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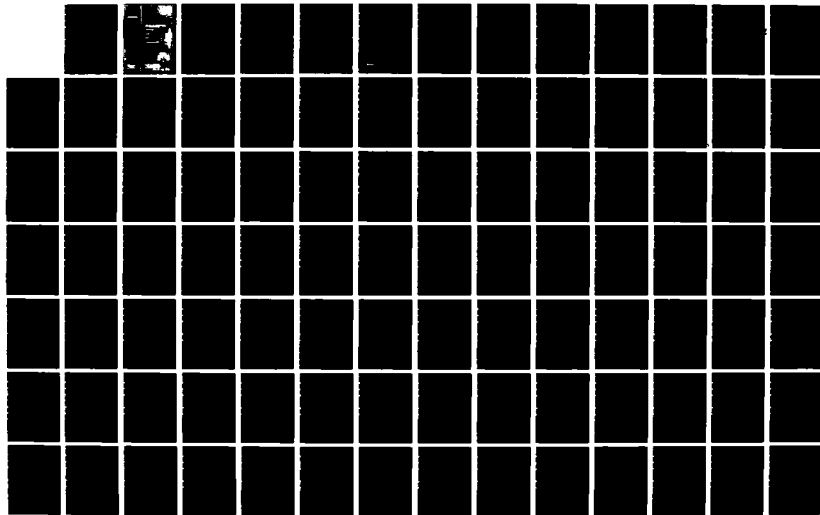
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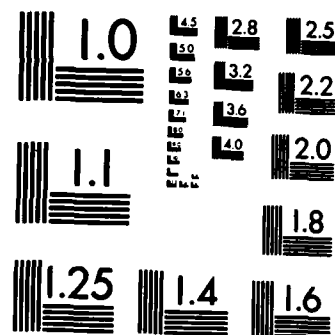
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Assesses the principal military and political constraints that have limited U.S. military involvements in the Third World since World War II. The work represents the first phase of a study of the political and military factors that are likely to constrain U.S. strategies and combat operations in future Third World conflicts and crises, the implications of such constraints for the design and execution of U.S. strategies for meeting future challenges in the Third World, and the requirements that particular constraints may pose for future U.S. Air Force missions and capabilities. The motivations that have led U.S. decisionmakers to constrain combat operations and other military responses show striking continuity. They stem primarily from the concern to control the risks of military conflict with the USSR, limit civilian and U.S. military casualties, seek negotiated solutions to conflicts, and accommodate the policies of other nations. Successive administrations, whatever their affiliation, have tended to base strategies more on what the United States should not or ~~date~~ not do than on the optimum requirements of the actual battlefield situation.

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A RAND NOTE

CONSTRAINTS ON U.S. MILITARY STRATEGIES IN PAST THIRD WORLD CONFLICTS

Stephen T. Hosmer

July 1984

N-2180-AF

Prepared for

The United States Air Force

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PREFACE

This Note identifies and assesses the principal military-political constraints that have limited U.S. military involvements in the Third World since World War II. The work represents the first phase of a study of the political-military conditions that are likely to constrain U.S. strategies and combat operations in future Third World conflicts and crises; the implications of such constraints for the design and execution of U.S. strategies for meeting possible future communist challenges and other contingencies in the Third World; and the requirements that particular constraints may pose for future USAF missions and capabilities.

The study is being conducted under Project AIR FORCE, "U.S. Military Strategies for Third World Conflicts: Constraints and Requirements." It draws on and complements other Rand work on third area issues, including Stephen T. Hosmer and Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Policy and Practice Toward Third World Conflicts*, Lexington Books, D. C. Heath and Company, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1983. The present study should be useful to Air Force and other Department of Defense planners concerned with developing U.S. military plans and policies for Third World areas.

SUMMARY

U.S. strategies in past Third World conflicts and crises have evolved largely from cumulative constraints. That is, various U.S. administrations have tended to base strategies more on what they believed that the United States should not or dare not do than on what the battlefield situation of a particular conflict or crisis might optimally require.

One finds a striking continuity in the fundamental motivations that have induced American decisionmakers, whatever their political affiliation, to constrain U.S. combat operations and other military responses in the Third World. Indeed, the constraints and self-imposed limitations that have restricted U.S. strategies and combat behavior since World War II have been motivated in large part by U.S. concerns to control the risks of direct military conflict with the USSR; avoid friendly and enemy civilian casualties; limit U.S. military casualties and thereby preserve U.S. domestic support for a war; seek negotiated solutions to Third World conflicts; and accommodate the attitudes and policies of other countries, particularly U.S. allies.

In Third World conflicts or crises in which the USSR was perceived to have vital interests, the United States has held its military responses well below the threshold that might provoke direct military conflict with the USSR. Three historically recurring concerns underlie U.S. military caution in such situations: the fear of setting off World War III, triggering a direct Soviet (and/or Chinese communist) combat intervention in the area, and provoking Soviet moves against other areas of vital interest to the United States. Beyond the constraints stemming from these overriding concerns, the United States has also tried to avoid actions that would encourage the USSR to increase military aid to a client, damage U.S.-Soviet bilateral relations, and most important, weaken the U.S. global power position in relation to that of the USSR.

While U.S. military and civilian leaders alike have sought to avoid a direct or expanded conflict with the USSR, U.S. military commanders (and particularly battlefield commanders) have tended to see the risks

of a Soviet response to more assertive U.S. military operations as appreciably lower than have most key civilian officials. Such divergent risk perceptions underlie much of the past civil-military disagreement about U.S. warfighting strategies.

To limit and control the risks of direct or wider confrontations with the USSR and, in the case of the conflicts in Asia, to prevent or contain war with China, the United States has severely circumscribed its strategies to meet the major post-World War II communist challenges in Korea, Cuba, and Indochina. Strategic caution has disposed the United States to:

- Declare and pursue only limited and defensive war aims, shunning, except for a brief period in Korea, such objectives as the overthrow of a Soviet client's government or the invasion of its territory
- Limit the weaponry and geographic area of conflicts and, in particular, avoid attacking Soviet and Chinese territory
- Defer or eschew high-risk military options in the hope that less risky options might suffice to achieve limited U.S. war aims or at least gain time for negotiations
- Seek early negotiated solutions to conflicts and offer substantial U.S. concessions to secure such negotiated settlements.

The decisions to eschew high-risk options in Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam were reinforced by two other factors: U.S. leaders believed that the less risky strategies that they had chosen to pursue would ultimately pay off, and, at the same time, they doubted that the high-risk options proposed as alternatives to these strategies would prove militarily decisive.

In addition to severely constraining U.S. strategies in Third World conflicts and crises, U.S. fears about provoking a direct or wider military conflict with the USSR and/or China have produced other strikingly consistent U.S. behavior patterns. These include:

- Minimizing challenges to Soviet prestige and avoiding damage to Soviet property and personnel
- Eschewing military postures that might suggest a U.S. intention to embark on a wider war
- Avoiding the risk of simultaneous conflicts with the USSR or its clients in different geographic areas
- Conducting gradual and incremental military operations where Soviet interests have been involved
- In confrontations with the USSR, adopting military options that would force the Soviets to fire first
- Maintaining tight, central command and control over U.S. military operations to avoid unwanted escalation.

In all Third World conflicts in which American forces have engaged, U.S. decisionmakers have sought to minimize friendly and enemy civilian casualties. In the main, this traditional concern has been motivated by deeply rooted American humanitarian and moral convictions, adherence to the law of war, and the desire to retain domestic and international support for continued U.S. involvement in a conflict by demonstrating that the United States was fighting a moral and just war. Thus, U.S. leaders have shunned strategic options that would have generated high noncombatant casualties and, in combat, have adopted rules of engagement and other precautionary measures to hold down enemy as well as friendly civilian casualties.

The United States traditionally has also sought to assure the safety of its own civilian nationals in overseas conflicts. Most of the post-World War II U.S. interventions were made to protect American lives. Moreover, the United States has frequently removed U.S. civilians from harm's way prior to initiating actions that might embroil them in a conflict or place them in jeopardy of enemy reprisals.

While a matter of constant concern to U.S. leaders at every stage of conflict, American combat casualties begin to directly influence U.S. warfighting strategies when these losses grow to the point where they seriously undermine U.S. public support of the war. When continued high U.S. casualty levels have increased public opposition to a war,

U.S. leaders have shifted strategies and adopted explicit battlefield policies to hold down U.S. military losses and programs to build up indigenous forces so that they might take over more of the fighting.

As a result of the Vietnam experience, the American public and the Congress fear and resist any involvements that may draw U.S. forces into another foreign conflict. This so-called Vietnam syndrome, along with the 1973 War Powers Resolution and other congressional actions, have over the past decade seriously constrained U.S. options for meeting communist or communist-backed challenges in the Third World.

The United States has sought negotiated solutions to the conflicts in which it has been involved, because it pursued defensive and limited war aims; wanted to obviate the costs and risks of continued conflict; and believed that it had to demonstrate a willingness to seek a negotiated settlement so as to maintain domestic and international support for a continued war effort. As a result of these considerations, the United States has proved far more eager than its adversaries to both initiate and maintain the negotiatory process.

Negotiations have constrained U.S. warfighting strategies in two ways. First, they have encouraged U.S. leaders to defer the adoption of high-risk or high-cost military options in the hope that a negotiated solution would obviate the need to exercise such options. Second, U.S. expectations about the enemy's terms for settling a conflict or his terms for entering negotiations have circumscribed U.S. battlefield strategies and eroded U.S. leverage for forcing the early termination of conflicts.

American military behavior in Third World conflicts and crises has also been conditioned to varying degrees by the attitudes and policies of other countries. As a great power with global interests, the United States has necessarily had to take into account the reactions of other nations to its Third World involvements. Most important, the United States has wanted to maintain the cohesion of its alliances as a bulwark against the Soviet Union and has sought to avoid actions that might disrupt or weaken the alliance system.

Moreover, the United States has often had to rely on the support of other countries to establish the legality or political legitimacy of its military actions in the Third World. Finally, in certain conflicts and

crises, the United States has required from its allies both physical support, such as base and transit rights for staging airlifts or air strikes, and military participation in the conflict itself.

Because the national interests and policies of allies have often diverged from those of the United States, Washington has had to adjust its Third World involvements to accommodate their views. In the Korean conflict, for example, the United States accorded Britain and the other western cobelligerents a virtual veto over decisions affecting the strategic conduct of the war.

American decisionmakers as a rule have proved willing to lift constraints on U.S. operations in a Third World conflict, or to override usually observed political-military prohibitions, when strong U.S. action has been required to (1) preserve the safety of U.S. forces and/or other Americans and (2) gain leverage with an adversary to break out of a strategic bind. Such escalations to gain leverage, however, have occurred only after the United States had already made its maximum feasible concessions at the negotiating table and was confronting an adversary that was clearly stalling for better terms. Escalations were designed to secure only limited objectives, namely, to terminate exhausting conflicts under terms already demanded of the enemy. In neither Korea nor Vietnam was escalation used to win a traditional military victory.

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ACRONYMS

AAA	antiaircraft artillery
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
CIA	U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
DMZ	demilitarized zone (Korea)
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
ExCom	Executive Committee (U.S. National Security Council)
FAC	Forward air controller
FEAF	U.S. Far East Air Force
JCS	U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff
MACV	U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
POL	petroleum, oil, and lubricants
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
SAM	surface-to-air missile
TAC	U.S. Tactical Air Command
UN	United Nations
USAF	United States Air Force
VC	Viet Cong

I. INTRODUCTION

All U.S. combat operations and other military responses in Third World conflicts and crises since World War II have been restricted in one way or another, and in some instances, such as the Korean and Vietnam wars, constraints have dominated the design and execution of U.S. warfighting strategy. Given the restrictions on U.S. actions in past conflicts, military planners must have an informed basis for assessing the types of constraints that may limit future U.S. involvements in the Third World.

To the extent that constraints may be anticipated, military planners can take them into account in contingency planning. They may thus devise intervention strategies that will optimize the effectiveness of U.S. operations in the event such restrictions are imposed. At a minimum, military officials must be prepared to advise senior U.S. decisionmakers of the possible battlefield consequences of any constraints that the latter may place -- or want to place -- on future U.S. operations in the Third World.

