (87, 89) The Johnson administration believed that it could work out a satisfactory resolution to the problem of NLF representation and of other issues, such as the seating arrangements for the two sides. (94) On October 21 North Vietnamese delegation chief Xuan Thuy proposed a joint communiqué for release by the United States and North Vietnam, so that "there be no further misunderstandings" in light of "the statements coming out of Saigon." Thuy insisted that both sides devise a secret minute of the October understandings and stated that Hanoi would only accept a lengthy interval between a bombing halt and the beginning of formal negotiations. (95) Such a delay was unacceptable to Washington.

The last days of October, however, saw progress in Paris and Washington. The Soviet Embassy in Paris and Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoliy Dobrynin communicated the strong desire of the Soviet Union to see substantive talks begin quickly. (92, 98) On October 22 the Soviet Government proposed "splitting the difference" between the two delegations on the time interval, a proposal that both Harriman and Vance supported. (99, 101) President Johnson and his advisers decided to agree to this 3-day interval. (103, 104) In addition, by October 24, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon had arranged an apparent agreement with the South Vietnamese Foreign Minister on most of the remaining procedural problems with South Vietnam. (118) On October 24 a Soviet diplomat in Paris told Vance that "his government was deeply interested in finding a solution and that he was acting under the instructions of his government." (119) Dobrynin assured Rostow during an October 25 meeting that the U.S. representatives had expressed themselves "very clearly" on the "facts of life" prior to a full halt and the opening of talks and that the North Vietnamese understood the U.S. position. (122)

Progress toward a breakthrough accelerated during the last week before the election. On October 27 Thuy proposed that talks begin on November 2 if the United States terminated the bombing on October 30. "We have now got everything we have asked for," Vance reported to Washington. "We should accept." (128) In a meeting that evening at the White House, the President's advisers were virtually unanimous in their support for moving ahead on the basis of this new position. Johnson first wanted a candid assessment regarding the impact of the halt on U.S. troops in Vietnam from the field commander there, and he directed that General Creighton Abrams return to Washington. (129) Arriving in the early morning of October 29, Abrams immediately met with Johnson and other senior officials. Following a review of the breakthrough, the President pointedly asked Abrams if implementation of the three key parts of the understanding would further endanger U.S. forces in Vietnam. Abrams assured the President that the cessation would not result in further casualties and that the enemy would not be able to take advantage of the halt and undertake any further offensive actions. He added that he had no reservations regarding the implementation of the halt; indeed, providing the enemy kept to the understanding, the halt would work out to a military advantage to the United States. Johnson decided to go ahead with the bombing cessation. (139)

### **The Position of South Vietnam**

It was at this moment that the South Vietnamese Government began to equivocate on participation in the expanded talks. On October 29 Thieu informed Bunker that the November 2 date was too soon for him to have his representatives ready to attend. (149) Johnson was outraged but still hoped for the successful initiation of the peace process. In order to give Thieu more time, Johnson opted for a postponement of a few days. (151) The President and his advisers already believed there was a conspiracy to derail the negotiations to help the Republicans in the election. Anna Chennault, an associate of Republican Presidential candidate Richard Nixon and co-chair of Women for Nixon, had been in contact with Bui Diem, South Vietnamese Ambassador to the

United States. "There is no hard evidence that Mr. Nixon himself is involved," Rostow reported in an October 29 memorandum to the President. "Exactly what the Republicans have been saying to Bui Diem is not wholly clear as opposed to the conclusions that Bui Diem is drawing from what they have said." (145) During the regular Tuesday luncheon with his foreign policy advisers, Johnson expressed dismay at Bunker's reports on his unsuccessful efforts to arrange a meeting with Thieu. Thieu's uncharacteristic unavailability seemed to confirm Johnson's belief in a conspiracy between the Republicans and the South Vietnamese. Presidential Consultant Maxwell Taylor suggested that "it may be sinister, or it may be ineptitude," while Johnson prophesized that "Nixon will doublecross them (the South Vietnamese) after November 5," election day. (148) Later that day South Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thanh informed Bunker that the dispatch of a delegation to Paris would require approval from his country's National Assembly. Bunker assessed that the GVN would not be ready to go ahead at the current time. (149) Concerned about proceeding to Paris without the GVN aboard, Johnson agreed to a further postponement of 2 days in order to give Bunker more time. (150) He also sent to Saigon a stern letter that Bunker could use. (151, 155)

In contrast, by October 30 the North Vietnamese definitively dropped their demand for a secret minute of the understandings. (158) In light of these developments, members of the administration universally objected to Thieu's latest effort to stall the talks. (161) Johnson decided to proceed with the announcement of the bombing halt on October 31, which would be followed by talks on November 6, in order to give the South Vietnamese the maximum amount of time to consider joining in the expanded negotiations. (167) On October 31 Bunker reported that Thieu was "coming around," but informed Thieu of Johnson's decision to proceed regardless of the GVN's official stance on the expanded talks. (165) The President's speech announcing the halt aired that evening. (169)

Prompt opening of expanded talks proved elusive. On November 1 Thieu announced that on the next day he would deliver a speech regarding the talks. Johnson dispatched a message for Bunker to deliver to Thieu admonishing him to "move forward together in Paris," but Thieu refused to see Bunker before he made his speech. (175) On November 2 Thieu publicly stated that he would not send a delegation to the expanded talks in Paris, effectively preventing the convening of the four-party meetings. (178) In turn, the North Vietnamese refused to accept further meetings solely between U.S. and DRV representatives. (196) Late in the evening of November 2 Johnson discussed with Senator Dirksen, his old colleague and an intimate of both Nixon and Chennault, the connection between the Republicans and the South Vietnamese. The President described the actions of Nixon's supporters as "treason" and instructed Dirksen to transmit a warning to Nixon that he must act to prevent any adverse impact upon the Paris talks. (181) On November 3 Johnson called Senator George Smathers (D-Florida), who had been in contact with Nixon. Smathers stated that Nixon denied any knowledge of the affair, and the President countered that he had documented proof of a Republican connection to the GVN. (186) Apparently at the urging of both Dirksen and Smathers, Nixon made a telephone call to Johnson that afternoon to disclaim personally any involvement with the entire affair. (187) In light of Nixon's denials and Johnson's own reticence about revealing the full range of government surveillance and wiretapping of Chennault and Diem, the decision was made not to make public the information gathered regarding the Republican-South Vietnamese connection. (192-194) In a close vote, Nixon won the 1968 Presidential election. (199)

With 2½ months still remaining in office, President Johnson was determined to open substantive talks, but Thieu would not see Bunker for a week. (203, 206) When they did meet, Bunker unsuccessfully pressed Thieu to dispatch a delegation to the expanded conference. Bunker reported afterward that Thieu "wants to find a way out of the situation in which he finds himself." (208) Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs William Bundy also delivered a stern admonition to Bui Diem. (210) In addition, Johnson asked Nixon to transmit to Thieu a message pressuring him to join the Paris talks. (205, 207, 209) It was not until a November 11 meeting with Nixon that Johnson secured the President-elect's promise to present a "united front" on Vietnam. At that time, Nixon agreed to communicate formally to the South Vietnamese his desire that they participate in the Paris talks. (211) At the President's behest, Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford, in a November 12 news conference, strongly rebutted continuing recalcitrant statements coming out of Saigon. (213) Agreement between the U.S. and South Vietnamese Governments on a joint position relating to

negotiating issues was worked out during November. (217, 228) In Paris the U.S. delegation's protest of enemy attacks on unarmed American reconnaissance planes as well as its shelling of certain South Vietnamese cities helped to re-establish trust with South Vietnam. (222-228, 233) On November 26 Thieu finally agreed to dispatch a delegation to Paris, and made a public announcement the following day. (235, 236)

The official talks still did not begin. South Vietnam raised a series of procedural issues, the most prominent of which were the particular use of flags and name plates, the speaking order of the participants, and the physical arrangement of the conference, including most notably the shape of the conference table. On the latter issue, the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front (NLF) insisted on a four-sided table to emphasize equality between the parties, while the United States and especially the GVN favored a two-sided arrangement that did not obviously give the NLF equal footing with the GVN. (250, 260, 264) On January 2, 1969, the North Vietnamese relented on their requirement that made flags and nameplates contingent upon the acceptance by the other side of a continuous round table. (268, 269) On January 7 Johnson sent Thieu a strongly worded message to desist from the "continued stalemate on present lines" that was undermining public support within the United States for South Vietnam. (276) Thieu continued to refuse to consider such a trade-off from his original position on the shape of the table. (277-279) Pressure on Thieu from Washington coupled with the involvement of Soviet diplomats eventually overcame this impasse. On January 13 the Soviet Ambassador in Paris directed his subordinate to propose a resolution: a round table with two smaller rectangular tables at opposite sides; no flags or nameplates; and speaking order arranged by the drawing of lots. (280, 281) Both the North Vietnamese and the American delegations agreed to this proposal on January 15, as did both South Vietnam and the NLF the next day. (283, 284) On January 18 the first meeting between the four parties, which focused solely on modalities for the substantive talks, was held. (286) The Johnson administration left office on January 20, 1969, with the knowledge that peace talks were finally underway.

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## Foreign Relations Of The United States 1964-1968, Volume XXVII, Southeast Asia Volume Summary

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*The documents in this volume are drawn from the centralized indexed files of the Department of State and the decentralized Bureau, Office, and other lot files of the relevant Departmental units. The volume also includes records from the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency. In addition, the editor made extensive use of the Presidential and other papers at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas. Access to the recordings of President Johnson's telephone conversations at the Johnson Library resulted in the inclusion of transcripts or summaries of several of his conversations with senior U.S. policymakers, which help to document more fully the President's active engagement in Southeast Asia.*

*Almost all of the documents printed here were originally classified. The Information Response Branch of the Office of IRM Programs and Services, Bureau of Administration, Department of State, in concert with the appropriate offices in other agencies or governments, carried out the declassification of the selected documents.*

### **Introduction**

The war in Vietnam and the secret conflict in Laos dominated U.S. foreign policy toward Southeast Asia during the administration of Lyndon Johnson. The fighting also had serious repercussions for U.S. relations with neighboring states not directly involved in the conflicts. This volume presents documentation on U.S. policy relating to Southeast Asian nations on the periphery of the war in Vietnam. It contains two regional compilations. One focuses on the Australia-New Zealand-United States Treaty Organization (ANZUS); the other on the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and economic development in Southeast Asia. The rest of the volume covers bilateral relations with Burma, Cambodia, and Thailand. The following is a summary of the most important of the issues covered. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text.