This Note identifies and analyzes the military and political constraints (both self-imposed and externally imposed) that have limited U.S. strategies and combat operations in past Third World conflicts and crises. The genesis of particular constraints on U.S. military action vary: Some stem from physical or legal restrictions, such as the denial of overseas bases to U.S. forces or the time limits imposed by the War Powers Act; many others stem from U.S. decisionmakers' perceptions of the probable adverse consequences of certain courses of action, such as concerns about the risks of provoking a devastating war with the USSR; still others stem from a combination of motivations, such as the ethical and political considerations underlying the traditional U.S. concern to hold down civilian casualties.

The work represents the first phase of a study, now in progress, that:

- Explores whether and how similar constraints might manifest themselves in future U.S. military responses and combat operations
- Examines the implications of such potential constraints for the design and implementation of U.S. strategies for meeting future Third World contingencies
- Suggests ways in which potential constraints might best be accommodated in U.S. (especially USAF) contingency planning and operational procedures.

In preparing this study, the author surveyed the motivations underlying the constraints on U.S. military involvements in all major post-World War II conflicts and crises in the Third World. Because of the important insights that they reveal, particular attention was given to the circumstances and apparent motivations surrounding the constraints imposed during the Korean and Indochinese wars and the Cuban missile crisis. In compiling documentation on the policymaking rationale underlying past U.S. military behavior, the author used the most authoritative sources available, including the memoirs of civilian and military leaders involved, official histories, congressional hearings, and official documents published in the *Pentagon Papers*.

This study finds a striking continuity in the motivations underlying U.S. behavior in past Third World conflicts and crises. The constraints that have restricted U.S. strategies and combat behavior since World War II have been motivated in large part by U.S. concerns to

- Control the risks of a direct military conflict with the USSR
- Avoid friendly and enemy civilian casualties
- Limit U.S. military casualties and thereby preserve U.S. domestic support for the involvement
- Seek negotiated solutions to Third World conflicts
- Accommodate the attitudes and policies of other countries, particularly U.S. allies.

Sections II and III examine each of these motivations in terms of how they have circumscribed U.S. strategies in the Third World and constrained American combat behavior. Section IV assesses the cumulative effects of constraints on U.S. strategies and the conditions under which constraints have been lifted.

II. CONSTRAINTS STEMMING FROM U.S. CONCERNS ABOUT CONTROLLING THE RISKS OF MILITARY CONFLICT WITH THE USSR

MOTIVATIONS TO AVOID CONFLICT WITH THE USSR

In Third World conflicts or crises in which the USSR was perceived to have vital interests, the United States has held its military responses well below the threshold that might provoke direct military conflict with the USSR. Three historically recurring concerns underlie U.S. military caution in such situations: namely, setting off World War III, triggering a direct Soviet (and/or Chinese communist) combat intervention, and provoking Soviet moves against other areas of vital interest to the United States.

Concern About Setting Off World War III

Paradoxically, U.S. concerns about igniting a third world war have both stimulated U.S. interventions in Third World conflicts and constrained the military strategies pursued in those interventions. The U.S. leadership resisted the communist assaults against South Korea and South Vietnam and the Soviet attempt to emplace missiles in Cuba in part because it was convinced that the failure to oppose these challenges would encourage even bolder and more threatening communist initiatives in other areas -- initiatives that it believed could provoke World War III.

President Truman believed that if the communist aggression in Korea were "allowed to go unchallenged it would mean a third world war, just as similar incidents had brought on the second world war."¹ President Johnson anticipated much the same consequences if the United States "ran out on Southeast Asia." He wrote in his memoirs: "I could see trouble ahead in every part of the globe -- not just in Asia but in the Middle East and in Europe, in Africa and in Latin America. I was convinced that our retreat from this challenge would open the path to World War III."²

¹Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman*, Vol. 2, *Years of Trial and Hope*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1956, p. 333.

²Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1971, p. 148.

Once U.S. forces have been committed to resisting a communist challenge, however, U.S. strategies and tactics have been conditioned by an overriding concern to avoid courses of action that might provoke a direct Soviet military response or set in motion a train of events that might eventually lead to general war between the United States and the USSR. This concern, while generally shared by both senior civilian and military officials, has been most pronounced in U.S. presidents, who have seen themselves as bearing the ultimate responsibility for avoiding catastrophic conflict.

Truman said, for example: "Every decision I made in connection with the Korean conflict had this one aim in mind: to prevent a third world war and the terrible destruction it would bring to the civilized world."³ The prospect that any U.S. counteractions in the Cuban missile crisis might "escalate the Soviet Union into a nuclear war" dominated President Kennedy's decisionmaking in that crisis.⁴ Even after adopting the less risky temporizing step of the quarantine, Kennedy still believed that the odds were "somewhere between one out of three and even" that the Soviets would go all the way to war.⁵

Lyndon Johnson wrote of the Vietnam war: "Above all else, I did not want to lead this nation and the world into nuclear war or even the risk of such a war. . . . I was resolved to do everything possible to keep this a limited war, to prevent it from expanding into a nuclear conflict."⁶ Indeed, as with Kennedy in the Cuban missile crisis, Johnson believed his close personal control of U.S. military operations in Vietnam to be "essential for preventing World War III."⁷

³*Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 345-346.

⁴Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1965, p. 680.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 705.

⁶*Vantage Point*, p. 153.

⁷See Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1976, p. 264.

Concern About Provoking Direct Soviet (and/or Chinese) Combat Intervention

This overriding concern to avoid setting off World War III has motivated the United States to eschew military options and actions that might provoke the Soviets or Chinese to introduce their own combat troops into conflicts in which U.S. forces were engaged. The U.S. leadership feared not only that direct Soviet or Chinese combat involvement would, at the minimum, greatly exacerbate U.S. military difficulties in the immediate battlefield, but also that such intervention might trigger a chain of military actions and reactions that would escalate into a general war.

Washington decisionmakers sought from the outset of the Korean war to avoid provocations that might bring the USSR or China directly into that conflict. In July 1950, for example, President Truman refused to approve high-level photoreconnaissance missions over the Soviet Far East on grounds that it was "contrary to our policy to engage in activities that might give the Soviet Union a pretext to come into open conflict with us."⁸ The invasion of Korea by Chinese communist troops in November 1950 as U.S. forces approached the Yalu River may be ascribed to a fundamental miscalculation on the part of the United States as to Chinese interests and intentions in Korea rather than to U.S. disregard of that risk.⁹

The lesson provided by Peking's march into Korea unquestionably magnified U.S. concerns about a possible Chinese communist intervention in the Vietnam conflict. President Johnson wanted particularly to avoid repeating General Douglas MacArthur's error of provoking the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the words of one senior presidential adviser, Johnson "did not want American boys to have to fight the Chinese hordes again."¹⁰

⁸According to Truman, "All it would take would be for some of these photo-reconnaissance planes to be shot down by the Russians. This, of course, would create a new and more serious situation." *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 346.

⁹For a discussion of the factors contributing to this U.S. miscalculation, see below, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 377.

While the possibility of Chinese intervention was the prime concern, U.S. decisionmakers also believed that certain U.S. actions might provoke the Soviets into sending their own "volunteers" to fight on the side of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).¹¹ The acts considered sufficiently provocative to trigger Chinese and/or Soviet air or ground intervention in Vietnam included any U.S. ground actions in North Vietnam, the bombing of North Vietnamese population centers, the mining or blockading of Haiphong, attacks on North Vietnam's dike system, and even, at one point, the destruction of its airfields.¹² Moreover, as with the Truman administration in regard to Korea, President Johnson and his advisers worried that any U.S. attacks on Chinese communist territory resulting from a PRC intervention in Vietnam might risk bringing in the Soviets as well under the Sino-Soviet treaty.¹³ In short, war with one communist power, it was believed, might result in war with the other.

Concern About Provoking Soviet Moves Against Other Areas of Vital Interest to the United States

The U.S. concern about provoking or justifying a Soviet riposte or opportunistic aggression against other areas of vital interest to the United States has also contributed to U.S. caution. This anxiety stems from deeply ingrained U.S. assumptions about the expansionist aims of the USSR; the Soviet capabilities to militarily threaten, if not overrun, numerous countries proximate to its Eurasian landmass; and the limited U.S. capacity to defend many of these areas, particularly when U.S. forces are tied down in another conflict or crisis.

¹¹However, U.S. officials also recognized that any such Soviet intervention was likely to be limited, as the USSR was "not well situated geographically or logistically for effective military counteraction in the DRV itself." See *The Pentagon Papers*, Senator Gravel Edition, Vol. 4, Beacon Press, Boston, undated, p. 244.

¹²See below, pp. 30-37.

¹³See *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 374; *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 52.

The concern that Moscow would shift the venue to a place where the stakes for the United States and the Soviet Union might be greater and the U.S. military position weaker has surfaced repeatedly in U.S. conflict calculations.¹⁴ West Berlin has invariably been high on the list of targets vulnerable to possible Soviet counteraction. Its intrinsic military vulnerability has on a number of occasions contributed to deterring bolder U.S. action.¹⁵ For example, one of the reasons President Kennedy ruled out a large, direct U.S. military role in the Bay of Pigs invasion was his conviction that if U.S. forces moved on Cuba, the USSR would move on Berlin.¹⁶

At the time of the Korean war, U.S. decisionmakers saw the greatest potential danger of Soviet aggression to be in Berlin and Western Europe. Because Europe was then so weakly defended -- NATO was still in the early phases of formation -- nearly all senior U.S. civilian and military leaders in Washington opposed the United States becoming involved in an all-out war with communist China. Truman and his advisers viewed any all-out U.S. conflict with China to be a "gigantic booby trap," one that would play into Moscow's scheme to involve the United States as heavily as possible in Asia so that the USSR "might gain a free hand in Europe."¹⁷

Soviet aggression was also feared in Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iran, and most particularly Japan, which was at the time also only weakly defended and within striking distance of many strong Soviet air bases.¹⁸ It was

¹⁴Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1965, p. 804.

¹⁵Berlin's vulnerability is fully appreciated by the USSR. Khrushchev is reported to have said: "Berlin is the testicles of the West. Every time I give them a yank they holler." See David Detzer, *The Brink: Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*, Thomas Y. Crowell, Publishers, New York, 1979, p. 154.

¹⁶See Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1979, pp. 294, 308.

¹⁷See *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 378, 386-387, 398, 421, 437.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 421. On June 30, 1950, Truman wrote in his diary that the USSR was "figuring on an attack in the Black Sea and toward the Persian Gulf. Both prizes Moscow has wanted since Ivan the Terrible who is now their hero with Stalin and Lenin." Robert H. Ferrel (ed.), *Off*

believed that in many of these areas a "minor incident could be created which would give the Russians an excuse for open intervention."¹⁹

The possibility of a Soviet riposte against vital points in Europe or Southwest Asia was also given great weight by members of the Executive Committee (ExCom) of the National Security Council in planning U.S. response options during the Cuban missile crisis. According to Theodore Sorensen's account, the ExCom considered the following to be possible targets for Soviet retaliation: Berlin ("first on everyone's list"); Turkey (because the exposed U.S. Jupiter missiles there "were most likely to be equated with the Soviet missiles in Cuba"); Iran (where the Soviets enjoyed a tactical advantage comparable to that of the United States in the Caribbean and where Moscow "had a long-standing desire for control"); Pakistan, Scandinavia, and Italy.²⁰

Some form of Soviet action against Berlin was deemed a likely response to virtually any U.S. course of action in the Cuban crisis. Some ExCom members firmly believed that a U.S. air strike against the Soviet missiles in Cuba would provoke a Soviet attack on the Jupiter missile bases in Turkey.²¹ To avoid the risk of a catastrophic nuclear escalation that might flow from such a Soviet attack, President Kennedy ordered the U.S. Jupiter missiles in Turkey defused.²²

Although by the time of the Vietnam war U.S. decisionmakers worried less about Soviet retaliation in Europe or other areas than they had during the Korean conflict and Cuban missile crisis, this prospect nevertheless continued to trouble those evaluating escalatory options.

the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1980, p. 185. Also reinforcing the U.S. caution in Korea was the concern that communist China might be "ready for major thrusts" in other parts of Asia, e.g., Indochina, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or even Japan. See *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 437.