### **ANZUS and the Defense of Southeast Asia**

The compilation has three principal themes: the formal ANZUS consultative relationship, which is presented in brief coverage of ANZUS Council meetings; the growing personal relationship and collaboration between President Lyndon Johnson and Australian Prime Ministers, especially Harold Holt, and to a lesser extent New Zealand Prime Minister Holyoake; and Australia's desire to consult with the United States in anticipation of the British withdrawal from East of Suez, which was projected for the 1970s.

The ANZUS Treaty with its provisions for yearly meetings of Foreign Ministers was created to reassure the Australians and New Zealanders against the threat of a resurgent Japan. As the Cold War developed in Asia, Communism and China became the focus of ANZUS. Given Australia's and New Zealand's distance from mainland Asia, the Chinese threat was mostly a theoretical, or at least, a long-term one. ANZUS meetings were often leisurely one-day affairs characterized in most cases by discussion of generalities. (7, 45)

Far more important to President Johnson was the combat support Australia and New Zealand could provide in South Vietnam, thus demonstrating that the war was not exclusively an American and South Vietnamese one. At the 1965 Washington ANZUS meeting, Johnson encouraged New Zealand to send troops, although given the size of New Zealand military forces and its existing commitments in Malaysia, the force sent to Vietnam was only token. (6) In 1968 when he faced a stagnant economy and an upcoming election, Prime Minister Holyoake

asked that New Zealand's past support for the United States in Vietnam be reciprocated with better economic relations, especially improved access for New Zealand meat in U.S. markets. (42-44)

Australia's participation in the Vietnam war was considerably larger than New Zealand's. In March 1966 Australia agreed to send a self-contained force of 4,500 troops to Vietnam. (11) This major commitment impressed Johnson and helped nurture a growing close personal relationship with Prime Minister Harold Holt. (15, 18, 19, 23, 25-28) The accidental drowning death of Holt moved President Johnson to travel to Canberra for the memorial service in which he eulogized Holt to the Australian Cabinet and reaffirmed the U.S.-Australian relationship. (35) U.S.-Australian relations remained close after Holt's death, but did not have the same intimacy under Prime Minister John Gorton. (36-38)

The most significant issue covered in the compilation is the desire of Australia to consult with the United States over the defense of Malaysia and Singapore in anticipation of Britain's projected withdrawal from East of Suez. In early January 1966 the British Labour Government informed its allies that it could no longer afford world-wide commitments. The result was a joint U.S.-Australian effort to try to convince the British to reverse the policy. (12, 13, 15, 17, 21-25) As British determination to withdraw became increasingly clear, Australia initiated a series of discussions with the United States on possible U.S.-Australian policy options. (29, 30, 32)

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) advised Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara that the United States should support a continuing Australian and New Zealand presence in Malaysia and Singapore, but should not assume any of Great Britain's commitments nor station U.S. troops there. (33) While encouragement of Australia's defense of Malaysia and Singapore might raise questions of the application of the ANZUS Treaty, the JCS recommended close consultation without offering a "blanket guarantee." (37) When Prime Minister Gorton met with the President and Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford, U.S. officials encouraged him to keep Australian forces in Malaysia and Singapore as part of an enhanced regional role. (38, 39)

### **Southeast Asia Region**

The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was traditionally the focus of U.S. regional policy toward Southeast Asia. During 1964-1968, however, SEATO suffered from such inherent dilemmas and weaknesses that it was increasingly ineffective in rallying its members to the collective defense of South Vietnam or Laos. The marginalization of SEATO is the first theme of this compilation. The second theme is regional economic development as propounded by President Lyndon Johnson in his April 1965 proposal for a vast scheme of economic development for Southeast Asia underpinned by development of the Mekong River.

SEATO's weaknesses became all too evident during its Council meeting in April 1964 when members failed to agree on even a public affirmation of the war in South Vietnam. The French pressed for neutralization of Southeast Asia on the grounds that the effort to save South Vietnam was doomed. (47-49) Although not prepared to withdraw from SEATO, France was increasingly unwilling to play a positive role and reduced its participation to observer status. (54) The British Labour Government, for its part, was adamantly opposed to any SEATO public language that could be construed as committing Britain to supply military forces to South Vietnam. (64, 72)

The problems of SEATO were highlighted for President Johnson in April 1967 when the Council met in Washington. Special Assistant Walt Rostow informed the President that the activist Asian members, Thailand and the Philippines, felt that French "foot dragging," combined with reduced interest of Pakistan and Britain, threatened to "sap SEATO's vitality." (89) When the President met with SEATO Ministers he spoke encouraging words about the organization, but no amount of Presidential rhetoric could patch over the basic flaws. (90) SEATO was an organization whose membership was too diverse to agree on a unified strategy for defending Southeast Asia.

The other major issue relating to SEATO was how it would relate to the Johnson administration's bold dream for economic development of South Asia. The scheme coalesced in the spring of 1965. (56-59) The President announced the concept in Baltimore on April 7 when he asked the U.S. Congress to make a \$1 billion investment in the area. The President envisioned the Mekong River as providing "food, water, and power on a scale to dwarf even our own TVA." Johnson appointed former World Bank President Eugene Black to head the effort. (60, 61)

Black became the point man for the enterprise, and its accomplishments are documented through his reports to President Johnson. (65, 71, 83, 95) Black's effort was multifaceted, but its principal manifestation, apart from dams in Laos and Cambodia, was his assistance in creating the Asian Development Bank. The bank was able to obtain funds mostly from Asians themselves, especially the Japanese. (67, 80, 92) By the end of the Johnson administration, however, the spread of war in Indochina doomed Johnson's grandiose development plans for the Mekong River, but the Asian Development Bank and the idea of Asian economic cooperation was a lasting legacy.

### **Burma**

The Burmese withdrawal into isolation and the "Burmese Way to Socialism" left the United States with very little diplomatic leverage in the Union of Burma. The principal U.S. objective was to assure the Burmese political/military leader, Ne Win, that the United States was in no way out to get him. (97, 99) The Johnson administration took advantage of hints from Burmese officials and invited Ne Win and his wife to Washington for a State visit in September 1966. As Chief of Staff of the Burmese Army, Ne Win had come to the United States during the Eisenhower administration and had suffered some personal setbacks. The visit to the White House with President Johnson at his most charming and expansive was a means of erasing those past indignities and reassuring the leader that the United States did not see Burmese nonalignment and independence as counter to U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. (100-102)

### **Cambodia**

In early 1964 Prince Sihanouk, head of state and chief of state of Cambodia in all but name, was determined to hold an international conference that would guarantee Cambodian neutrality and territorial integrity. Sihanouk feared the growing insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam, but his foremost concern was the threat he perceived to Cambodia from Thailand and South Vietnam. (105, 108) Sihanouk flirted with the idea of a quadripartite conference (Cambodia, South Vietnam, Thailand, and the United States) to agree upon neutrality, but he added so many unacceptable preconditions that the United States was hesitant to agree. Sihanouk interpreted this hesitation as opposition and abandoned the idea. (109-114) To punctuate its dissatisfaction, Cambodia encouraged and directed violent demonstrations which resulted in the sacking of the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh. (115-117)

In a letter to British Foreign Secretary R.A. Butler, Secretary of State Dean Rusk suggested that while Sihanouk's desire to reaffirm Cambodia's neutrality and territorial integrity was a legitimate objective, he also wanted to pillory South Vietnam (and indirectly the United States) for incursions into Cambodian territory in pursuit of Viet Cong forces and to "rub the noses of the Thai" in French colonial treaties and an International Court of Justice decision, which supported Cambodia's position in border disputes with Thailand. (121)

The issue quieted down when Sihanouk announced he would visit France for almost 2 months. (127) While Sihanouk was temporarily retreating from a conference, he continued the pressure on South Vietnam by taking the issue of South Vietnamese border incursions to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The United States was not opposed to a UN role in policing the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border, believing that it might discourage Viet Cong use of Cambodian territory. (131-133, 137) The result of the UNSC effort was a Security Council resolution establishing a three-person commission to visit Cambodia and South Vietnam. (134) When the commission made its initial report, the United States was disappointed that it was too pro-Cambodian and made no mention of the Viet Cong. Sihanouk, however, formally rejected the findings of the mission on the grounds that they were not sufficiently pro-Cambodian. (142, 144)

U.S.-Cambodian relations deteriorated. In late summer 1964 the White House States considered using a private intermediary to express to Sihanouk U.S. concern about the state of relations and to offer friendly and frank private discussions instead of diplomacy by press release and public speeches. (138, 139) The Department of State concluded that it could not hurt to use a more informal channel of communication to Sihanouk, but insisted that the intermediary not undercut the influence of newly-appointed Ambassador Randolph Kidder. (141) The private intermediary met with Department of State officials responsible for Cambodia and agreed to send a personal letter to Sihanouk based on Department of State key points. (142, 144)

The intermediary plan apparently had little success as Sihanouk refused to accept Kidder's credentials and the Ambassador-designate returned to Washington. In November 1964 the Embassy in Phnom Penh feared that

Sihanouk was about to break relations with the United States. To avoid that, the United States suggested that Sihanouk's trusted adviser, Son Sann, should meet with a special representative of the President, Philip Bonsal, in New Delhi. The Cambodians agreed, but the talks failed to lead to any improvement in relations. (146-150)

The year 1965 did not begin any better. Despite hints that Cambodia wanted to continue a dialogue with the United States (152) and some renewed interest in an international conference (153, 154), South Vietnamese incursions into Cambodian territory and a mistaken U.S. bombing of Cambodian territory exacerbated relations to the point that, in early May 1965 Cambodia broke diplomatic ties with the United States.