¹⁹*Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 420.

²⁰In addition to possible Soviet reactions, the U.S. was also concerned about possible moves by Castro against the U.S. Navy installation at Guantanamo Bay and by communist China against Taiwan, Korea, or Indochina. However, according to Sorensen, the "most dire possibility of all" was that the Soviets might conclude "that all-out war was inevitable and thereupon launch a preemptive nuclear strike on the United States to make certain they hit us first." See *Kennedy*, pp. 680-681. For another account of ExCom planning for Soviet countermeasures, see *The Past Has Another Pattern*, p. 293.

²¹See *Kennedy*, pp. 685-689, 694.

²²*The Past Has Another Pattern*, p. 306.

For example, President Johnson's reluctance to bomb North Vietnam in 1964 derived in part from the concern both that this would give "communist China an excuse for massive intervention in Vietnam" and that it would "encourage the Soviets to raise the level of tension around Berlin, in the Middle East or elsewhere."²³

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara told the president that any U.S. ground action against North Vietnam would, among other risks, create the "distinct possibility [of a] confrontation with the USSR elsewhere in the world."²⁴ Several of Johnson's principal advisers, including McNamara, also cautioned that any U.S. mining of North Vietnamese harbors might provoke the Soviets to take "some action in Korea, Turkey, Iran, or, most likely, Berlin."²⁵

Thus, as the Korean, Cuban, and Vietnam cases clearly demonstrate, the United States has feared *horizontal* as well as vertical escalation in conflicts where strong Soviet interests were perceived to be at stake.

Other Concerns Relating to the USSR

Aside from the overriding aim of avoiding a direct or expanded conflict with the Soviet Union, other concerns relating to the USSR have also encouraged U.S. military caution. These include qualms about encouraging the USSR to increase military aid to a client, damaging other U.S.-Soviet bilateral relations, and weakening the U.S. global power position in relation to that of the USSR.

Concern about prompting the USSR to provide increased or more-threatening types of military assistance to a client. This anxiety was particularly evident in the Vietnam war, when Washington believed that Moscow would, at the minimum, match any U.S. escalatory steps against the North with increased arms aid to Hanoi and might even provide the DRV with new and more sophisticated equipment as well. The Johnson

²³*Vantage Point*, p. 119.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 370.

²⁵See, for example, *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 163, 173; U. S. Grant Sharp (Admiral, U.S. Navy [Ret.]), *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*, Presidio Press, San Rafael, California, 1978, p. 149; and Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, David McKay Co., Inc., New York, 1969, pp. 192-193.

administration believed, for example, that Moscow might respond to the mining of the Haiphong harbor by providing Hanoi with a new arsenal of weapons, such as medium jet bombers, chemical munitions, floating mines, or even cruise missiles (land-based or on Komar boats), which would have posed a particular danger to U.S. ships in the Tonkin Gulf.²⁶

Concern about harming other bilateral relations between the United States and USSR. While never a decisive determinant of U.S. military action, the preservation of U.S.-USSR relations remained a corollary consideration in the Vietnam war, particularly under the Nixon administration, when the United States was seeking detente with the USSR and China. Nixon lists among the reasons why he rejected the "escalation option" during his first year in office the fact that this would "delay or even destroy any chance we might have to develop a new relationship with the Soviet Union and Communist China."²⁷ Similar concerns were also evident during the Johnson years; for example, McNamara warned that mining North Vietnam's harbors would lead the Soviets "to show across-the-board hostility toward the United States (interrupting any ongoing conversations on ABMs, nonproliferation, etc.)."²⁸

Concern about weakening the U.S. global power position in relation to that of the USSR. Facing a worldwide Soviet threat, the United States has consistently tried to prevent its involvements in Third World conflicts from impairing its ability to defend its other global interests and commitments. This concern has been reflected in the U.S. caution to pursue Third World conflict strategies that would neither risk undermining America's global alliance system (a subject that will be discussed in Section III), nor so unbalance U.S. military defenses as

²⁶When asked why he thought the Soviets had not supplied Hanoi with surface-to-surface missiles, Johnson's national security adviser, Walt Rostow, responded: "We were exercising restraint." If such missiles had been provided and used "it is possible that we might go into a 'Cuban missile crisis.'" Henry F. Graff, *The Tuesday Cabinet*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970, p. 142. See also *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 164, 172-173, 226, 244-246; *Strategy for Defeat*, pp. 149, 164; and *The Limits of Intervention*, p. 194.

²⁷Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1978, p. 348.

²⁸*Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 173.

to impede America's security and foreign policy objectives in other areas.

The decisions to hold down U.S. force commitments and to otherwise limit the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam arose in part from this concern. Cautioning against the United States becoming involved in a general war with China in response to the Chinese intervention in Korea, Secretary of State Dean Acheson likened such involvement to "being sucked into a bottomless pit" and said that it would "bleed us dry." According to Truman, Acheson warned that the USSR "was behind every one of the Chinese and North Korean moves and that we had to think of all that happened in Korea as world matters. We should never lose sight of the fact that we were facing the Soviet Union all around the world."²⁹ This view was also shared by the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) who believed that an all-out war in Asia would seriously undermine the U.S. attempt to build up the defenses of Western Europe.³⁰

Similar, albeit less alarmist, concerns about U.S. "obligations and involvements elsewhere in the world" also led senior Johnson administration defense officials to advocate the capping of the U.S. manpower commitments to Vietnam following the 1968 Tet offensive. The then under secretary of the Air Force, Townsend Hoopes, for example, in arguing against the additional troop deployments to Vietnam requested by General Westmoreland and the JCS, warned that "if the Soviets believed our worldwide posture had become seriously unbalanced by the heavy deployments to Vietnam, it is possible they would test our will in Europe or at other points (e.g., new pressures on Berlin or stimulation of the Syrians to aggravate the already uneasy Middle Eastern situation)."³¹

Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford also opposed further large-scale troop commitments to Vietnam. He hesitated over both the domestic economic and political costs of such commitments and the possibility that they might impair other U.S. foreign policy interests in "the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, Western Europe, and elsewhere."³²

²⁹Truman Memoirs, Vol. 2, pp. 387-388.

³⁰See, for example, Omar N. Bradley (General of the Army) and Clay Blair, *A General's Life*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1983, p. 558; see also Truman Memoirs, Vol. 2, pp. 386-388.

³¹The Limits of Intervention, p. 192.

³²Clark Clifford, "A Vietnam Reappraisal," *Foreign Affairs*, July

Concern about the global power relationship has also led U.S. decisionmakers to resist adopting military options that might undermine the credibility of the U.S. strategic deterrence forces. An all-out bombing campaign against China was rejected during the Korean war because this would have further weakened the U.S. "shoestring" air force and risked eroding U.S. capabilities for deterring or fighting a war with the USSR.³³ The reluctance of Defense and State department officials to sanction the use of B-52s in the northern part of the DRV (Route Package VI) during the 1965-1968 air campaign against North Vietnam stemmed not only from their view that Hanoi would perceive this as an escalation in the conflict, but also from their belief that "losing even a single aircraft" would have detracted from the image of our strategic deterrent in the eyes of the USSR.³⁴

1969, p. 612. The JCS and General Westmoreland were also concerned about the diminished U.S. military capacity to meet contingencies in other areas and had, in fact, urged President Johnson to call up reserves. Only about one-half of the 206,000 additional men requested by the JCS were to be sent to Vietnam; the remainder were to be used to reconstitute the U.S. strategic reserve at home, which had dwindled to less than three divisions, to meet possible contingencies in Korea, Europe, and the Middle East. The JCS were particularly concerned about a renewed conflict in Korea (because of the North Korean raid on the presidential residence in Seoul and the seizure of the *Pueblo*); they were also troubled by intelligence reports of possible Soviet moves around Berlin. The JCS therefore saw the Tet offensive as a propitious moment to ask for a reserve call-up, and, to increase the chances of a sympathetic hearing in the Johnson administration, encouraged General Westmoreland to fortify the request by also asking for more troops for Vietnam. See Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981, p. 128; Maxwell Taylor (General, U.S. Army [Ret.]), *Swords and Plowshares*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1972, p. 388; and John B. Henry II, "February 1968," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1971, pp. 3-33.

³³According to General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, then Air Force chief of staff, the USAF could either "lay waste" to China or it could "lay waste" to the industrial potential of the USSR, but it could not "do both" because the United States had only "a shoestring air force." Robert Frank Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1961, pp. 227-228.

³⁴William W. Momyer (General, USAF [Ret.]), *Air Power in Three Wars*, Department of the Air Force, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1978, pp. 182-183.

A different example of how consideration of the U.S.-USSR global power relationship has affected U.S. Third World behavior may be found in the military options rejected in the Iranian hostage crisis. The Carter administration opted against punitive attacks, a "generalized military response" (such as seizing Kharg Island), a naval blockade, and air strikes against Iran because none of these options was guaranteed to free the hostages and any might have resulted in their being harmed. But, it also rejected such actions because, in Zbigniew Brzezinski's words, they "could tip the strategic balance" in the Persian Gulf region "in favor of the Soviet Union by generating unprecedented Iranian-Soviet military and political collaboration." Rather than risk pushing Iran into Moscow's arms and presenting the USSR with additional opportunities in its "drive toward the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean," the United States opted for the more cautious courses of negotiations, economic sanctions, and eventually the abortive rescue mission.³⁵

DIFFERENCES IN U.S. CIVILIAN AND MILITARY THREAT PERCEPTIONS

While U.S. military and civilian leaders alike have sought to avoid a direct or expanded conflict with the USSR, U.S. military commanders (and particularly battlefield commanders) have tended to see the risks of a Soviet response to more assertive U.S. military operations as appreciably lower than has been the case with most key civilian officials.³⁶ Civilian officials, and U.S. presidents in particular,

³⁵See Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Failed Mission," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 18, 1982, pp. 28-30, and idem, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981*, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, New York, 1983, pp. 470-509.

³⁶There were, of course, important exceptions to this generalization about differences in civilian and military risk perceptions. The members of the JCS, for example, shared President Truman's concerns about the likely Soviet military reaction to more assertive U.S. actions in the Korean war; conversely, John McCone, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Johnson administration, shared the military's view that the United States could safely conduct a more vigorous air campaign against North Vietnam. The generalization also fails to capture the many nuances in the risk assessments of civilian and military leaders.

have tended to perceive the Soviets as so delicately poised toward intervention or some other military response that any bold U.S. military measure might serve as a "pretext" to tip them into action.³⁷ American military commanders, on the other hand, have tended to see the Soviets as more cautious about risking war with the United States, more willing to absorb military provocations, and more prone to back down when confronted by strong U.S. resolve.

General Lucius Clay, the American commander and military governor in Germany, for example, was confident that the Soviets were bluffing when they blockaded Berlin in 1949.³⁸ Clay advocated, unsuccessfully, that the United States break through the blockade with an armed convoy; he believed that the "chances of such a convoy being met by force with subsequent development of hostilities were small."³⁹

Similarly, General MacArthur, the U.S. field commander in the Far East, urged strong retaliatory measures in response to the Chinese communist intervention. Gainsaying the prevailing military and civilian view in Washington, MacArthur argued that it was a "matter of speculation" whether the Soviets would intervene in Korea if the United States carried the war to Chinese soil.⁴⁰

In the case of the Cuban missile crisis, the senior U.S. military leaders pushed hardest for an immediate U.S. air strike against the missile sites in Cuba.⁴¹ Perceiving the Soviets to be far behind the

³⁷See, for example, *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 124, 346.

³⁸The view that the Soviets were bluffing in Berlin was also shared by General Clay's political adviser, Ambassador Robert Murphy, who later regretted that he had not resigned in public protest over Washington's failure to challenge the Russians when they blockaded Berlin. See Robert D. Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, Doubleday and Co., Garden City, New York, 1964, p. 317.