Part of the reason for the rupture of relations sprang from Sihanouk's belief that the United States was supporting his opponents, especially the Khmer Serei (Free Khmers) and his particular bête noir, their leader Son Ngoc Thanh, who was in exile in South Vietnam. There was skepticism at the White House and Department of State about Son Ngoc Thanh. As National Security Council (NSC) staffers told McGeorge Bundy, "State is properly skittish as this guy has the political future of Harold Stassen but drives Sihanouk crazy." Only very limited U.S. contacts with Son Ngoc Thanh took place, although the United States was less able to control Thai and South Vietnamese support of the Khmer Serei. (157, 172)

Far more dangerous to Cambodia than Khmer Serei dissidents was the problem of Viet Cong use of Cambodia and the pressure building in Washington and Saigon to attack the enemy in its sanctuaries. (159, 160) President Johnson resisted requests from General William Westmoreland for hot pursuit authority, but he did allow firing into Cambodia in self-defense. (160-162, 164, 165)

The problem of Cambodia's relation to the Viet Cong was an issue in both Washington and Saigon. The Central Intelligence Agency concluded that Cambodia was "not a witting or willing accomplice in Viet Cong operations in Cambodia." Sihanouk would like more control over Cambodia's 600-mile border with South Vietnam, but Cambodia did not have the ability to enforce its authority. (170) The Joint Chiefs of Staff were convinced that both Sihanouk and the United States could do more. Secretary of Defense McNamara presented a JCS proposed program of intensified intelligence coverage of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong activities in Cambodia, a diplomatic and psychological campaign to encourage Cambodia to curb the Viet Cong, increased surveillance and interdiction of seaborne infiltration, covert paramilitary and overt cross-border operations, low-level reconnaissance, and hot pursuit. (171)

Concerned about the momentum building against Cambodia, President Johnson asked Senator Mike Mansfield, Sihanouk's closest friend in the U.S. Government, to pass a message to the Prince to stop Viet Cong raids into South Vietnam. (173) The Department of State also believed the JCS program was too radical and might push Cambodia into active hostility against South Vietnam and the United States. The State Department favored a more cautious and gradual approach on the grounds that Cambodia was already doing as much as it could to impede the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. Given Cambodia's neutrality and need to placate China, Sihanouk could hardly be expected to join South Vietnam in military operations against the Viet Cong. (176, 180) There was also consensus among the White House staff that the "hard line" toward Cambodia was a mistake. (182) President Johnson asked the NSC staff to brainstorm "imaginative initiatives" on Cambodia. The result was a program of "fresh ideas" which favored persuasion and encouragement rather than the coercive approach recommended by the JCS. President Johnson received the NSC proposals enthusiastically and passed them to the Department of State for comment and recommendations. (183)

In responding to these new ideas, the Department of State noted that much of what was recommended was already being done. For example, it had tried to expand ICC coverage of the border, but had been stymied by the Soviet Union. Efforts to discourage Thailand's and South Vietnam's support of the Khmer Serei were ongoing. State agreed with the NSC staffers' idea of a presidential letter delivered by special emissary and favored more unofficial visits and private contacts. While the United States should strive to reestablish diplomatic relations with Cambodia, forcing the pace too quickly could prove to be counterproductive. (185)

After June 1966 the United States embarked on a cautious program of reconciliation attempts with Sihanouk. Ambassador Chester Bowles talked to Cambodia's Ambassador to India, Nong Kimny. (187-189) There were hints that Sihanouk was interested in a dialogue. (196, 197) In spring 1967 the Department of State sent a message through the Australians informing Sihanouk of the U.S. desire for better relations and expressing concern about Viet Cong/North Vietnamese use of Cambodia. (201, 203, 204) Not all of the U.S. Government

was convinced that the "soft line" to Cambodia was right. In December 1966 the JCS stated that "VC/NVN use of the Cambodian sanctuary constitutes a clear and present danger" and recommended additional air and ground reconnaissance of Cambodia, hot pursuit, and public exposure of enemy use of Cambodian sanctuaries. (198)

The U.S. intelligence community did not share the "clear and present danger" analysis of the Joints Chiefs, believing that denying the enemy the use of Cambodia would not itself constitute a decisive element in winning the war in South Vietnam. The intelligence analysts did conclude that the Cambodian sanctuary provided a considerable military and psychological advantage and would be used more frequently during the coming year. (199, 200) A Joint State/Defense/CIA study group worked on the problem in early 1967 and recommended approval of stepped-up air reconnaissance and limited on-the-ground cross-border intelligence-gathering operations, codenamed Daniel Boone, but suggested that high-risk and provocative operations be delayed until the result of diplomatic initiatives to Sihanouk could be assessed. (205)

In autumn 1967 the Department of State continued diplomatic and public pressure on Cambodia to inhibit Viet Cong/North Vietnamese use of Cambodia. (209, 212) At the same time, it approved measures to expand Daniel Boone operations. (210, 211) When General William Westmoreland, U.S. Commander in Vietnam, requested permission to attack large concentrations of enemy troops resting in Cambodia in December 1967, the administration, with departing Secretary McNamara taking the lead, did not approve. (214-217)

The question of temporarily invading or bombing Cambodia caused serious disagreement within the Johnson administration. Ambassador at Large Averell Harriman made an impassioned plea against it, drawing an analogy with the German invasion of neutral Belgium in 1914. (221) Westmoreland renewed his request for B-52 bombardment, claiming that the United States was missing an opportunity to hit a vulnerable enemy in jungle areas along an ill-defined border. Westmoreland believed that the operation could be kept secret. (222) In the face of these conflicting recommendations, the President held firm to a stepped-up program of diplomatic pressure on Cambodia rather than attacking the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese on Cambodian territory. (223-225)

In January 1968 the Johnson administration authorized a high-profile mission to Cambodia headed by Ambassador to India Chester Bowles for face-to-face discussions with Sihanouk. (226) Although the results of the meetings were intangible, Bowles believed that the corner had been turned and U.S.-Cambodian relations would improve. (227, 229, 230) Bowles' optimism was offset by the CIA belief that as long as Cambodia was unable to control its territory, it could not crack down on Viet Cong/North Vietnamese use of Cambodian sanctuaries. CIA concluded that the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese were increasingly relying on Cambodian territory for sanctuary, base areas, infiltration of personnel, and as a source of rice and supplies and estimated that increasing amounts of war matériel were being routed through southern Cambodia. (233) With major battles between North Vietnamese and U.S. forces raging in the central highlands of South Vietnam, Westmoreland again asked for authority to bomb the enemy in the tri-border area of Cambodia. He was again refused. (234)

In July 1968 the Cambodian Navy captured a U.S. Army utility landing craft that had strayed into Cambodian waters. Eleven U.S. soldiers and one South Vietnamese policeman were detained. (239) After the earlier North Korean seizure of the *Pueblo*, the Johnson administration moved quickly to downplay this incident and obtain release of the detainees. (240, 242, 243) The President sent Eugene Black to Cambodia in the hopes that he could facilitate release of the detainees, reiterate U.S. concern about Viet Cong/North Vietnamese use of Cambodia, and offer a general statement from the United States expressing respect and recognition of Cambodia's borders provided it would lead to resumption of diplomatic relations. Sihanouk did not meet with Black. The White House's assessment was that his mission was a failure. (244, 246-248)

The Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested harassment of Cambodia river traffic as a means of coercing Sihanouk to release the U.S. detainees. Both Secretary of Defense Clifford and Secretary of State Rusk rejected this idea as counterproductive. (251) In December 1968 the United States received hints that Cambodia was prepared to release the American detainees if Sihanouk received a personal message from President Johnson. (255) The message was dispatched and the Americans were released on December 23. (260)

In late 1968 the Johnson administration had failed to reach a consensus on the significance of Cambodia to the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese war effort in South Vietnam. General Creighton Abrams, Westmoreland's

successor as U.S. Commander in Vietnam, believed **Cambodia had surpassed Laos as the principal supply infiltration route.** The Central Intelligence Agency took the opposite view. (252, 263) The U.S. military continued to argue for authority to attack enemy bases in Cambodia. (254, 261) Almost everyone in Washington agreed that Cambodian sanctuaries were of increasing importance to North Vietnam, but there was no consensus that attacking them would result in a military advantage worth the disruption of U.S.-Cambodian relations. In its last days, the Johnson administration was not inclined to make such a decision. The fate of U.S. policy toward Cambodia was left to Richard Nixon's administration.

### **Thailand**

The central theme of this compilation is the growing collaboration between Thailand and the United States to combat the threats posed by the wars in Laos and South Vietnam. In early 1964 the United States considered introducing U.S. troops into Thailand (as was done in 1962) to both send the North Vietnamese a message and to reassure Thailand. (264) The U.S. military successfully opposed this use of military forces for political ends. (265, 269) Thai leaders also had strong reservations that another U.S. deployment would have any practical effect. (268, 270)

Instead of deploying U.S. troops, the United States and Thailand instituted joint military consultations and bilateral planning in the event the North Vietnamese and their Pathet Lao allies overran the Mekong towns of Laos. (272, 274-276, 280, 282) In addition, the Thais continued to play a small but important role in the defense of non-Communist Laos by training anti-Communist tribal guerrillas, providing artillery support and pilots for the Lao air force, and training Lao forces in Thailand. (278) Even more important was the growing use of Thai bases for U.S. bombing campaigns in Laos and South Vietnam.

Military assistance provided another way to reassure the Thais and repay them for their cooperation. Ambassador to Thailand Graham Martin, supported by the Department of State, suggested that since Thailand was increasingly "an integral and vital part of our current operational military complex in SE Asia," the United States should consider Thai requests for additional aid in the context of the U.S. effort in Southeast Asia. (287, 288, 291) The Department of Defense took a different view, suggesting that increased military aid for Thailand should not come at the expense of aid to Vietnam. (289, 290) Furthermore, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara believed that the U.S. Country Team was not encouraging Thailand to orient sufficiently its military program toward counterinsurgency nor insisting on balanced military forces. Organized on conventional military lines, Thai military forces were only at 56 percent strength. McNamara refused to recommend continued high cost military assistance to Thailand until Thailand made basic military reforms and he could be sure that U.S. money would be spent effectively. (294)

The Department of State responded that since the Thai army was "the base of the whole regime" and also comprised the separate power bases of Thai political/military leaders Thanom Kittikachorn and Charusathien Praphat, the army was bound to have more officers than needed and be ineffective in its use of resources. (295, 296) Ambassador Martin promised military reform and offered to "stake his career on it" provided that the "infinitesimal" cost of Thai military assistance "add ons" were approved. The Department prepared to defend additional military assistance to Thailand by engaging Secretary Rusk in the debate, but it needed evidence that Thailand would undertake specific reforms. (298)

The difference of opinion between the State and Defense Departments on additional Thai military assistance reached a boiling point in August 1965. State insisted and Defense reluctantly agreed that the Thai political situation required an immediate decision on the level of the FY 1966 military assistance package so the information could be passed to the Thais. McNamara agreed. (299-302) The issue of military aid levels was an ongoing one, however, since military assistance was a yearly decision. In May 1966 Rusk and McNamara discussed differences over increases on the U.S. military assistance program to Thailand in future years and whether the United States should provide helicopters and crews for use in the Thai counterinsurgency effort. (297)

In August 1966 Rusk and McNamara were still far apart. State reported that the Embassy in Thailand was recommending \$70 million for FY 1967. Defense favored \$44-45 million. (319, 322) The issue was referred to President Johnson who approved a figure of \$60 million for FY 1967. The President accepted the Department of State's view that Thailand's cooperation in permitting bases and facilities to U.S. forces engaged in combat in