³⁹Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1969, p. 262.

⁴⁰MacArthur believed that the Soviet rulers would decide solely on the basis of their "own estimate of relative strengths and capabilities, with little regard for other factors." See James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. 3, *The Korean War*, Part I, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 12, 1978, p. 400.

⁴¹See *Kennedy*, p. 692, and *The Brink*, pp. 128-130.

United States in strategic forces and unable to compete effectively with U.S. power in the Caribbean, these U.S. military leaders thought it unlikely that the USSR would go to war unless its vital interests were at stake. They could not believe that Moscow considered its new military lodgment in Cuba to be "vital."²

Military and civilian risk perceptions diverged particularly during the Vietnam conflict. General William Westmoreland and Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp, among other military leaders, believed the U.S. political and diplomatic officials guiding the war to be "disproportionately concerned with the possibility of communist Chinese and Soviet intervention."³ Indeed, Westmoreland holds that many of the major erroneous decisions about the war made during the Johnson administration were influenced by "an almost paranoid fear of nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union and a corresponding anxiety over active participation by Chinese communist troops."⁴

Such divergences in risk perceptions deserve serious attention because they underlie much of the civil-military disagreement about the U.S. strategies followed in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts and in the Cuban missile crisis.

MANIFESTATIONS OF U.S. CONCERNS IN ITS WARFIGHTING STRATEGIES

The concern to limit and control the risks of a direct or wider conflict with the USSR, and in the cases of the conflicts in Asia, to prevent or contain war with China, has led the United States to severely circumscribe its strategies to meet the major post-World War II communist challenges in Korea, Cuba, and Indochina. Among other consequences, this strategic caution has disposed the United States to:

²*The Brink*, p. 129.

³*Strategy for Defeat*, p. 4.

⁴William C. Westmoreland (General, U.S. Army [Ret.]), *A Soldier Reports*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1976, pp. 112-113, 411.

- Declare and pursue only limited and defensive war aims, shunning, except for a brief period in Korea, such objectives as the overthrow of a Soviet client's government or the invasion of its territory
- Limit the weaponry and the geographic area of conflicts and, in particular, avoid attacking Soviet and Chinese territory
- Defer or eschew high-risk military options in the hope that less risky options might suffice to achieve limited U.S. war aims or at least gain time for negotiations
- Seek early negotiated solutions to conflicts and offer substantial U.S. concessions to secure such negotiated settlements.

The Korean War

The United States intervened on behalf of the Republic of Korea (ROK) in June 1950 reluctantly, cautiously, and piecemeal. Hoping that limited U.S. air and naval support alone would enable the ROK army to throw back the invaders, the United States initially sought to avoid direct participation in the ground war. As the North Korean advance swept south, however, and the cohesion and morale of the ROK defenders began to disintegrate, it became clear that only U.S. infantry forces could save the day. These forces were eventually committed in sufficient numbers to hang on precariously to the Pusan perimeter.⁴⁵

The objectives of the Truman administration and the United Nations in Korea had initially been limited to the restoration of peace and the original border between North and South. The overwhelming success of General MacArthur's deep amphibious envelopment at Inchon in September 1950, however, seemed to open the way for the realization of the expanded war aims that were by then evolving in Washington. These aims included the destruction of the North Korean army and the reunification of Korea by free elections.⁴⁶

⁴⁵*History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Korean War, Part I*, pp. 124-125.

⁴⁶See Glenn D. Paige, *The Korean Decision*, The Free Press, New York, 1968, pp. 246-247; *A General's Life*, p. 561; and Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1974, pp. 192-201.

In sanctioning General MacArthur's advance north of the 38th parallel, U.S. decisionmakers knew that they risked triggering Soviet and/or communist Chinese intervention. On balance, they considered these risks to be acceptable and controllable. They had, however, seriously misjudged the situation, underestimating both the communist Chinese military capabilities and, even more important, the nature and strength of Peking's interests in Korea.⁴⁷ Furthermore, they had believed that the optimum time for external communist intervention in Korea had passed. That is, they thought that had the Soviets or Chinese intended to intervene in Korea, they would have done so at the point of greatest military advantage, when U.S. and South Korean forces had been hard pressed to defend their precarious foothold around Pusan.⁴⁸

Moreover, U.S. decisionmakers believed they had taken steps to reduce and control the risks of a Chinese or Soviet intervention. They had issued a standing order to MacArthur that U.S. air and naval forces were to "stay well clear" of the Soviet and Manchurian borders; they had prohibited attacks on the North Korean Yalu River hydroelectric facilities that provided power to China; and they had repeatedly reassured Peking that the United States had no political or military designs on the Chinese mainland.⁴⁹

MacArthur was authorized to conduct military operations north of the 38th parallel only as long as there was "no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or communist Chinese forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in Korea."⁵⁰ In addition, MacArthur was told that "under no circumstances" were his forces to cross the Manchurian or USSR borders and that "as a matter of

⁴⁷See *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, pp. 202-216. Communist China was generally believed to have relatively little interest in the Korean situation other than in the security of the North Korean hydroelectric facilities that provided electric power to Manchuria.

⁴⁸*History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Korean War, Part I*, p. 281.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 249-259, and *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, p. 217.

⁵⁰*History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Korean War, Part I*, p. 230.

policy, no non-Korean ground forces" were to be used in the northeast provinces bordering the USSR or in the area along the Manchurian border.⁵¹

In the event major Soviet forces intervened, MacArthur was instructed to assume the defensive while consulting Washington, but was given leeway in the event of "open or covert employment" of major communist Chinese units to continue action as long as there seemed a "reasonable chance of success."⁵² The prohibition against the use of non-Korean forces near the Soviet and Manchurian borders was eroded by a subsequent order that MacArthur interpreted as allowing U.S. troops to spearhead the drive to the Yalu.⁵³

Despite increasingly threatening warnings from Peking (which were dismissed as "Chinese bluffing") and the clear-cut evidence by late October that major communist Chinese units were operating in North Korea, MacArthur was permitted to continue his advance toward the Yalu. This advance was shattered and thrown back by the massive communist Chinese offensive launched on November 25.

After reviewing its options in the face of what MacArthur had characterized as "an entirely new war," the Truman administration decided to confine any U.S. military response to Korea proper and to cut back its war aims of reunifying Korea to the less ambitious objective of attempting to secure a negotiated armistice along the lines of the *status quo ante*, i.e., near the 38th parallel. The administration also decided that while the United States would attempt to resist the Chinese advance in Korea as long as feasible, it would withdraw if need be to preserve U.S. forces for the defense of Japan.⁵⁴

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 231, 261. Had the USSR intervened in Korea, an event that probably would have meant a "Soviet move to total war," the JCS intended to recommend that the United States evacuate Korea and execute a plan (called *Offtackle*) for a full-scale, rapid U.S. mobilization. See *A General's Life*, pp. 499-501, 563.

⁵³*Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, pp. 205-206.

⁵⁴See *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 435-436.

MacArthur argued vigorously against this no-win policy, advocating instead a series of escalatory measures that not only would release the pressure on UN troops in Korea but "could severely cripple and largely neutralize China's capability to wage aggressive war." In addition to the bombing of Manchuria, he recommended the destruction of Chinese industrial war-making capacity through air and naval bombardment, the blockade of China's coast, and the use of Chinese nationalist forces both in Korea and in diversionary attacks against the Chinese mainland.⁵⁵ Truman rejected these escalatory options, along with MacArthur's request for permission to conduct "hot pursuit" into and reconnaissance flights over Manchuria.

The administration opposed MacArthur's recommendations on several grounds. First, Truman and his senior advisers, including the JCS, adamantly opposed U.S. involvement in an expanded conflict with communist China. They considered the real enemy to be the USSR, which they believed would be "delighted" to see the United States embroiled with the "second team," communist China.⁵⁶ As Dean Acheson put it, the "Russian game was a 'trap play' -- to see how much of our strength they could make us dissipate while their main strength remained free for future use."⁵⁷ In committing troops to Korea, the United States had already nearly exhausted its reserves and wanted to husband the additional forces being mobilized for the defense of Europe, which was considered the major target of likely Soviet aggression.⁵⁸

Second, U.S. leaders knew that both our European allies and the United Nations would oppose any escalation of the conflict in Asia. They were concerned, therefore, that these countries would withdraw from

⁵⁵*History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Korean War, Part I*, pp. 399-400.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 359-360.

⁵⁷*Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 421. General Bradley made a similar point during the 1951 MacArthur Hearings, when he observed that a U.S. strategy which expanded the conflict with communist China "would involve us in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time and with the wrong enemy." *A General's Life*, p. 640.

⁵⁸*History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Korean War, Part I*, p. 398.

the collective action in Korea, leaving the United States isolated in confronting communist China and the USSR.⁵⁹

Finally, and most important, Truman and his advisers were convinced that the Chinese intervention had "increased the threat of general war" with the USSR, and they feared that the various escalatory steps advocated by MacArthur would run a grave risk of provoking a direct Soviet intervention in Korea or would trigger Soviet retaliation against Japan or Europe. Dean Acheson, for example, believed that "Russia would cheerfully" get in the war if the United States bombed the airfields in Manchuria "with any degree of success."⁶⁰ Truman was also convinced that the United States had to "anticipate Russian intervention" in response to an attack on communist China because "Peiping and Moscow were allies, ideologically as well as by treaty."⁶¹ He later wrote:

If his [MacArthur's] advice had been taken, then or later, and if we had gone ahead and bombed the Manchurian bases, we would have been openly at war with Red China and, not improbably, with Russia. World War III might very well have been on.⁶²

Similar concerns led to the rejection of MacArthur's recommendations for a blockade of China, which the State Department also saw as likely to trigger a Soviet intervention, and for the use of Chinese nationalist troops in diversionary attacks in South China, which would have constituted, in Truman's words, an act of war.⁶³ The employment of Chinese nationalist troops in Korea, which the JCS considered of dubious military value, was also opposed on the grounds that it could expand the war by provoking a Chinese communist attack on Taiwan or by escalating the fighting in Korea. According to General Omar Bradley, the use of Chinese nationalist troops might have provoked the Chinese communists to launch air attacks against U.S. ground forces,

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 344, 359.

⁶⁰*Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 387-388.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 382.

⁶²Ibid., p. 383.

⁶³Ibid., p. 415; *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Korean War*, Part I, p. 371.

which in turn would have compelled the United States to attack the Manchurian air bases -- an act that might have provoked a Soviet intervention.⁶⁴

The Truman administration continued to adhere to this cautious strategic course in Korea throughout its tenure in office. Chinese communist and Soviet territory remained inviolate, although high altitude aerial reconnaissance of Manchuria and the Shantung peninsula was permitted, as were, eventually, attacks on the Yalu River hydroelectric facilities. After several major communist offensives were successfully repulsed, the ground war in Korea settled into a stalemate with U.S. and other UN forces assuming an *active defense* along a line roughly following the 38th parallel.

Following several months of constant and eager U.S. probing for armistice negotiations, truce talks with the communists were finally opened in July 1951.⁶⁵ However, despite important U.S. concessions on such issues as the establishment of the demarcation line, the composition of the "neutral nations supervisory commission," and the reconstruction and rehabilitation of airfields in North Vietnam, these negotiations also became stalemated because of the communist refusal to accept the voluntary repatriation of prisoners of war.⁶⁶

⁶⁴*A General's Life*, p. 601. In addition to its fears of escalating the war, the United States eschewed air attacks on the Manchurian airfields for two other reasons. First, the United States did not want to provoke the Chinese into using their air force for massive attacks on U.S. ground forces in Korea; the Chinese in fact abstained throughout the war. Second, the United States wanted to forestall Chinese communist bomber attacks on the vulnerable and highly congested U.S. air facilities in South Korea and Japan. Here again, the Chinese reciprocated, and no attacks from Manchurian bases were made against U.S. air facilities during the war. The "Bed Check Charlie" raids against U.S. air bases were all flown from communist bases inside North Korea, which were subject to U.S. attack. Thus, both the United States and China tacitly granted each other sanctuaries from which to mount air operations. According to a high-level communist report secured in Korea, the Chinese communist air commanders in Manchuria greatly resented these constraints against ground force and airfield attacks that Peking had imposed. See *The United States Air Force in Korea*, pp. 266, 648.