Vietnam had irrevocably aligned it with the United States and created the expectation of a special relationship. Increased military assistance would allow the Thais to build up their own conventional forces' strength, help to repair relations with Washington soured by U.S. Congressional criticism, and eliminate the Thai belief that they needed a bilateral defense treaty with the United States. (329)

McNamara remained a critic of Thailand's use of U.S. military aid because he perceived in Thailand's military a lack of interest in combating the nascent Communist insurgency in northeast Thailand. While U.S. assessments of the Communist threat were not alarmist, there was growing concern in Washington. Virtually all U.S. intelligence analysis stressed that Thailand's social and economic stability and long history of independence gave it a strong edge against the insurgency, but the United States became increasingly involved in consultation and support of Thailand's counterinsurgency effort. (303, 307, 310, 311, 313, 328, 344, 352)

Thailand's contribution to the Vietnam war expanded greatly during the second half of the Johnson administration, especially the U.S. Air Force's B-52 bombing campaigns originating from Thailand. (341, 342) By mid-1967 there were 40,000 U.S. military personnel in Thailand, and Thailand had 2,500 combat troops fighting in South Vietnam. In the second half of 1967 President Johnson pressed Thai leaders for an additional 10,000 troops. (350, 356, 357) After negotiations on the "requirements" for the additional troops, a deal was finalized in a memorandum agreed upon by McNamara and Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman. Thailand obtained a number of concessions from the United States: equipment and overseas pay for the 10,000 going to Vietnam, an option on a Hawk missile battery, and a \$15 million yearly increase in the planned military assistance program for Thailand in FY 1968 and 1969. (363-368)

The final theme of the compilation concerns the beginning of Thailand's political transition from military dictatorship to representative government and the military/political leaders' efforts to prepare themselves for national elections under a new constitution. Their first step was the organization of a political party for which they sought secret U.S. financial assistance. In late 1965 Secretary Rusk approved a plan in principle to supply the monetary assistance requested and President Johnson endorsed it. The program was not immediately initiated because the new constitution was not completed and promulgated until the second half of 1968, and elections were postponed until February 1969. In August 1968 Thai officials reopened the issue of financial electoral assistance. Secretary Rusk authorized the operation on the grounds that President Johnson had approved it in 1965 and the situation in 1968 was unchanged. (304-306, 376, 383, 396-400, 404, 407, 408) In 1969 the government party won a slim plurality in the elections for the elected lower assembly (the Senate was appointed by the King), and it soon garnered support many independent assemblymen who were elected.

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## Foreign Relations Of The United States 1964-1968, Volume XXVIII, Laos Volume Summary

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(This is not an official statement of policy by the Department of State; it is intended only as a guide to the contents of this volume.)

Since 1861, the Department of State's documentary series *Foreign Relations of the United States* has constituted the official record of the foreign policy and diplomacy of the United States. Historians in the Office of the Historian collect, arrange, and annotate the principal documents comprising the record of American foreign policy. The standards for the preparation of the series and the general deadlines for its publication are established by the *Foreign Relations of the United States* statute of October 28, 1991 (22 USC 4351, et seq.). Volumes in the *Foreign Relations* series are published when all the necessary editing, declassification, and printing steps have been completed.

The documents in this volume are drawn from the centralized indexed files of the Department of State and the decentralized Bureau, Office, and other lot files of the relevant Departmental units. In addition, the volume relies heavily upon Presidential and other papers at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas. Because U.S. policy in Laos had such a strong military component, the editor made extensive use of the records of the Secretary of Defense and his principal assistants at the Department of Defense, the official files of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Westmoreland and Abrams papers, both at the Center of Military History in Washington, D.C., as well as the Taylor Papers at the National Defense University, also in Washington. Laos also had a large intelligence component. For these topics the files of the Central Intelligence Agency and the records of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the Department of State were most useful. The volume was completed before the Office of the Historian had access to Johnson's taped telephone conversations, but there are only a few tapes of conversations exclusively on Laos. Johnson usually discussed Laos in conjunction with Vietnam. Important tapes on the Vietnam war are included in *Foreign Relations, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966* (released in 1998) and the President's taped conversations on the war including Laos are scheduled for publication in subsequent volumes on Vietnam and in volume XXVII, *Mainland Southeast Asia: Regional Affairs*.

This volume complements the intensive documentary coverage of the Vietnam war published or scheduled for publication in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume I, Vietnam, 1964* (released in 1992), *Volume II, January-June, 1965* and *Volume III, June-December 1965* (both released 1996), and *Volume IV, Vietnam 1966* (released on March 23, 1998). *Volume V, Vietnam, 1967* and *Volumes VI and VIII, Vietnam, 1968* are scheduled for later publication.

Almost all of the documents printed here were originally classified. The Information Response Branch of the Office of IRM Programs and Services, Bureau of Administration, Department of State, in concert with the appropriate offices in other agencies or governments, carried out the declassification of the selected documents.

The following is a summary of the most important of the issues covered. Parenthetical citations are to numbered documents in the text.

### Summary

When he was Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson played no role in the Kennedy administration's attempt to neutralize Laos and insulate it from the fighting in South Vietnam. Under Kennedy, Johnson was not active in foreign affairs and therefore was uninvolved in the negotiations at the Geneva Conference of 1962 that resulted in restoration of tripartite government in Laos under neutralist leader Souvanna Phouma. By November 1963, Kennedy's policy had clearly failed to stop the fighting in Laos and bring about real neutrality for Laos. North Vietnam flouted the Geneva provisions by retaining approximately 6,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos to defend and maintain the Ho Chi Minh trail in the southern Laos panhandle, their vital supply line to South Vietnam. North Vietnam supported the Pathet Lao with military assistance and troops. Together the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese controlled most of the northern and central highlands. Although officially part of the same government, the military forces of the Pathet Lao and the Souvanna government engaged in low level warfare for territory and strategic advantage. President Johnson was forced to deal with a simmering crisis in Laos.

In February 1964, the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese began an offensive in central Laos on the strategic Plain of Jars, the gateway to the Mekong Valley where most of the Lao population lived. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman recommended the introduction of U.S. forces into Thailand (as had been done in 1962 during an earlier Laos crisis) and a broad program of political, military, and covert actions to provide additional support to the Souvanna government. (3, 6) U.S. Defense officials failed to see how sending U.S. troops to Thailand would blunt the Communist offensive in central Laos, and recommended only low-level reconnaissance and the deployment of additional jets for Thailand. (4, 7) President Johnson's principal advisers concluded that Hilsman's program was premature. (8) Ambassador to Laos Leonard Unger also opposed Hilsman's advice, stating that, if implemented, it would shred what remained of the Geneva settlement and undermine Souvanna's precarious neutralist position. (11)

The Johnson administration examined instead a series of incremental steps to combat the Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese offensive, including support of the fledgling Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF), composed entirely of T-28 propeller driven aircraft, (13) and encouragement of potential joint South Vietnamese-Lao military cooperation in the panhandle. (15, 16) The Pentagon and General William Westmoreland, Commander in Vietnam, pressed for U.S.-South Vietnamese cross border operations, but the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy, successfully opposed them for fear of potential hostile publicity and complicating already planned covert operations against North Vietnam. (18) The Communist offensive in Laos stopped after the North Vietnamese/Pathet Lao consolidated their newly won positions in the highlands. They did not threaten the Mekong Valley towns of Laos, the traditional strongholds of the Lao non-Communist forces.

U.S. attention shifted to the administrative capital of Vientiane where relations between the three Lao factions were fast deteriorating. (19) On April 19, 1964, two of the leading conservative politician-generals, General Kouprasith and Security Chief Siho, attempted to overthrow Souvanna's government. The coup forces arrested Souvanna and his ministers, but in response to pressure from Ambassador Unger and Washington, they rescinded the arrests. President Johnson and his advisers decided to take no further action until more information was available. Johnson was adamant that word be passed to Hanoi that the Pathet Lao should not take advantage of the coup in Vientiane. Johnson also hoped that the Souvanna government could be restored. (22, 23, 24, 25, 27)

Johnson took advantage of Assistant Secretary William Bundy's visit to Saigon to send him on a fact finding mission to Vientiane. Bundy's tentative conclusion was to allow Souvanna to reconstruct his government. (29) As McGeorge Bundy told the President, the political crisis in Vientiane would not be resolved soon since "the clocks in Laos run on their own time." (30) Upon his return to Washington, William Bundy reported to President Johnson and the National Security Council (NSC) that Souvanna would most likely survive and that the short-term priority was to keep the "right-wing hot heads" from preventing it. (35) William Bundy cabled Unger that the United States was prepared reluctantly to apply sanctions against the coup forces, particularly suspension of U.S. military supplies. (36, 37) Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara strongly supported Souvanna and recommended pressing the coup leaders to accept Pathet Lao membership in a new coalition

government. (38) Vientiane returned to approximate normality; Souvanna was again in power, but the coup leaders still had great influence behind the scenes.

While the Johnson administration waited for the Lao factions to form a government, the NSC examined the problem of infiltration of North Vietnamese troops down the Ho Chi Minh trail through the Laos panhandle into South Vietnam. William Bundy hoped that the President would authorize small-scale intelligence gathering by South Vietnamese teams and U.S. photo reconnaissance to determine the nature of the problem. (42) Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay and Admiral David McDonald wanted to extend the war into the panhandle by conventional bombing. (44)

At a NSC meeting on May 5, the administration **agreed to authorize cross border intelligence gathering operations**, but delayed photo reconnaissance for a week in deference to Unger's reservations about potential damage to Souvanna. (45, 46) Unger stated in mid-May that the Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese had renewed their offensive, at least in part, in reaction to right-wing influence on the Souvanna government. U.S. reconnaissance of Laos could be used by Souvanna's enemies to justify the claim that he was no longer a neutral. (47) While the general assessment in Washington held that the renewed Communist offensive of May was aimed at eliminating neutralist forces from the Plain of Jars, U.S. intelligence did not consider that the Mekong towns were in danger. (49) Nevertheless, Unger now asked for authority to give the tiny Lao air force 500-lb. bombs and supplement its minuscule pilot pool and air force with a small number of aircraft with Air America pilots under U.S. Government contract who would fly U.S. T-28 aircraft with Lao markings. The Department of State authorized the use of the bombs, but denied the use of U.S. civilian contractors flying combat missions for Laos. (48) Instead, it authorized sending four T-28 to the Lao and provided low-level U.S. jet reconnaissance of the battlefield. (50) Eventually, Unger convinced Washington that Air America pilots were needed in the battle. (51-53)

As Unger noted, the United States was now deeply in violation of the Geneva agreements, but he believed that the Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese success and the disarray of the pro-Souvanna neutralist forces on the Plain of Jars made such measures necessary. (59) Johnson administration policymakers met on May 24, to deliberate on possible policy initiatives, but the lack of consensus at the meetings demonstrated how divided the administration was about Laos. The President himself remarked pointedly on this failure of the decision process. All that resulted was a substantial increase in U.S. reconnaissance of Laos. (60-62)

Washington's inaction owed much to a recent proposal by the Polish Government for a negotiated settlement in Laos in which the three Lao factions, the International Control Commission, and the Geneva Co-Chairmen (Soviet Union and Great Britain) would meet at a neutral site and resolve their differences. (63, 65) **As long as there was a hope of a negotiated settlement that isolated Laos from the rest of Southeast Asia, the administration was unprepared to take further decisive action.** (66, 67) Johnson's principal advisers met to prepare recommendations for the President on what to do should military action be required when and if it became clear that negotiations had reached an impasse. (71-74)

A new development changed the situation. Pathet Lao anti-aircraft batteries shot down a RF-8 reconnaissance jet from the USS *Kitty Hawk*. McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a second armed reconnaissance mission for the next day with authorization to return fire if fired upon. Johnson polled his advisers and none disagreed with this plan. (76, 77) On the next day, June 7, McNamara proposed attacking the battery responsible for the downing of the U.S. reconnaissance jet. The President agreed, but wondered aloud a number of times where policy in Laos was heading. (80, 81) In Vientiane, Unger had no doubts, believing that armed reconnaissance and the attack on the Pathet Lao battery were now at risk of becoming "a military exercise for its own sake, running rapidly out of control" and endangering diplomatic negotiations over Laos. (82) Johnson and his advisers seriously considered Unger's objections, but they believed that a one-shot retaliatory strike would have to be carried through as a signal to Hanoi. Johnson reluctantly approved. (83) The attack was only a qualified success; half of the planes hit the wrong target. (93)

Johnson's foreign policy advisers met on June 10 to discuss policy objectives in Laos. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, the principal champion of attempts to persuade Soviet officials to press North Vietnam to abide by the Geneva agreements, emphasized the need to obtain withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops as promised in the 1962 agreement. McNamara suggested such a goal was probably unrealistic; repelling militarily further

Pathet Lao advances was a more practical interim objective. (88, 89) On June 15, the President's advisers again met to discuss Southeast Asia. William Bundy thought it was now time to draw back and make longer-range contingency plans to meet small-scale Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese attacks. (95) The Johnson administration attempted to define--without much success--its long term goals in Laos. (96-98, 100)

The next decision point came far sooner than Johnson's planners had anticipated. In late June 1964, Souvanna's military commanders submitted a plan, code-named Operation Triangle, to retake territory lost to the Pathet Lao on the Plain of Jars near the junction of routes 7 and 13, a strategic point between the administrative capital of Vientiane and the royal capital of Luang Prabang. The Lao generals requested that the United States provide six Air America piloted transport planes, fifteen T-28 aircraft piloted by Air America civilians to provide ground support, and U.S. air reconnaissance. The request was modest, but it was an important departure for the United States because it involved Americans fighting in Laos. (103-105) When Johnson was told that the plan had a better than 50-50 chance of success and that the Joint Chiefs favored it unanimously, he approved U.S. support. (106, 107)

In a retrospective analysis, July 1, 1964, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research presented a number of conclusions to Secretary Rusk, perhaps the most important of which was that both the United States and North Vietnam had become much more involved in the conflict in Laos. (108) This is the overriding theme of the rest of the volume: a U.S.-North Vietnamese ground and air war fought on two fronts. The first front was the war in northern Laos where the United States supported a Hmong (Meo) guerrilla force on the ground that eventually numbered 40,000 troops. The Hmong usually operated behind Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese lines and were supplied by the Central Intelligence Agency and supported from the air by Air America. The second front was the panhandle or corridor of southern Laos where the United States embarked on a major air war of interdiction to try to prevent men, arms, and supplies from reaching the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese in South Vietnam.

The immediate concern in Washington was the slow implementation and advance of Operation Triangle. (110-114) With Operation Triangle finally making modest progress, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pushed for a more active policy in the Laos panhandle, suggesting that the South Vietnamese Air Force be allowed to mount a bombing campaign and the South Vietnamese army be permitted to dispatch up to battalion-sized ground forces (led by U.S. Special Forces advisers) to disrupt and harass traffic on the Ho Chi Minh trail in the corridor. When the issue was raised at an NSC meeting in late July 1964, the JCS's courses of action were rejected because of Souvanna's unyielding opposition to South Vietnamese military operations in Laos. (117)

There was now a rough equilibrium between the non-Communist and Communist military forces in northern Laos. Enhanced by additional T-28 aircraft and Thai support, the Royal Armed Forces (FAR) were capable of retaking much of the Plain of Jars, but the Pathet Lao/North Vietnamese were fully capable of defending the Ho Chi Minh trail and, if they chose, mounting a counteroffensive which could halt Operation Triangle in its tracks. While there was a balance of power in Laos, Johnson policymakers realized it depended upon North Vietnamese forbearance. (119, 120)

Such a tenuous equilibrium had little attraction to Westmoreland in Saigon, who considered that the tiny Lao Air Force could hardly be expected to blunt infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh trail. As a matter of "self-defense in the face of a desperate threat," Westmoreland called for U.S. and South Vietnamese air power to attack the panhandle. (128) At a meeting in Washington, President Johnson approved limited South Vietnamese air and ground operations along the Laos-South Vietnamese border so long as Souvanna agreed. In addition, the Royal Lao Government was encouraged to use more of its limited air power against the infiltration corridor. (130) Unger responded that given the small-scale nature of these operations, Souvanna need not be informed. (131) The President reiterated this decision in early October when he again approved a program of U.S. bombing in the Lao corridor. McNamara pointed out that such approval also implied the use of U.S. aircraft for suppressive fire, but that he was not then asking the President to approve this decision. (136, 138)

As the United States moved slowly toward a full-scale air war in Laos, the Department of State, and especially Rusk, continued to talk with Soviet officials about a possible new Geneva conference on Laos. At the same time, the Department encouraged Souvanna to insist on tough preconditions for such talks that would reestablish the essence of the 1962 agreement. High-level U.S.-Soviet discussions on Laos fell into a familiar pattern of charges and countercharges that the respective Southeast Asia allies were not living up to the Geneva

agreement. (118, 121, 143, 147) Finally an exasperated Rusk tried a non-diplomatic approach by asking Gromyko when Hanoi was going to leave Laos alone, and stated that if it was not going to, then the United States and the Soviet Union had a serious problem. Gromyko countered angrily that it was the United States that was expanding the war in Laos. (149)

The JCS recommended an expanded U.S. role in the bombing of the panhandle. (140, 142) On December 7, 1964, Johnson approved JCS recommendations for an air campaign to be known as Operation Barrel Roll. (148) When the new ambassador to Laos, William Sullivan, informed Souvanna of the U.S. decision, Souvanna's response was hawkish. The Lao Prime Minister encouraged the U.S. Air Force to attack anything that moved on the infiltration routes by day or night, but he insisted that the bombing program not be publicized or acknowledged. (150, 152, 153)

Representatives of the Embassies in Saigon, Bangkok, and Vientiane, and MACV officials met to refine and improve Barrel Roll. (155) The Departments of State and Defense approved new guidelines which made the bombing campaign more flexible and better coordinated. (157) The Department and Embassy in Laos discussed ways to allow the bombing to make a greater impression on the North Vietnamese. (171, 173) In March 1965, the Johnson administration approved an intensified program of U.S. bombardment against the Laos panhandle, called Steel Tiger, and separated it from Barrel Roll, which would concentrate on the rest of Laos. (174, 176)

In late January and early February 1965, right-wing military forces attempted another coup against Souvanna. Sullivan's timely intervention--he convinced an Australian technician to disable the national radio network--and his open support for Souvanna helped to quash the half-hearted and poorly organized putsch. (162-164) This failed coup eliminated once and for all the two most important conservative figures on the Lao political scene, Generals Phoumi Nosavan and Siho Lamphouhakoul. Henceforth, they were no longer factors in Lao politics. (166, 167)

During 1965, differences of opinion about implementation of policy arose, especially over the question of cross border operations from South Vietnam into Laos. Westmoreland and MACV wanted to harass the North Vietnamese forces in Laos, using local hill people led by U.S. Special Forces. Sullivan's reaction was totally negative: "it is, in my view far fetched to think of storming the Ho Chi Minh trail with a bare bottom bunch of these boys." Sullivan believed that MACV should attempt intelligence scouting, a little sabotage, a little interception, but if Westmoreland wanted "to break up the real marrow of the Ho Chi Minh trail," he "had better start thinking in terms of regiments and divisions, not tribal assets." (179)

After returning to Washington for consultation in the summer of 1965, Sullivan combined his thinking on cross border operations into a single cable. Looking first at interdiction, Sullivan stated that the U.S. did not have adequate resources to deny the North Vietnamese the Ho Chi Minh trail, especially by air power alone. True interdiction would require troops--two U.S. divisions at least--but such an overt violation of Laos sovereignty and the Geneva Accords of 1962 would either bring Souvanna down should he agree to it, or require the United States to underwrite Lao control of the Mekong Valley. Sullivan considered neither alternative as practical. The best that the United States could accomplish was harassment of the North Vietnamese in the Laos corridor. While this effort was becoming more efficient and productive, **successful harassment usually disrupted intelligence gathering**. Once harassment teams attacked, the North Vietnamese swept the area driving off the passive intelligence assets. Sullivan's point was that operations in the Laos corridor should be judged on whether the objective was worth the price. (194)

In the second half of 1965, the United States gave serious consideration to a plan favored by President Johnson to shoot down a North Vietnamese supply plane delivering military goods to the Pathet Lao. This action would send a clear message to Hanoi that there was a price to pay for supporting the Pathet Lao. (188, 197, 198) Codenamed Duck Soup, this plan proved impossible to implement, mainly because the enemy aircraft had to be caught in the act of parachuting or dropping by air supplies to ground forces and there was always a danger that a Soviet aircraft might be attacked by mistake. The same implementation difficulties befell the idea of creating a cordon sanitaire across the corridor of Laos into Thailand, thus sealing off the Ho Chi Minh trail, and the scheme to use napalm in Laos bombing campaigns. The cordon plan required substantial U.S. troops; napalm would arouse unacceptable international condemnation. (205, 206, 208, 211)