⁶⁵See Section III below, p. 89.

⁶⁶Among other concessions, the United States also promised North Korea and communist China that it would "resist" any future aggression on the part of South Korea in the peninsula and, in the event of any such aggression, would deny South Korea "equipment and supplies." For

Following the inauguration of Eisenhower in 1953, the United States began to seriously contemplate the possibility of escalating the war to break the deadlock. By most accounts, the signal of this intent, and especially the threat to use atomic weapons, finally brought the communists to accept the termination of the conflict in July 1953.⁶⁷

The Cuban Missile Crisis

More than any other concern, the specter of nuclear war constrained the Kennedy administration's response to the Soviet attempt in 1962 to secretly deploy medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Cuba.⁶⁸ After weighing the three courses of military action proposed to force the removal of the missiles -- invasion, air strike, and blockade -- President Kennedy and his principal crisis advisers on the ExCom opted for a blockade as the initial U.S. response, primarily because they believed that it carried the least risk of triggering an immediate and potentially catastrophic conflict with the USSR.⁶⁹

discussions of these and other U.S. concessions, see Joseph C. Goulden, *Korea: The Untold Story of the War*, Times Books, New York, 1982, pp. 567-582; *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 461; and Mark W. Clark (General, U.S. Army [Ret.]), *From the Danube to the Yalu*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York, 1954, p. 292.

⁶⁷See below, Section IV, pp. 115-116.

⁶⁸Secretary of Defense McNamara in 1968 characterized the dangers of the crisis as follows: "The world was faced with what many of us felt then, and what since has been generally agreed, was the greatest danger of a catastrophic war since the advent of the nuclear age." See *The Brink*, p. 249. While McNamara's view was widely shared in the Kennedy administration at the time, a later U.S. government postmortem of the crisis reportedly found such concerns to be exaggerated and unjustified, holding that Kennedy and his advisers had erred in their management of the crisis because they laid "too much stress upon the danger of nuclear war." See Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1971, p. 62.

⁶⁹Three nonmilitary options were also considered by the ExCom: (1) to do nothing; (2) to bring diplomatic pressures and warnings to bear upon the USSR; and (3) to make a secret approach to Castro in an attempt to split him off from Moscow, warning the Cuban leader that "the alternative was his island's downfall and that the Soviets were selling him out." All three of these options were given serious attention, particularly the option for diplomatic pressures and warnings, which was revisited by all members of the ExCom "at one discouraged moment or another." *Kennedy*, pp. 682-683.

The invasion option -- or as one advocate put it, to "go in there and take Cuba away from Castro" -- had few supporters in either the ExCom or the government at large. It was rejected because of the adverse diplomatic and political fallout that could be expected from an invasion and because it would cast the United States in the role of an aggressor and, at the minimum, wreck U.S.-Latin American policy.⁷⁰ The JCS apparently also harbored reservations about an invasion both because it might embroil the United States in a prolonged antiguerrilla conflict in Cuba and because it would require so much manpower and materiel that the United States would be hard pressed to meet its commitments if the Soviets simultaneously started something in another area.⁷¹

Thus, the decisive argument against an invasion -- that it "more than any other course risked a world war, a Soviet retaliation at Berlin or elsewhere" -- prevailed, and President Kennedy's view that an invasion "should be prepared but held back" -- that it was "a last step, not the first" -- was adopted.⁷²

While the air strike option was strongly favored by most senior military officers, initially supported by the ExCom, and for a time seriously considered by the president, it too was eventually rejected for a variety of reasons. For one thing, closer examination revealed that the limited "surgical strike" desired by the ExCom and the president to quickly eliminate the missile sites was militarily impractical. The offensive and defensive target systems in Cuba were so numerous that only a massive aerial bombardment would suffice, and even then there could be no assurance that all the missiles would be neutralized.⁷³

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹See *The Brink*, pp. 129-130, and *Sword and Plowshares*, pp. 267, 279. An invasion was also expected to cause heavy U.S. casualties, over 25,000 according to one estimate. Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1968, p. 33. The U.S. military, however, preferred an air strike or even an invasion to a blockade, which they considered "to be far too weak a course and that military steps were the only ones the Soviet Union would understand." *Essence of Decision*, pp. 226-227.

⁷²Kennedy, p. 683.

⁷³The U.S. military believed that up to 500 sorties would be required to "eliminate all sources of danger" in Cuba. Anything less would, in the military view, destroy U.S. credibility throughout the

The "chaos and political collapse" resulting from a massive strike against Cuba, it was feared, would ultimately also necessitate a U.S. invasion. Moreover, an air strike could succeed only if accomplished without prior warning; however, a surprise attack killing thousands of Cubans would severely damage the U.S. moral position throughout the world.⁷⁴

Finally, an air attack, as one participant put it, would "directly and definitely attack Soviet military might, kill Russians as well as Cubans and thus more likely provoke a Soviet military response."⁷⁵ Policymakers were also concerned that the USSR might set off a nuclear war by firing at the United States any missiles still remaining in Cuba, or that the Soviets would attack Berlin, the U.S. missile bases in Turkey or Italy, or other points of U.S. interest, such as Iran and Korea.⁷⁶

Even though the more temporizing blockade also carried the risk of a Soviet riposte (President Kennedy was convinced that the Soviets would counterblockade Berlin), and even though it had serious potential political and military drawbacks (such as the failure to prevent the missiles from becoming operational), it nevertheless was the option deemed least likely to precipitate a drastic Soviet military response.⁷⁷

The blockade involved no immediate violence, constituted a limited, comparatively low-level action that allowed time for negotiations, and provided the Soviets with an opportunity to withdraw their missiles without hostilities commencing. It also preserved the U.S. options for

world and leave the United States in "intolerable peril." *A Thousand Days*, p. 804. Also see below, p. 40.

⁷⁴Kennedy, pp. 684-685; *A Thousand Days*, p. 804. See also Section III below, pp. 64-65.

⁷⁵Kennedy, p. 685. At the time of the crisis, the U.S. estimated that about 22,000 Soviet soldiers and technicians were stationed in Cuba, including a combat force of about 5000 tank-equipped ground troops. Castro later placed the true number at "more than 40,000." See Stephen T. Hosmer and Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Policy and Practice Toward Third World Conflicts*, D. C. Heath and Company, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1983, pp. 24-25, and 197, n. 25.

⁷⁶See *The Past Has Another Pattern*, p. 393; *A Thousand Days*, p. 804; and Kennedy, pp. 685-686.

⁷⁷For discussion of the various shortcomings of the blockade option, see *The Brink*, pp. 132-134, and Kennedy, pp. 687-688.

a subsequent air strike or invasion if more forceful actions were to prove necessary. Indeed, the continuing U.S. buildup of air and ground forces in Florida throughout the crisis lent increasing credibility to the possibility of an air strike or invasion in the event the Soviets did not back down.

In its management and execution of the blockade -- which it gave the less belligerent appellation of *quarantine* -- the Kennedy administration exercised great care to reduce or postpone the risk of a direct clash between U.S. and Soviet forces. The United States confined its demands during the crisis to the precisely defined objective of seeking the withdrawal from Cuba of all nuclear-capable missiles and bombers and avoided any hint or action that could be construed by the Soviets as indicating more far-reaching U.S. intentions, such as the overthrow of Castro.

Shipments of petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) were excluded from the blockade to convince Moscow that the quarantine was not intended to force the collapse of the Cuban economy. According to Theodore Sorensen, blockading POL shipments "seemed too drastic a step for the first move, too likely to require a more belligerent response and too obviously aimed more at Castro's survival than at Khrushchev's missiles."⁷⁸

The rules of engagement established for U.S. naval vessels -- "to disable but not sink" any blockade runners -- also manifested this cautious management, as did the decision not to intercept any Soviet ships until absolutely necessary and the selection of a freighter of Lebanese registry as the first vessel to be boarded for U.S. inspection.⁷⁹ The propensity to avoid any precipitous military action was further reflected in President Kennedy's reversal of his earlier tentative decision to immediately attack a Soviet-operated surface-to-air missile (SAM) site in Cuba in the event an unarmed American U-2 plane was shot down.⁸⁰

⁷⁸Kennedy, p. 689. President Kennedy also struck from his speech announcing the quarantine "any hint that the removal of Castro was his true aim." Ibid., p. 700.

⁷⁹Kennedy, pp. 698, 708, 710; *The Brink*, pp. 173, 227-229. Also see below, p. 44.

⁸⁰On Saturday, October 27, a Soviet-operated SAM downed a U-2, piloted by Major Rudolf Andersen, Jr. Rather than order an immediate

When the crisis reached its peak following the U-2 shoot-down and the time for a U.S. air strike appeared close at hand, the Kennedy administration, as a last resort prior to ordering this action, granted two concessions demanded by the USSR for the removal of the missiles. The United States made formal "assurances against any invasion of Cuba" and also agreed to remove its missiles from Turkey and Italy. The president's brother privately assured the Soviet ambassador in Washington that "within a short time after the crisis was over," the U.S. missiles in Turkey and Italy "would be gone."¹ Indeed, within three months after the conclusion of the crisis, the United States withdrew all of its missiles from Turkey and Italy, and 60 Thors from Britain.²

The Vietnam War

The U.S. combat intervention in the Vietnam conflict, as in the Korean, was reluctant, incremental, and prompted by a perceived urgent necessity to stave off a disastrous military collapse. The Johnson administration's decisions in 1965 to bomb North Vietnam and to deploy U.S. ground combat forces to the South were both impelled by the judgment that without these actions South Vietnam's "defeat appeared inevitable."³

counterstrike against a SAM site, however, President Kennedy postponed the strike for one day so as to garner more information on what had happened to the aircraft and to await Khrushchev's final negotiating position. The president also called off the reconnaissance flare-drop flight over Cuba scheduled for Saturday night because the flares might have been mistaken for air-to-ground fire from the planes. *Kennedy*, p. 713.

¹While the pledge not to invade Cuba constituted a significant concession in that the United States had supported just such an invasion at the Bay of Pigs the year before and was continuing to support Cuban exile attacks on Cuba, the promise to remove the U.S. Jupiter missiles from Turkey and Italy did not, at least in military terms, amount to an important concession. The United States had for some time considered the missiles in Italy and Turkey to be obsolete, and even before the Cuban crisis began was working on their withdrawal. See *Thirteen Days*, pp. 86-87; *Essence of Decision*, pp. 225-230; and *The Past Has Another Pattern*, pp. 500-502, n. 2.

²*The Brink*, p. 259.

³*Vantage Point*, p. 126. Commenting on the reasons for the U.S. air and ground interventions, General Earle G. Wheeler stated that "in

In contemplating the possible need for a U.S. combat intervention in Vietnam, the Johnson administration had from the outset been acutely concerned about the risks of provoking a communist Chinese or Soviet counterinvolvement and thus setting off a wider war. Indeed, as previously mentioned, President Johnson had initially held back from air attacks on the North in part because he was concerned about possible Soviet reactions elsewhere and in part because such attacks might lead to the involvement in the conflict of "the Chinese or Soviets, or both."⁸⁴

Once U.S. combat intervention was under way, the Johnson administration carefully avoided military actions that might risk widening the war. This included acts that might directly confront Chinese or Soviet sovereign interests, such as violations of China's borders or attacks on Soviet shipping, as well as military measures that individually or collectively might so threaten the Hanoi regime that it would be forced to ask for active combat assistance from its patrons in Moscow or Peking.

Members of the Johnson administration agreed that neither communist China nor the USSR would countenance the decisive defeat of North Vietnam. They did not know, however, how much pressure could be exerted on the North without triggering some form of external communist counteraction. As Under Secretary of State George Ball put it in a memorandum to the president:

Quite clearly there is a threshold which we cannot pass over without precipitating a major Chinese involvement. We do not know -- even within wide margins of error -- where that threshold is. Unhappily we will not find out until after the catastrophe.⁸⁵

the summer of 1965 it became amply clear that it wasn't a matter of whether the North Vietnamese were going to win the war; it was a question of when they were going to win it." See Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1982, pp. 69-70.