In early 1966, tensions between Sullivan and Westmoreland over cross border operation increased. Sullivan charged that Westmoreland's covert forces, the Studies and Observation Group (MACSOG), which comprised of ARVN foot soldiers led by Green Berets, was "an Eagle Scout Program," and that their intelligence forays into Laos, code-named Shining Brass, were often ineffective, dangerous, and of limited intelligence producing value. Westmoreland could not understand Sullivan's opposition to harassing the enemy before he entered South Vietnam. (216, 218)

Nevertheless, the covert U.S. military effort in Laos expanded in small incremental steps. In March 1966, Sullivan authorized the use of napalm in two specific cases, and then the Department allowed its general use as a tactical weapon. (223, 227) The Department of Defense successfully established the principle of "hot pursuit" into Laos from South Vietnam (230, 231, 234), increased the size of Shining Brass teams from 11 men to platoon size, and expanded their area of operation within Laos. (237)

At mid-year of 1966, there were signs of optimism, especially in the CIA-directed war in northern Laos. Sullivan reported that despite increased North Vietnamese troop commitments, the war in the north was going well. He noted with pride that success came against North Vietnamese regulars, not the Pathet Lao. (244) The 303 Committee received an optimistic report of CIA's counterinsurgency operations in Laos and considered it an "exemplary success story" worthy of continuation and expansion. (248) CIA's Far Eastern Chief William Colby was "exhilarated" not only by the success in the north, but by CIA's intelligence operations in the panhandle. He reported that in the north "the marriage of excellent intelligence furnished by CAS and the superb performance by the 7th AF has enabled outnumbered friendly units [Vang Pao's Hmong] to not only contain the enemy offensive, but to mount a counteroffensive which has regained 90% of the area lost." (246)

The Johnson administration was also proud of the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF), which it had helped to build virtually from scratch. The head of this small air service was General Thao Ma, a combat pilot who poured his heart into T-28 operations, often leading missions. As one U.S. official observed, "Ma and he alone makes the RLAF go." Critics accused Ma of being "fixed" on T-28 operations and less honest Lao resented his unwillingness to use the RLAF transport squadron for smuggling. (232) Lao politics were at their essence family politics, and Ma was without important family contacts. Souvanna temporarily eased him out of the job of Chief of Staff of the RLAF and gave him a desk job in Vientiane. Ma rebelled in October 1966, put his planes at Savannakhet into the air, and took off to bomb Vientiane. It was an act of defiance by a desperate man, but apart from some minor bombing damage and a few regrettable deaths, Ma's defiance failed. He flew to exile in Thailand with a good part of the RLAF, which was later retrieved. (262-264) The task for the United States was to rebuild the Lao Air Force, but by this time U.S. aircraft were carrying much more of the air operations over Laos.

Another theme of U.S. policy in late 1966 was Secretary of Defense McNamara's growing interest in a technological barrier--composed of sensors, short-lived mines, visual surveillance by aircraft, and quick reaction air strikes--running across South Vietnam south of the 17th parallel and traversing Laos so as to cut off infiltration. Sullivan was convinced that such reliance on "gadgets" would be a disaster, but McNamara pushed the idea forward. (261, 265) McNamara's penchant for technology as an alternative means of fighting the Vietnam war was equally evident in 1967. The Department of Defense experimented with weather modification to increase the rainy season in the panhandle and slow infiltration and with a compound that would make mud stickier and impede truck traffic. Sullivan approved the idea with his usual wit: "Make mud, not war." (274, 289)

Neither of these schemes passed much beyond the experimental stage. Perhaps the most important technological issue in Laos was the need to place a navigational guidance system in northern Laos to direct the bombing of North Vietnam. (278) Souvanna wanted no tangible proof that operations against North Vietnam were being carried on from Lao soil. He reluctantly agreed to the establishment of the facility, but insisted that if it were exposed the United States would say that it was done without his knowledge. The U.S. resident technicians would have to have civilian cover and the unit would have self-demolition capacity for emergency use. (290)

Also in 1967, tensions between Sullivan and Westmoreland over the nature of the covert ground war in Laos emerged even more starkly. Westmoreland and the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), Admiral Sharp,

successfully pressed for a reduction of restrictions on operations against the Ho Chi Minh trail. (276, 277) Sullivan worried about the steady and gradual expansion of the U.S.-directed effort, believing that MACSOG already had more targets than it could handle. Expanded operations proposed by Westmoreland could not be kept secret. Once exposed they would be a glaring exception to Souvanna's opposition to foreign troops in Laos and would help justify North Vietnamese presence. (283) The intelligence community studied the problem and concluded that Souvanna would disapprove and probably resign in the face of large U.S.-South Vietnamese operations in Laos launched over his objections, but would tolerate small scale actions of which he was not officially informed. (287)

Sullivan became increasingly exasperated at MACV efforts to enlarge its operations in the panhandle. (301, 302) He informed Westmoreland that the 20-kilometer zone of operations in Laos along the border with Vietnam in which MACSOG operated a stepped up version of Shining Brass, renamed Prairie Fire, was "not a piece of territory which has been detached from my responsibilities in Laos and given over to your Command." (306) For his part, Westmoreland believed that Sullivan was not allowing for enough flexibility for MACSOG operations. (307)

In contrast to MACV-Embassy Vientiane tensions, relations between the Embassy and the CIA in Laos proceeded relatively smoothly. CIA roadwatch teams operated in the panhandle on a large scale. The "quiet war" in northern Laos, as William Colby called it, was a substantial covert undertaking in which 36,183 local defense forces (mostly Hmong) were paid and directed by CIA. The cost was under half of what the U.S. spent on the 55,000 strong **Royal Lao Army, one of the least aggressive and effective armies in the world.** The CIA-supported Hmong were doing most of the serious fighting in Laos. (304)

In the fall of 1967, Souvanna made his third visit to Washington during President Johnson's term. Before Souvanna's arrival, Johnson asked his advisers for "new ideas" on fighting the war in Vietnam, and some responded with new initiatives for U.S. and South Vietnamese operations in Laos. (310) In discussing issues with Souvanna, the Embassy and White House officials warned Johnson that Souvanna was either ignorant of or not officially aware of much of U.S.-South Vietnamese operations in Laos. The President was advised to be discreet about those topics. (311) Most of Souvanna's conversations with President Johnson and Rusk at meetings on October 20 and 21 revolved around North Vietnam. If anything, Souvanna was more hawkish than Johnson, recommending bombing North Vietnam intensively for November and December and then proclaiming a halt. If the North Vietnamese did not respond, Souvanna recommended resuming the bombing with a vengeance. As for Laos, Souvanna told Rusk there was no going back to the Geneva Accords of 1962 unless there was peace in South Vietnam. (312-314)

In late 1967, there was general optimism about the effectiveness of the U.S. bombing campaign, including the use of B-52's, against trucks using the Lao portion of the Ho Chi Minh trail. (317, 319, 321) The President approved daytime B-52 bombing over Sullivan's objections that Souvanna was opposed to all but night missions. The Pentagon convinced Johnson that no one could recognize a B-52 from 20,000 to 30,000 feet. (315, 320) The year ended with McNamara's systems analysts in the Pentagon questioning the cost effectiveness of jet fighter aircraft as opposed to propeller driven aircraft (much slower and cheaper) in attacking North Vietnamese targets on the trail. In the controversy over whether jets or props were more efficient in the air war over Laos, neither the systems analysts nor the traditional military gave ground. Finally, the JCS satisfied both sides by agreeing to expand both the number of jet and propeller aircraft for use in Southeast Asia. (323, 326, 337)

By 1968, the U.S. commitment to the air war over Laos had grown enormously since the early days of "armed reconnaissance" in 1964. Nevertheless, in the face of a successful North Vietnamese offensive, Sullivan required more air power and asked that a U.S. air commando wing be "dedicated" to Laos. (332) Sullivan was the leading proponent of what one official called the "Sopwith Camel" approach, using prop planes to hit North Vietnamese troops at the border of Laos and North Vietnam along so-called "choke points" before they disappeared under the jungle canopy of the Ho Chi Minh trail. (334) The 7th Air Force was unprepared to dedicate planes to Laos, stating that South Vietnam was their first priority, but they promised to respond to Sullivan's requests as fully as possible. (335, 371)

In early 1968, there were ominous signs that special navigational site 85, established in north Laos at **Phou Pha Thi**, had come to North Vietnam's attention. On January 12, the North Vietnamese sent two single engine biplanes to bomb the site. One plane was shot down by ground fire, the other with a rifle fired by a U.S. technician from an Air America helicopter. (336) The North Vietnamese next dispatched six battalions with artillery and rocket support, closed the ring on site 85, destroyed it, inflicted heavy casualties on its Hmong defenders, and killed 11 American technicians. This secret battle deep in north Laos was the blackest day to date for U.S. fortunes in Laos. (340-343, 351)

The conflict between Sullivan and Westmoreland over the level of U.S.-South Vietnamese operations in the panhandle continued in 1968. Sullivan complained of MACV's "encroachment" and still regarded MACSOG "as [a] dubious organization of marginal value." (347) **Sullivan's opposition helped to kill the plan to employ 3000 Kha tribesmen as guerrillas in Laos**. (352) The defense of Khe Sanh, so near the Laos border, convinced President Johnson that Westmoreland should be allowed to employ battalion sized Prairie Fire forces in Laos in conjunction with operations in South Vietnam's Ashau Valley. (355, 356, 358, 360) The operation was eventually canceled (364), but the decision to use these extensive combat forces in Laos was an important departure for U.S. policy.

In the spring of 1968, the Department of Defense initiated a reassessment of U.S. policy in Laos. The JCS believed that the United States was too passive in Laos, responding only to North Vietnamese moves. The Tet offensive had been supported from the Laos panhandle, I, II, and III Corps in South Vietnam were in trouble in part because of support from Laos, and pacification in South Vietnam was floundering. It was time to rethink policy in Laos. (350, 354) Sullivan stated that if the United States wanted to alter its basic commitment to fighting the North Vietnamese by covert and limited methods, it had better be prepared to support Laos with U.S. troops. (359) Nicholas Katzenbach, Under Secretary of State, stressed to Paul Nitze, Deputy Secretary of Defense, that it was important to consider what the North Vietnamese had not done in Laos: they had not set up a rival Pathet Lao government, not engaged in terrorism, not exposed publicly U.S. ground operations in the panhandle, nor had they pushed to the Mekong. (366) There existed a unspoken mutual restraint between Hanoi and Washington in Laos; but if the United States increased its efforts, North Vietnam could also do so just as effectively.

As 1968 drew to a close, U.S. experts on Laos admitted that it had been a good year for the North Vietnamese/Pathet Lao and a bad one for Souvanna. (373, 376, 380, 383, 384) The U.S. presidential election of 1968 and the Paris Peace talks took the steam out of the reassessment of U.S. policy in Laos desired by the Department of Defense. The general feeling was that there would be no North Vietnamese drive to the Mekong so long as there was a chance for peace, but no one was convinced that the enemy did not have the capability to do so. (386, 388, 390, 392). With the bombing pause over North Vietnam, the United States committed additional air power to Laos in the hopes of righting the balance. (391, 393, 398) At year's end, there were new concerns that North Vietnamese/Pathet Lao forces might move across what had become a de facto line and threaten the Mekong towns. (397, 399) The battle for Laos was not over. In 1964, Laos was a secondary front of the war in Vietnam. In 1968, Laos was a full-fledged battlefield of the war in Southeast Asia.

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## **Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume I**

### **Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969-1972**

#### **Volume Summary**

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The field of U.S. diplomatic history has undergone dramatic changes in recent years, broadening its scope to encompass cultural relations. The *Foreign Relations of the United States* series is similarly moving in new and innovative directions. Previous *Foreign Relations* volumes focused on the major decisions and diplomatic activity of U.S. foreign policymakers. This volume-"Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969-1972"-is the first in the series to document one aspect of the cultural approach: the intellectual assumptions that U.S. foreign affairs leaders used to make sense of the world and frame policy. Although other key officials receive attention, the volume carefully details the worldviews of the two architects of foreign policy during the first administration of Richard M. Nixon: the president and Henry A. Kissinger, his assistant for national security affairs. Using previously unpublished records along with published sources, it chronicles the basic premise-realism-that both Kissinger and Nixon used in mentally ordering the world and in formulating policy. It also highlights the theoretical mechanisms-linkage and triangular diplomacy-they employed to achieve Vietnamization, détente, and other objectives. It reveals the principals' worries about multipolarity, U.S. power, and American credibility, while tracing their mental construction of the Nixon Doctrine to meet those perceived challenges.

Nixon and Kissinger's foreign policy views did not spring *de novo* into their heads in January 1969. Rather, they both arrived on the job with a wealth of ideas about international affairs developed throughout years of practical and theoretical experience in the field. The volume begins by documenting those worldviews in articles, essays, and campaign speeches written or given by Nixon and Kissinger during the 2-year period prior to their assumption of office.

Realism, the most important of the principals' initial assumptions, influenced policy throughout the administration. For Kissinger, among the most influential thinkers in the history of U.S. diplomacy, the concept of balance-of-power was a shibboleth. A proper balance, attained only if the great powers resisted the temptation to jockey for tactical advantage, created a stabilizing equilibrium, he argued. The former Harvard professor also believed that national interests (rather than ideals) measured in terms of security and power (military, economic, political, and psychological) should govern both international affairs and U.S. foreign policy. According to an important 1968 essay, in which he expressed his overall worldview, Kissinger realized that Americans, accustomed to thinking in terms of such ideals as peace or freedom, were uncomfortable defining power and interests as the bases of their foreign policies and objectives. Nevertheless, he argued, the United States should pursue its global "interests"-a key word in the Nixon administration's foreign political lexicon-rather than "altruism." Before doing so, however, American decisionmakers first needed to reach a "mature conception" of foreign policy by clearly defining the nation's interests and objectives and then by matching its capabilities and commitments to those interests and objectives. (4, 118) On those grounds, realism led Kissinger to be particularly critical of President Lyndon B. Johnson's involvement in Vietnam, which the national security advisor felt was peripheral to U.S. security. (81)

Although Nixon was no stranger to power politics or international affairs, the volume documents his evolving realist thought. Earlier in his career, Nixon-first as a Congressman and then as vice president under Dwight D. Eisenhower-had been a devout anti-communist and cold warrior who saw the world through an ideological lens. But he converted to realism as president, a transition most clearly revealed in his conversation with Chairman Mao Tse-tung during his historic first visit to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in February 1972. Within the context of calming Mao's concerns about the U.S. military presence in Asia and elsewhere, Nixon explained that, as a Quaker, he was philosophically opposed to a large military establishment and "military adventures." Since becoming commander-in-chief, however, he had found it necessary "to put the survival of his nation first." As Nixon told bipartisan Congressional leaders after his return to Washington, that reordering of priorities had led him to explore relations with communist China, with which the United States shared a "common interest" that trumped the two states' ideological differences. (106, 108) Realism provided

the intellectual rationale not only for the administration's approach to the PRC, but also for its disinclination to promote democracy abroad, a mission usually associated with Wilsonian idealism. (2, 3, 4, 53) Similar thinking peppered the president's public discourse, including a nationally televised address he gave at the end of his first term. Listing his administration's accomplishments, Nixon highlighted the creation of a "structure of peace" with the two communist powers-China and the Soviet Union-that rested "on the hard concrete of common interests and mutual agreements, and not on the shifting sands of naïve sentimentality." (123, 18)

Before the realist *Weltanschauung* of Kissinger and Nixon could function, policymakers needed to analyze, plan, and identify the nation's capabilities, interests, and objectives. Since bureaucratization hindered the thoughtful, yet agile, approach to statecraft favored by the president and his national security advisor, reforming the policymaking process emerged as one of their key goals. As the secrecy surrounding Kissinger's trips to Peking in July 1971 and to Moscow in March 1972 suggest, reform often meant centralizing foreign policymaking, placing decisions almost entirely in the hands of Nixon and his national security advisor. (102, 110) Before being named to his post, Kissinger argued that bureaucracy paralyzed U.S. policymakers by widening the array of available policy options even as it limited the capacity of statesmen, increasingly distracted by administrative responsibilities, to choose among them. (4) Both Kissinger and Nixon numbered reforming the foreign policymaking apparatus among the key accomplishments of their first years in office. The administration, they claimed, had created a "a new way of making decisions" by making the National Security Council (NSC), rather than the Department of State, the main body responsible for advising the president on foreign affairs. The smaller, more agile NSC could plan, analyze, and review all foreign policy options systematically and quickly, providing a clearer picture of the way ahead. Specialized groups within the NSC-such as the Senior Review Group and the Defense Program Review Committee-reviewed policy, prepared contingency plans, or brought other matters, including defense, more fully within the White House's grasp. (47) Nixon confidently declared that-unlike past administrations that allegedly had lacked a clear sense of purpose, merely had responded to crises, and had become unnecessarily embroiled in conflicts-"we know where we are going." (104)

Realism provided Nixon and Kissinger with an understanding of geostrategy and a negotiating approach that fueled their pursuit of détente with the Soviet Union. Common wisdom within the administration held that the Sino-Soviet split, Soviet-American strategic parity, and certain challenges facing the Kremlin within its own sphere of influence had combined to create a situation in which a lessening of Cold War tensions was in the interest of both nations. (2, 8, 41) Signaling his desire to negotiate, Nixon announced in his inaugural address what would become an oft-repeated theme of his administration: the world was moving from "a period of confrontation" and "entering an era of negotiation." (9) Unlike past administrations, which had pursued agreements with the Soviets merely to lessen tensions or improve the atmosphere of superpower relations, Nixon and Kissinger assumed that Soviet-American interests differed and instead sought to negotiate only in those areas where it was in their mutual interest to do so. For example, Nixon told French President Charles de Gaulle, during a private conversation held in Paris in early 1969, that he had little interest in talking with the Soviets merely to reduce mistrust. Instead, "we should be hard and pragmatic in dealing with the Soviets. They knew what they wanted and we must know what we want." (13, 10) The president repeated that position on several occasions, including an address to the United Nations in October 1970, in which he stated that détente depended upon a mutual recognition of power and national interest. "[P]ower has a role in our relations," Nixon reminded his listeners. "Power is a fact of international life." (78, 47, 52, 60) Similarly, Kissinger, in a speech before the Business Council in December 1971, argued that Americans mistakenly assumed that tensions with the Soviets were due to "mere personal misunderstandings and that the remedy for national differences is the development of interpersonal good will." The Nixon administration would not make the mistake of confusing "foreign policy with psychotherapy. What we want to do is deal with concrete issues in our relationships." (101)

Détente produced dramatic results in May 1972 with the Moscow Summit, where the United States and the Soviet Union signed the first Strategic Arms Limitation agreement (SALT). (97, 114, 116, 117) At the summit, Nixon again articulated his administration's approach to the Soviets. Acknowledging their differing systems and global interests, he told his hosts that a superpower condominium could not be achieved by "mushy sentimentality or by glossing over differences which exist. We can do it only by working out real problems in a

concrete fashion, determined to place our common interests above our differences." (115) Upon his return to Washington, the president reiterated this worldview to his Cabinet and White House staff, reminding them that "fundamental shifts in the world balance of power," rather than "woolly-headed idealism," had produced the Moscow Summit and SALT. (119)

Triangular diplomacy and linkage provided tactical models to achieve the interests identified by realist analysis. Based on balance-of-power theory, triangular diplomacy involved using relations with one country as leverage to extract concessions from another. The deepening Sino-Soviet split and the emergence of China as a global power presented the Nixon administration with an opportunity to establish relations with the PRC which, by serving as a counterweight to the Soviet Union, would provide additional leverage for extracting concessions from Moscow. Kissinger typically provided the most detailed and nuanced explanation of triangular diplomacy to *Time* magazine correspondents in December 1970. Given the Sino-Soviet border conflict, he explained, the Soviets had an interest in dealing with the United States so as "to free their Western rear so that they can focus more on China." And the United States could guarantee itself a maximum amount of leverage vis-à-vis Moscow simply by putting out "the word that we are restudying the China question." The administration's emerging China strategy was "to develop a dialogue with them [the Chinese] for its own sake and then to have a counterweight with the Soviets." (80, 24, 55) With those goals in mind, Nixon came to office determined to pursue an opening to China. In April 1969, Secretary of State William P. Rogers announced at an Associated Press luncheon that the administration was ready to establish "normal relations" with China and would be "responsive" to any friendly overtures from Peking. (21, 14)

Triangular diplomacy paid dividends immediately after the July 1971 announcement that Nixon would visit China, a breakthrough made possible by Kissinger's secret visit to Peking that month. (92, 93) The national security advisor discovered that playing the "China card" had worked its magic during his first meeting with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin following the announcement. Dobrynin, who Kissinger found "totally insecure," conveyed the Kremlin's suddenly renewed interest in a proposed U.S.-Soviet summit that was eventually held in Moscow in May 1972. (94) Kissinger typically placed triangular diplomacy within a broad concept of geostrategy during a meeting in the Oval Office held just days before the president's trip to China, a discussion recorded on the Nixon tapes. "For the next 15 years we have to lean toward the Chinese against the Russians. We have to play this balance of power game totally unemotionally. Right now, we need the Chinese to correct the Russians, and to discipline the Russians." (105) Nixon similarly characterized triangular diplomacy. (97, 107, 119)