⁸⁴Also motivating this initial reluctance to bomb North Vietnam was the Johnson administration's concern that such attacks might provoke Hanoi to massively invade the South or to significantly step up the guerrilla war there. *Vantage Point*, pp. 66-67, 119.

⁸⁵*Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 52.

Secretary McNamara and other senior civilian officials in the Department of Defense harbored similar concerns about escalatory actions that might cross a threshold and "flash" a Soviet or Chinese intervention.⁸⁶ Indeed, McNamara at one point had worried that communist China might intervene with combat forces to prevent a "DRV/VC [Viet Cong] defeat" even in South Vietnam.⁸⁷

Lyndon Johnson acutely feared a threshold, believing, without any apparent basis in fact, that both Moscow and Peking had entered into secret treaties with North Vietnam which "had placed secret limits, tripwires whose passage would automatically precipitate Russia or China into armed conflict with the United States."⁸⁸ Even in approving the targets for air strikes on the North, the president "lived in constant fear of triggering some imaginary provision of some imaginary treaty."⁸⁹

The views of the president and many of his key civilian advisers about what might provoke a Chinese or Soviet intervention in Vietnam unquestionably differed from those of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and most of the U.S. intelligence community. The latter two groups considered large-scale external communist intervention unlikely unless the United States invaded the northern part of North Vietnam, attempted to overthrow the Hanoi regime, or bombed too close to the China-Vietnam border.⁹⁰

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 44.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 50.

⁸⁸ *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 270; *Vantage Point*, p. 67.

⁸⁹"I never knew," Johnson told his biographer Doris Kearns, "as I sat there in the afternoon approving targets one, two, and three, whether one of those three might just be the one to set off the provisions of those secret treaties. In the dark at night, I would lay awake picturing my boys flying around North Vietnam, asking myself an endless series of questions. What if one of those targets you picked today triggers off Russia or China? What happens then? Or suppose one of my boys misses his mark when he's flying around Haiphong? Suppose one of his bombs falls on one of those Russian ships in the harbor? What happens then? Or suppose the fog is too thick or the clouds are too high or the target too small and the bomb drops by mistake within the thirty-mile radius of Hanoi?" *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 270.

⁹⁰For the views of the U.S. intelligence community about the possible external communist response to various U.S. courses of action

This overriding concern to avoid any "major risks of widening the war" severely constrained the Johnson administration's strategic as well as tactical conduct of the conflict. Numerous escalatory options were rejected because of a fear of possible Soviet and/or Chinese counteraction.

1. In the first place, U.S. policymakers ruled out any acts that might threaten the Hanoi regime's political survival or territorial control, such as the systematic bombing of the country's major political and population centers or an invasion of the southern part of North Vietnam.

Strikes against North Vietnam's population centers were, in the words of one senior U.S. defense official, "likely not only to create a counterproductive wave of revulsion abroad and at home, but greatly to increase the risk of enlarging the war with China and the Soviet Union."⁹¹ Similar concerns ruled out the proposals of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) for an Inchon-type landing above the demilitarized zone (DMZ) to gain bargaining leverage over Hanoi and to disrupt North Vietnamese capabilities for supporting military operations in the South.⁹² Secretary McNamara believed that any U.S. ground actions in North Vietnam would prompt China to enter the war "with both its ground and air forces" and the USSR to dispatch "volunteers" to Vietnam and to "generate a serious confrontation with the United States at one or more places of her own choosing."⁹³

in Vietnam, see Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1979, p. 269; *Vantage Point*, p. 125; and *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4.

⁹¹Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton, in *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 43. Also see *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁹²Among other operations, General Westmoreland proposed a combined amphibious and airborne "hook" against North Vietnam, putting U.S. forces just north of the DMZ to "trap and destroy" the North Vietnamese ground troops, artillery, and supplies positioned near the DMZ. See *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 204, 271, 314, 355, 410.

⁹³See *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 173, 246, 444; and *Vantage Point*, p. 370. Among the places considered as possible targets for Soviet counteraction were "Korea, Turkey, Iran, the Middle East or, most

To forestall any misperception that the United States had any war aims broader than the defense of South Vietnam, the Johnson administration from the outset of the U.S. military intervention in the war repeatedly attempted (both privately and publicly) to reassure the North Vietnamese "that the United States had no intention of trying to overthrow their regime" or to threaten their "sovereignty or territorial integrity."⁹⁴ Inasmuch as political survival and continued territorial control of the North were probably the two interests most crucial to the Hanoi regime, Washington's reassurances in this regard undoubtedly diminished the U.S. bargaining position for seeking a negotiated solution to the Vietnam conflict.

2. Washington eschewed "knock-out blows," such as the use of tactical nuclear weapons against North Vietnamese army (NVA) forces in otherwise uninhabited areas, and the conventional bombing of the Red River dike system in North Vietnam to cripple the rice production.

General Westmoreland, for one, believed that the "use of a few small tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam -- or even the threat of them -- would have quickly brought the war to an end."⁹⁵ However, Washington would not countenance even a detailed consideration of this risky option by MACV and ordered General Westmoreland to disband the small secret group he had established to study the subject.⁹⁶

likely, Berlin," where the Soviets could best control the "degree of crisis." *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 173.

⁹⁴*Vantage Point*, pp. 67 and 249. When the United States first began deploying ground forces to South Vietnam, McNamara told the president that he "considered it important that we not give the impression by our increased military buildup and actions that we were thinking of invading North Vietnam." *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁹⁵General Westmoreland envisaged the use of tactical nuclear weapons in situations such as the defense of Khe Sanh, where the surrounding territory was virtually uninhabited and civilian casualties would have been minimal. See *A Soldier Reports*, p. 338.

⁹⁶Washington worried that word of the secret study group's existence would leak to the press. *Ibid.* There is little evidence that the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons was seriously considered by either the Johnson or Nixon administrations, except in the context of involvement in the war of massive Chinese communist ground forces. Even

While attacks on the Red River dike system would have greatly disrupted North Vietnam's agricultural economy and severely strained its transport system, this option was also ruled out⁹⁷ -- first, because of the heavy civilian casualties that would have resulted (see Section III) and, second, because there was, in President Johnson's words, "too grave a risk of communist Chinese or even Soviet involvement" if this measure were carried out.⁹⁸

3. The decisionmakers rejected proposals from U.S. field commanders to control the infiltration and resupply of enemy forces in the South by launching spoiling ground attacks against the communist sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos or to occupy and thereby permanently block the Ho Chi Minh trail routes in Laos.

General Westmoreland pressed for authorization to mount ground incursions into Cambodia and Laos on a number of occasions and developed several plans for the military occupation of the Laotian panhandle, which he believed "would have materially shortened American involvement in the war."⁹⁹ The Johnson administration turned down all such plans,

in this extreme contingency, Secretary of State Dean Rusk had doubts because of "the possibility of a nuclear exchange, with all that this involved." See *The Pentagon Papers*, Senator Gravel Edition, Vol. 3, Beacon Press, Boston, undated, p. 175; see also *The Past Has Another Pattern*, p. 376.

⁹⁷According to the CIA, if timed correctly, a bombing of the levee system which kept the Red River under control could have caused large crop losses and forced North Vietnam to import large amounts of rice. Depending on the success of other interdiction efforts, such imports might have overloaded the North's transport system. However, the CIA also pointed out that the levees "could be repaired in a matter of weeks, and any military effects of bombing them would be limited and short-lived." *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 140.

⁹⁸*Vantage Point*, p. 369. According to General Wheeler, the JCS never advocated attacking the dikes in order to flood the Red River delta. See *The Tuesday Cabinet*, p. 126.

⁹⁹See *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 193, 204, 217, 227, 238, 271-272, 336, 355, 410. Also see General Westmoreland in W. Scott Thompson and Donald D. Frizzell (eds.), *The Lessons of Vietnam*, Crane, Russak & Co., New York, 1977, p. 66.

partly on political and partly on military grounds. In the first place, the United States did not want to alienate Sihanouk in Cambodia or Souvanna Phouma in Laos and hoped eventually to resurrect the 1962 Laos accords. Furthermore, the more ambitious of these operations would have required the deployment of substantially greater U.S. ground forces to the Indochina area.

Indeed, one of the arguments against providing Westmoreland with larger ground forces in early 1968 was precisely because "it could lead to irresistible pressures for ground actions against sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos, and increased actions against North Vietnam."¹⁰⁰ But beyond these political and manpower considerations, the Johnson administration worried that any significant U.S. ground action against the sanctuaries would provoke a Soviet or Chinese communist reaction.¹⁰¹

4. The administration rejected proposals from the JCS and other military commands to disrupt North Vietnam's military, political, and economic life through systematic air attacks on the country's vital logistic and economic centers in combination with bombing, aerial mining, or a blockade to close its harbors.

The JCS argued that "only a most dramatic, forceful, and *consistent* application of air power" would accomplish U.S. objectives in Vietnam¹⁰² and that to maximize the effects of such a campaign, North Vietnam's ports, including the key harbor of Haiphong, should be closed.¹⁰³

The Johnson administration consistently rejected as too dangerous the military's proposals to bomb, blockade, and particularly air mine North Vietnamese ports. Such closures, it was argued, might (1)

¹⁰⁰*Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 507.

¹⁰¹ See Ambassador Robert Komer in *The Lessons of Vietnam*, p. 95; see also *Vantage Point*, p. 370.

¹⁰²*Strategy for Defeat*, pp. 135, 173, 222, 268 (emphasis in original); *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 195, 211-212.

¹⁰³The closure of Haiphong alone would have had "a dramatic effect because it handled some 95 percent of North Vietnamese shipping." *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 145.

increase the risks of Chinese or Soviet involvement in the war, for example, by prompting the Soviets to send volunteers; (2) provoke a confrontation with the USSR, for example, by destroying Soviet ships or by inducing the USSR to send its own minesweepers or to arm or escort its merchantmen, (3) prompt the Soviets to create a diversionary crisis elsewhere, for example, in Berlin; (4) induce the Soviets to provide increased and more sophisticated military assistance to North Vietnam, including surface-to-surface missiles that would endanger U.S. naval forces; (5) increase Chinese leverage on Hanoi; (6) force the Soviets to send a greater volume of aid to North Vietnam across Chinese territory, thereby compelling the communist powers to work out cooperative arrangements and "to take a wider range of common positions" -- acts that would contravene U.S. interests; and (7) impel the Soviets to take the issue to the United Nations or use it to drive a wedge between the United States and its allies.¹⁰⁴

Rejecting the strategic options outlined above, the Johnson administration confined U.S. ground operations to South Vietnam, attempted to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail system by air attacks alone, and initiated only a carefully circumscribed bombing campaign against North Vietnam. In addition to its initial objective of bolstering South Vietnamese morale, the air campaign was designed to limit or make more difficult the infiltration of men and supplies to the South and to increase the pressure on Hanoi to end the war by extracting a price for its continued aggression -- but not so large a price as to provoke a Soviet or Chinese military counteraction.¹⁰⁵

Constraints and rules of engagement severely eroded the military effectiveness of the U.S. bombing campaign. While many of these constraints stemmed from a U.S. desire to hold down civilian casualties, a subject that will be discussed in Section III, many were imposed to reduce the risks of triggering Soviet or Chinese intervention in the war.

¹⁰⁴For the views of senior Johnson administration officials about the possible adverse consequences of port closures, see *Vantage Point*, p. 369; *Strategy for Defeat*, pp. 149 and 170; *The Limits of Intervention*, p. 194; *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 51-52, 147, 156, 163, 173, 243-244, 246-247, 257-258; and *Planning a Tragedy*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁵*Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 171, 265; and *Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 173.

Believing that a sudden, country-wide bombing campaign might provoke an external communist reaction, the Johnson administration consciously eschewed the opportunity in the first half of 1965 to mount intensive attacks on North Vietnam's major strategic war-related targets when that country still had only a skeleton air defense system.¹⁰⁶ Instead, the United States only gradually increased its bombing attacks, thus giving Hanoi time to install an extensive air defense system and to adjust its economic war effort to the creeping release of targets.¹⁰⁷

JCS proposals to strike North Vietnam's expanding air defense were initially also rejected because of "special Soviet or Chinese escalatory implications."¹⁰⁸ Permission to attack SAM sites, which in 1965-1966 were thought to be manned substantially by Soviet and Chinese technicians, was granted only reluctantly after U.S. aircraft losses began to mount; U.S. pilots were never permitted to attack the entire system.¹⁰⁹

Washington withheld permission to attack North Vietnam's airfields capable of handling MIG fighter aircraft until the air campaign had been under way for over two years. It feared that such attacks would drive the DRV aircraft to Chinese bases or force Hanoi to request the intervention of the Chinese air force.¹¹⁰ This, U.S. officials believed, would in

¹⁰⁶In early 1965, the JCS proposed a four-phase strategic bombing campaign to strike some 94 North Vietnamese targets over a 13-week period. This proposal was disapproved by Secretary McNamara, primarily because "he believed that the risk of a U.S.-Chinese confrontation could well be increased by a major air offensive." *Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰⁷As a consequence of the creeping release of targets, the U.S. air campaign became stereotyped and the United States forfeited the opportunity to deceive or surprise the North Vietnamese about "strike force targets and times." *Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 231.

¹⁰⁸See *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 24. According to General Momyer, the North Vietnamese air defense system could have been destroyed in early 1965 "with no significant losses to U.S. forces." *Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁹See *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4., pp. 45 and 52; see also *Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 118.

¹¹⁰*Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 52 and 156. No North Vietnamese MIG-capable fields were released for attack until April 1967, and then they were released only on a selective basis. Phuc Yen, the main North Vietnamese air base, was not cleared for attack until October 1967; Gia Lam, near Hanoi, remained off-limits during the entire war. The North

turn create pressures to attack Chinese airfields, and such attacks "would very likely lead to a direct war with Peiping and would -- in principle at least -- trigger the Sino-Soviet Defense Pact."¹¹¹

Similar concerns about provoking external communist involvement in the war led the Johnson administration to establish a buffer zone 25 to 30 nautical miles wide along the Chinese border with North Vietnam and special "prohibited" and "restricted" zones around Hanoi and Haiphong where all U.S. air strikes were tightly controlled and, for the most part, severely limited.¹¹² These geographic constraints hindered the mounting of sustained air attacks against supplies moving on North Vietnamese rail lines from China and provided Hanoi with "sanctuaries" in which to stage and marshal their military supplies by day for later movement at night or in poor weather.¹¹³

While the Johnson administration eventually granted permission to attack a number of the more lucrative, militarily related targets in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas, some key targets remained off-limits during the entire 1965-1968 bombing campaign. Other time-sensitive targets were not hit until the time to realize maximum effectiveness had passed.¹¹⁴ For example, despite continued prompting from the JCS,

Vietnamese in fact frequently used Chinese bases during the course of the air war. Because U.S. rules of engagement did not permit hot pursuit of the enemy into China, North Vietnamese MIGs often recovered in China when blocked from returning to their home bases. In addition, when the "North Vietnamese wanted to hold attrition rates down they withheld their fighters from combat by sending them to China." *Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 140-141.

¹¹¹See Under Secretary of State George Ball's memorandum to the president in *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 52.

¹¹²The restricted zone encircling Hanoi was 30 nm and the prohibited zone 10 nm. For Haiphong, the restricted zone was 10 nm and the prohibited zone 4 nm. While authority for attacks against selected targets in both types of zones were granted during the 1965-1968 air campaign, the bombing of targets in the prohibited zones was rarely sanctioned.

¹¹³*Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 183. In addition to dispersing and staging its military supplies in such sanctuary areas, the North Vietnamese also exploited U.S. bombing constraints in other important ways. Whenever possible, for example, the North Vietnamese placed their SAM sites within protected zones to give the SAMs immunity from U.S. attack. They also used off-limit dike systems as storage areas for POL and military equipment and as antiaircraft artillery (AAA) sites. Ibid., pp. 133, 188.

¹¹⁴By mid-1967, 57 targets recommended by the JCS still had not

attacks on North Vietnam's POL storage sites were delayed until June 1966, by which time the Hanoi regime had already dispersed significant portions of its POL supplies. President Johnson apparently hesitated to strike these high-value targets out of concern that Hanoi might call on its communist allies to intervene in their defense or that China might misconstrue the bombing as U.S. intent to obliterate the North Vietnamese regime and decide to come into the war on its own.¹¹⁵

Even under the constraints noted above and the numerous other restrictions that served to impair the U.S. air effort (such as the bombing pauses and enjoinder against the use of B-52s in the northern part of the DRV),¹¹⁶ some observers believed that the U.S. air campaign was close to producing its desired effect by late 1967.¹¹⁷ However, the shock of the Tet offensive, along with the growing desire to commence negotiations, led the Johnson administration to truncate the bombing campaign in March 1968 and eventually to halt it completely that October.

been struck. Of these, 33 were "lesser" or "significant" targets in populated, heavily defended areas, 4 were airfields, 3 were ports, and 5 were in the Chinese buffer zone. According to Secretary McNamara, "In the case of a few of these targets, the risks of direct confrontation with the communist Chinese or the Soviet Union . . . outweigh[ed] the military desirability of air strikes." See U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings before the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, Air War against North Vietnam*, 90th Cong., 1st Sess., USGPO, Washington, 1967, p. 278.

¹¹⁵Although he eventually recommended that the POL storage sites be struck, McNamara was initially reluctant to do so because an attack of this size might "trigger Chinese intervention on the ground." See *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 31, 80, 105-106.

¹¹⁶For some JCS comments on how "self-imposed restraints" had limited the air campaign's effectiveness, see *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 70, 210-211.

¹¹⁷General Momyer writes that he, along with generals Wheeler, McConnell, and Ryan and Admiral Sharp, "had argued in the summer of 1967 that the air campaign was on the verge of forcing the North Vietnamese to negotiate a settlement; if Haiphong and the other targets in the 30-mile circle were cleared for sustained attacks, the settlement would come quickly." *Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 237. This view is supported by John Colvin, the British consul general in Hanoi during 1966 and 1967, who concluded from his own observations that the U.S. bombing "had brought the D.R.V. to manifest defeat by 1967." In Colvin's words: "The D.R.V. in late September, when I left that unhappy country for England, was no longer capable of maintaining itself as an economic unit nor of mounting aggressive war against its neighbor." See John Colvin, "Hanoi in My Time," *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 1981, pp. 138-154.

Even though the Nixon administration after assuming office explored various escalatory options to end the war -- including a resumption of the bombing -- it too was initially deterred from ordering stronger courses of action partly because of concern about provoking a Chinese and Soviet reaction.¹¹⁸ Eventually, President Nixon sanctioned a partial exercise of the escalatory options denied by the Johnson administration -- the Cambodian and Laos incursions, the 1972 aerial mining, and the B-52 bombing of Hanoi.

As Section IV will demonstrate, however, these bolder steps were conducted under circumstances in which countermilitary action by Hanoi's allies was less likely. Furthermore, they were largely defensive acts in extremis, not designed to win the war on U.S. terms. Indeed, the peace agreement finally negotiated by the Nixon administration in January 1973 contained concessions that the United States would not have contemplated at the outset of its combat intervention in Vietnam, including the all-important concession that allowed North Vietnamese troops to remain in the South.

Military Judgments Reinforcing U.S. Strategic Caution

While the concern about setting off a wider war with the USSR and/or China clearly shaped the cautious U.S. strategies in Korea, Vietnam, and the Cuban missile crisis, two other military judgments importantly reinforced the propensity of senior U.S. decisionmakers to postpone or eschew the adoption of high-risk military options in those cases. First, the decisionmakers expected that the less risky strategies being pursued would in time suffice to secure the minimal U.S. objectives. Second, they doubted the potential military efficacy of the high-risk options being proposed.

¹¹⁸As Nixon put it in a 1983 television interview, "We were concerned about the reaction of the Chinese and Russians at that point -- overly concerned, I believe, since at the later times when we did take strong action, neither the Chinese nor the Russians intervened." See ABC News transcript *Nightline*, "Vietnam Peace Accords -- A Look Back," January 27, 1983, p. 5.

Though by no means certain of success, U.S. leaders seem to have believed that the circumscribed military strategies that they were pursuing in Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam would in the end produce outcomes consonant with U.S. national interests. Thus, as long as low-risk strategies still held promise, high-risk options were deferred.

With the exception of the brief period following the initial Chinese communist intervention in Korea, when the United States contemplated a possible withdrawal, the Truman administration seemed convinced that a military armistice along the 38th parallel could be secured without escalating the fighting beyond the Korean peninsula.¹¹⁹ Similarly, at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy and most of his key advisers were persuaded that a blockade was the option most likely to secure the removal of the Soviet missiles at the lowest cost.¹²⁰ ExCom members were highly confident that the USSR would acquiesce to the blockade by turning its ships around, although they also expected a retaliatory Soviet counterblockade at Berlin or elsewhere¹²¹.

Presidents Johnson and Nixon (the latter early in his first term) both rejected proposals for escalatory actions in Indochina in part because they saw the military trends in South Vietnam as sufficiently favorable to ward off any near-term defeat and expected that an acceptable negotiated settlement could eventually be secured to end that conflict.¹²² Even General Westmoreland, who was a constant advocate of bolder military measures, believed that "success eventually would be ours" in Vietnam, despite the constraints imposed on U.S. forces.¹²³

¹¹⁹Even when General MacArthur was arguing that evacuation from Korea would be "unavoidable" unless major reinforcements were sent or the prohibitions against attacking China were altered, other senior U.S. officers, such as the Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, thought that a tenable defense of Korea under the then-existing constraints was still possible. See *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Korean War, Part I*, p. 394.

¹²⁰Kennedy, p. 693.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 689.

¹²²See *The Vantage Point*, pp. 414-416, 423-424; see also *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, pp. 396, 400, 404-405.

¹²³*A Soldier Reports*, p. 262.

Along with this guarded optimism, U.S. leaders felt considerable skepticism, or at the least, uncertainty, about whether the high-risk courses of action being proposed would in themselves prove efficacious or militarily decisive. President Truman apparently doubted, for example, that the bombing of Manchuria or any other target system in China would have by itself produced a "Korean victory to the Yalu." Truman believed that, to be effective, the bombing would have had to be extended to the USSR, which was providing most of the war materials used by communist forces in Korea.¹²⁴ This view was shared by the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Vandenberg, who said that even if the full power of the USAF were used to lay waste to Manchuria and the principal cities of China, there was "a possibility that it would not be conclusive."¹²⁵

The final consideration that led President Kennedy to reject the air strike option in the Cuban missile crisis was the confirmation provided by the commander in chief, U.S. Tactical Air Command (TAC), that "even a major surprise air attack could not be certain of destroying all the missile sites and nuclear weapons in Cuba."¹²⁶ The fact that a blockade would not in itself physically remove the missiles from Cuba had worried the president, but "now it was clear that an air attack could not accomplish that task completely, either."¹²⁷

The Johnson administration vigorously debated the potential efficacy and decisiveness of various options for escalatory action against North Vietnam. On one side, the JCS and other senior military commanders argued that intensified bombing and mining of the harbors would in time bear fruit; on the other side, many (though not all) senior civilian officials believed that such escalatory steps not only

¹²⁴See *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 416; see also *Off the Record*, p. 304.

¹²⁵General Vandenberg also emphasized that "the material that is coming to the Chinese Communists and the North Koreans is from Russia." See *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953*, p. 228.

¹²⁶President Kennedy had asked the TAC commander, General Walter C. Sweeney, Jr., to meet with him especially to nail down the question of whether the Air Force could guarantee the destruction of all the missiles. See *Thirteen Days*, pp. 26-27; see also *Kennedy*, p. 697.