Closely related to triangular diplomacy was linkage, another intellectual foundation for the administration's statecraft. Kissinger and Nixon believed that linkage-making negotiating progress in one area with the Soviet Union dependant upon progress in another-provided the best tactic for achieving several key international goals, including détente, strategic arms control, ending the war in Vietnam, and reaching settlements in the Middle East and Berlin. The president defined linkage in a letter to Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird soon after his inauguration. Theorizing that "the great issues are fundamentally interrelated," Nixon wrote, "we must seek to advance on a front at least broad enough to make clear that we see some relationship between political and military issues." The Soviets, he continued, "should be brought to understand that they cannot expect to reap the benefits of cooperation in one area while seeking to take advantage of tension or confrontation elsewhere." (10) Kissinger similarly defined linkage for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The administration, he stated, "sought to move forward across a broad range of issues so that progress in one area would add momentum to the progress of other areas." (118)

Nixon and Kissinger went to great lengths to link progress on détente and SALT to the Kremlin's willingness to press its client in Hanoi to negotiate an end to the fighting in Vietnam. (11, 12, 13, 25) The president and his national security advisor stressed this connection in their private discussions with Dobrynin and Soviet foreign minister Andrei A. Gromyko. (77) During an October 1969 meeting with Dobrynin in the Oval Office, Nixon and Kissinger explained that, if the Soviet Union did "something in Vietnam" that led to an acceptable peace settlement, "the U.S. might do something dramatic to improve" bilateral relations. (40) As the volume shows, however, in March 1972, less than two months before the planned Moscow Summit, North Vietnam launched an offensive, largely supplied by the Soviet Union, that severely jeopardized the

administration's linkage strategy. (110, 112, 113) Nixon and Kissinger decided during a telephone conversation to threaten to abort the summit if the Kremlin failed to pressure Hanoi to halt its campaign and negotiate in earnest. As Nixon put it, their approach was to "keep kicking them [the Soviets] in the balls." (109)

As it applied to Vietnam, linkage complemented the Nixon Doctrine, the president's intellectual response to the war and shifts in the global balance of power. Nixon, who hinted at such a concept on the campaign trail, articulated the doctrine during a background briefing for reporters in Guam, where he had traveled in July 1969 to witness the splashdown of the Apollo astronauts. (3, 5, 29) Refined over the next several months, the doctrine held that, while the United States would honor its treaty obligations and continue to extend its nuclear shield to allies, it would come to its allies' defense only in the event of an invasion by a major power and only if doing so was in its own interest. Instead, Washington would encourage Asian nations to be responsible for their own defense. (32, 34, 37, 69)

Vietnamization, the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops from Southeast Asia accompanied by Saigon's assumption of responsibility for its own defense, was "an application of the Nixon Doctrine to South Vietnam," according to Kissinger. (69) Nixon, for whom ending the unpopular war in Vietnam was a top diplomatic priority, argued for shifting the burden of fighting to the South Vietnamese in a campaign speech in October 1968. The South Vietnamese should "fight their own battles," he declared. (7) Rogers agreed, informing the annual luncheon of the Associated Press in 1969 that the White House was "deeply engaged...in an intensive program of upgrading" South Vietnam's military capabilities. (21)

A reaction to the quagmire in Vietnam, the Nixon Doctrine also represented an attempt to harmonize the United States' still vast global interests and commitments with its declining capabilities and the emergence of a multipolar world order. Kissinger and Nixon, who assumed that the United States was moving from a position of "predominance to one of partnership," used the doctrine to promote self-sufficiency among U.S. allies in Asia, Latin America, and Europe. (41, 58, 101) However, the doctrine's tools-including foreign aid, strategic assistance programs, and regional alliances-also sought to contain nationalism, independence, and self-reliance within an American dominated network of interdependent relationships. (37, 85, 89, 90) According to Kissinger, U.S. aid and assistance programs were designed to develop "a world order in which the United States does not have to carry the entire burden. This means relating individual countries to others in their regions and then relating them to the United States." (35)

As the Nixon Doctrine suggests, Nixon and Kissinger's perception that the architecture of international power had shifted served as yet another intellectual backdrop against which they crafted policy. The economies of Western Europe, Germany, and Japan, all crushed by World War II, had fully healed. The communist world had split between the Soviet Union and China, a burgeoning power. New nations in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America had emerged. The end result: the bipolar structure of the Cold War, in which only two superpowers held a preponderance of power, had given way to a multipolar system. Several documents in the volume illustrate the principals' understanding of this change. (84, 104) As early as July 1967, Nixon informed a gathering of conservatives at San Francisco's Bohemian Club, "We live in a new world." (2) One year later, Kissinger identified "political multipolarity" as a new feature of the global scene. (4) After the inauguration, a study by the NSC staff concluded that a "diffusion of independent political activity" had replaced bipolarity. (41)

Even as the poles of international power proliferated, Nixon's foreign policy team became convinced that the United States was mired in relative economic, military, and even psychological decline, an assumption that profoundly shaped the administration's foreign policies. The Soviet Union, having occupied a position of inferiority since the dawn of the nuclear age, finally had achieved rough strategic parity with the United States. (71) In addition, a worsening economy, heightened demands for domestic spending, and post-Vietnam criticism of the military left little room for spending on defense or foreign aid. Concerned by the budgetary crisis, Secretary Laird and Undersecretary of State Elliott Richardson worried that the United States no longer possessed resources sufficient to conduct a robust foreign policy. (82, 46)

Disenchantment with Vietnam not only put pressure on defense budgets, it also fueled a sense among the public and Congress that the United States was over-committed abroad. The movement to narrow America's overseas obligations troubled Nixon's foreign policymakers insofar as they assumed that it could lead to a "new

isolationism." (39, 41) The president attacked "new isolationists" in a commencement address given at the Naval Officer Candidate School in March 1971, in which he equated assaults on U.S. military budgets and overseas commitments with "weakness." (87) The next month, he told Republican Congressional leaders that calls for a rollback in the U.S. posture represented a grave "danger to peace" as the proposed withdrawal would only weaken the United States, encourage adversaries, and "invite a large war." (88) In short, the Nixon administration was the first to confront "Vietnam syndrome," Americans' postwar unwillingness to play a forceful global role. (85, 86, 101) That condition shaped the administration's strategy in Vietnam. On several occasions, including during a May 1969 conversation with Singapore's prime minister, Nixon expressed his fear that a too rapid U.S. "bug-out" from Vietnam would foster a sense of national failure that would in turn produce "isolation." (20, 23, 27, 38, 75)

In Kissinger's estimation, post-Vietnam retrenchment, parity, and shrinking military budgets had combined to create a perception of U.S. weakness that led friends and foes alike to question Washington's credibility. (36) Worried that Vietnamization was further eroding America's reputation, in October 1969 he sent Nixon a study arguing that the nation's "deteriorating strategic position" discouraged allies, who increasingly viewed the United States as "a reluctant giant." (39) Conversely, the perception of American impotence encouraged adversaries, emboldening the Soviet Union to be provocative and challenge the United States. (71, 72) Such concerns, harbored also by Richardson and Nixon, led policymakers to try to end the war in Vietnam in such a way as to maintain the integrity of South Vietnam and thereby enhance U.S. credibility. (42, 67) The president, in a meeting with Republican Congressional leaders, made the case for a measured withdrawal from Vietnam that would leave an impression of U.S. strength necessary to facilitate a "modus vivendi" with the communist powers and to defend Washington's Asian allies. Alluding to the domino theory, the president sensed that the Philippines, South Korea, and Japan would "lose confidence in us...if we leave [Vietnam] precipitously." (88) Policymakers connected credibility, Vietnam, the domino theory, and even détente on several other occasions. (17, 67, 71, 87, 91, 101) In June 1972, for instance, Nixon informed his Cabinet and White House staff that only U.S. military strength, which created the impression of power, had made such breakthroughs as the Moscow Summit, SALT, and the opening of China possible. However, the United States would surrender its credibility, he explained, if it lost ingloriously in Vietnam. Summarizing his thinking, Nixon concluded, "If they think we are weak, they are going to pounce on us. If they think we are strong, they are going to deal with us." (119)

The intellectual foundations, including concerns about U.S. credibility, upon which the president, Kissinger, and other principals built foreign policy prepared the first Nixon administration to achieve some notable diplomatic achievements. Realism, linkage, and triangular diplomacy helped produce détente, SALT, and an opening to China. The Nixon Doctrine, meant to respond to multipolarity and relative U.S. decline, helped pave the way toward Vietnamization, which culminated in temporary peace in Vietnam in 1973. While Nixon achieved notable successes in his first term, the legacy of Vietnam, both domestic and foreign, confronted Nixon during his second term and Gerald R. Ford, his successor, with serious foreign policy challenges. *Foreign Relations of the United States* will document the intellectual assumptions of foreign policymakers during the second Nixon and Ford administrations from 1973 to 1976, when Kissinger served as both Secretary of State and National Security Advisor.

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## Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945-1976

### Number of Documents by Volume & Country

Volume	IC/VN	Laos	Cambodia	Thailand	SE Asia	TOTALS
HST 45	24					
HST 46	81					
HST 47	106					
HST 48	33					
HST 49	93					
HST 50	176					
HST 51	142					
HST Siam				217		
DDE 52-13	1484					
DDE 54-16	822					
DDE 55-1	411					
DDE 55-XXI		257	83		175	340
DDE 55-XXII				66		
DDE 58-1	274					
DDE 58-XV				120		
DDE 58-XVI		332	90		68	422
DDE MFS		716	96		114	926
JFK I	343					
JFK II	334					
JFK III	309					
JFK IV	383					
JFK XXIII			77	86	40	203
JFK XXIV		491				
JFK MFS		245				
LBJ I	479					
LBJ II	351					
LBJ III	278					
LBJ IV	356					
LBJ V	457					
LBJ VI	345					
LBJ VII	287					
LBJ XXVII			159	144	96	399
LBJ XXVIII		401				
RMN I	123					
RMN VI						
RMN VII						
RMN VIII						
RMN IX						
RMN X						
RMN XX						
RMN E-12						
Totals	7691	2442	505	633	493	11764

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Nixon Administration Vol. XX, 1969-1976		
Nixon Administration Vol. E-12, 1969-1976		



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