¹²⁷*Thirteen Days*, p. 27.

ran too great a risk of Soviet or Chinese involvement, but that they would also prove ineffective.¹²⁸

According to the critics of escalation -- including Secretary of Defense McNamara, who had originally advocated bombing of the North but eventually came to oppose it -- the war in Vietnam could be won only in the South.¹²⁹ Air attacks or other military pressures against the North could neither break Hanoi's will to continue the struggle nor force it to the peace table.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the critics saw "no combination of actions against the North short of destruction of the regime or occupation of North Vietnamese territory" that would physically reduce the flow of North Vietnamese men and materiel to the South below the relatively small amount required by communist forces to continue the war.¹³¹

With respect to mining of Haiphong and the other harbors, a course of action long advocated by the military, the critics held that the Soviets and Chinese would instead send needed supplies to the North along the road and rail lines from China and would use lighters and other emergency measures at Haiphong and other ports.¹³² Thus, as one Defense Department memorandum put it, "Even a small risk of a significant confrontation with the Soviets [because of mining] must be given major weight against the limited military gains anticipated from this action."¹³³

¹²⁸For examples of the different views among civilian officials about the merits of an expanded bombing campaign against the North, see *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 138-139; and *Vantage Point*, p. 369.

¹²⁹According to McNamara, the bombing of North Vietnam had "always been considered a supplement to and not a substitute for an effective counterinsurgency land and air campaign in South Vietnam." See *Air War Hearings*, p. 275.

¹³⁰The critics also believed that the U.S. air campaign was strengthening the will of the North Vietnamese and not proving cost-effective in terms of the importance of targets being destroyed versus the U.S. losses being suffered. For these and other arguments against escalatory steps, see *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 158-159, 171, 173, 224, 483.

¹³¹*Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 484.

¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 258.

These arguments by the critics, which in the main were supported by U.S. intelligence estimates, prevailed throughout President Johnson's term of office and eventually contributed to his 1968 decision to halt all further bombing of North Vietnam.¹³⁴

MANIFESTATIONS OF U.S. CONCERNS IN OTHER U.S. CONFLICT BEHAVIOR

In addition to severely constraining U.S. strategies in Third World conflicts and crises, U.S. fears about provoking a direct or wider military conflict with the USSR and/or China have produced other strikingly consistent U.S. behavior patterns. These include (1) minimizing challenges to Soviet prestige and avoiding damage to Soviet property and personnel, (2) eschewing military postures that might suggest a U.S. intention to widen the war, (3) avoiding the risk of simultaneous conflicts with the USSR or its clients in different geographic areas, (4) conducting gradual and incremental military operations, (5) in confrontations with the USSR, adopting military options that would force the Soviets to fire first, and (6) maintaining tight, central command and control over U.S. military operations to avoid unwanted escalation.

Minimizing Challenges to Soviet Prestige and Avoiding Damage to Soviet Property and Personnel

When directly confronting the USSR or engaging in conflict with a Soviet client, the United States has sought to minimize any public challenge to Soviet prestige. It has also tried to avoid, if at all possible, actions that might otherwise humiliate or provoke the USSR, such as attacks on Soviet territory, aircraft, ships, or personnel.

Even though U.S. decisionmakers privately believed the USSR to be directly responsible for starting the Korean war, the Truman administration went to great lengths not to give cause for an escalation of the conflict. In keeping with this policy, the U.S. government downplayed the USSR's role and avoided directly accusing the Soviets of complicity in the conflict.¹³⁵ Furthermore, it gave no publicity to the

¹³⁴See, for example, *Vantage Point*, pp. 240, 368, 369.

¹³⁵The U.S. diplomatic note to the USSR at the outbreak of the war,

fact that Soviet "volunteers" were routinely flying combat missions against U.S. forces in Korea or that MIG aircraft from Soviet bases had been engaged or shot down by U.S. forces.¹³⁶

Believing that Soviet leaders had an "almost pathological sensitivity" regarding their borders, the Truman administration gave strict orders to U.S. naval and air forces to stay "well clear" of the Soviet border and territorial waters throughout the Korean war.¹³⁷ When two U.S. jet fighters accidentally violated this injunction by attacking an airfield in the Soviet Maritime Province, the U.S. government immediately expressed its "deep regret," offered to pay damages, and informed the USSR that "the commander of the Air Force Group responsible had been relieved, and that disciplinary action had been taken against the two pilots."¹³⁸ Concerns about possible border violations and

for example, maintained "the public fiction of Soviet noninvolvement in Korea" and "did not charge the Soviet Union with direct complicity in launching the North Korean invasion." The moderate tone of the note aimed to assure Soviet leaders that the United States did not desire an enlargement of the conflict and to provide them with an opportunity to "save face" so that they might call off the attack. President Truman, not wanting to provide an excuse to the Soviets to "plunge the free nations into full-scale all-out war," rejected suggestions that the UN "charge the Russians with full responsibility for the Korean conflict and to demand that Moscow put an end to it." According to Truman, if this suggestion "had been followed and the Soviets had ignored the order, as in all likelihood they would have done, either the United Nations would have stood convicted of weakness or World War III would have been on." See *The Korean Decision*, pp. 117-118, 201-202; *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 346; *Korea: The Untold War*, p. xviii; and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982, pp. 111, 115.

¹³⁶For example, the government did not publicize the fact that in September 1950 U.S. Navy fighters protecting a U.S. task force in the Yellow Sea off North Korea had downed a Soviet MIG from Vladivostok. U.S. destroyers recovered the body of one MIG crew member, who was identified as a Soviet officer. See *The United States Air Force in Korea*, pp. 370, 567, 571; see also *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Korean War*, Part I, p. 253.

¹³⁷Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who used the term "pathological sensitivity," reportedly feared "a violent Soviet reaction" if U.S. aircraft attacked even North Korean targets close to the Soviet border. *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Korean War*, Part I, pp. 254-255.

¹³⁸The Soviets, however, did not acknowledge the U.S. offer to compensate them for the extensive damages caused by this attack. James F. Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War. Policy and Direction: The First Year*, Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D.C., 1972, pp. 200-201.

damage to Soviet shipping also led Washington to prohibit for a time any U.S. air attacks on the port of Rashin, a key North Korean logistic center on the east coast, 17 miles from the Soviet border.¹³⁹

In response to the Cuban missile crisis, the Kennedy administration exercised extreme care to minimize the humiliation to the USSR and to avoid as long as possible any attacks on Soviet personnel, military equipment, and shipping. A key argument against the air strike was that the killing of Soviets in a direct attack on Soviet military forces would involve "the prestige of the Russian army."¹⁴⁰ For the Soviets not to respond to such an assault "would be too great a humiliation for Khrushchev to bear."¹⁴¹ President Kennedy's postponement of the retaliatory air strike against a Soviet-manned SAM site in Cuba after the American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft was shot down gave further evidence of his reluctance to order U.S. forces to kill Soviets.

As noted, even in its management of the blockade, the United States attempted to defer or soften the challenge to the USSR. The selection of a nonbloc ship under Soviet charter as the first vessel to be boarded and the instructions to U.S. naval forces to fire into the rudders to "cripple but not sink" any would-be Soviet blockade runners exemplified this policy.¹⁴² Even after the Soviets had backed down and agreed to remove the missiles, President Kennedy insisted on minimizing the humiliation to the USSR: There was to be "no boasting, no gloating, not even a claim of victory."¹⁴³

¹³⁹General MacArthur considered Rashin, which contained large railroad marshaling yards as well as extensive storage and dock areas, to be the keystone of North Korea's logistic system on the east coast of Korea and strongly urged its destruction. The JCS, however, did not feel that Rashin was as vital as MacArthur claimed, and because of the risks involved with the USSR, turned down MacArthur's appeal for permission to bomb the target. Ibid., pp. 346-347.

¹⁴⁰Llewellyn Thompson, the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, who had just returned to the United States, told President Kennedy that if the United States bombed the missile sites, the Soviet military might force Khrushchev to take vigorous action. Thompson warned also that Khrushchev "might go into a rage and order an immediate counterattack." *The Brink*, p. 137.

¹⁴¹Kennedy, p. 687.

¹⁴²Ibid., pp. 698, 710.

¹⁴³As President Kennedy put it to his staff at the time: "We won by enabling Khrushchev to avoid complete humiliation -- we should not humiliate him now." Ibid., p. 717.

The United States displayed similar behavior during the Vietnam war. The Johnson administration, and to a large extent the Nixon administration, consciously sought to downplay Soviet involvement in that conflict. Washington gave little if any publicity to the fact that Soviet air defense personnel helped to man and exercised operational control over Hanoi's SAM system for at least some periods during 1965 and 1966.¹⁴⁴ The hesitancy to sanction U.S. attacks on SAM sites and some airfields in North Vietnam stemmed partly from the reluctance to kill Soviet or Chinese technicians. Indeed, the North Vietnamese airfield at Gia Lam, which was an active MIG base, remained off-limits to attack throughout the war because U.S. officials decided to permit Soviet and Chinese communist transport aircraft safe access to North Vietnam.¹⁴⁵

The Johnson administration's decision not to close North Vietnam's major harbors was the most important manifestation of this reluctance to directly confront Soviet prestige and to risk damage to Soviet shipping. President Johnson, along with many of his advisers, believed that an explosive situation might be created if U.S. military actions resulted in the sinking of or serious damage to a Soviet ship.¹⁴⁶ As a result, strict rules of engagement were enforced when U.S. aircraft attacked coastal targets close to any Soviet merchant shipping, and attacks on certain targets were prohibited when Soviet vessels were present.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴*Soviet Policy and Practice Toward Third World Conflicts*, p. 129.

¹⁴⁵*Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 140.

¹⁴⁶See, for example, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 270; and *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 147.

¹⁴⁷For example, U.S. air strikes against the important North Vietnamese coal depot at Cam Pha were prohibited when Soviet or other foreign ships were in the harbor. As with other self-imposed U.S. restraints, the North Vietnamese took advantage of this restriction by holding at least one foreign ship at a pier in Cam Pha nearly all the time. See Peter B. Mersky and Norman Polmar, *The Naval Air War in Vietnam*, The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, Annapolis, Maryland, 1981, p. 98; and *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, pp. 105-106.

Although the Nixon administration eventually ordered the aerial mining of Haiphong and other North Vietnamese ports in response to Hanoi's massive 1972 Easter offensive, the United States took care to give the Soviet and other foreign flag vessels in those harbors the opportunity to withdraw before the mines became activated.¹⁴⁸ At the same time, Nixon administration leaders rejected the suggestion that the United States pressure Moscow by harassing Soviet vessels en route to Cuba. According to Henry Kissinger, any such harassment of Soviet ships would have been "unduly provocative."¹⁴⁹

The United States also hesitated to publicly challenge the USSR and to attack Soviet air- and sealift assets in other Third World conflict situations. For example, during the 1973 Yom Kippur war and the 1975-1976 Angolan conflict, both the United States and the Soviet Union conducted air- and sealifts in support of opposing battlefield clients. In neither instance, however, did the United States seriously contemplate the use of military force to physically interdict the Soviet resupply effort.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, in both cases the United States adopted public stances that were consciously designed to mute the U.S.-Soviet confrontational aspects of the conflicts.

The U.S. government refrained from issuing public warnings about the Soviet intervention in Angola until late in that conflict, as Washington had hoped that its own covert support to the anti-MPLA factions in Angola might persuade the Soviets to scale down their

¹⁴⁸Prior to dropping the aerial mines (which incidentally was accomplished in a single day and without a casualty to U.S. forces), the United States notified the governments owning vessels in Haiphong harbor that they had 72 hours in which to withdraw their ships before the mines became active. Of some 36 merchant ships then in Haiphong, only 9 left, none of them flying the Soviet flag. It was presumed that the Soviets kept their vessels in place to restrain any further U.S. action in Haiphong. See Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. (Admiral, U.S. Navy [Ret.]), *On Watch*, Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., New York, 1976, p. 388.

¹⁴⁹Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1979, p. 1118.

¹⁵⁰However, the United States unsuccessfully attempted to impede the Soviet airlift to Angola by urging Yugoslavia to deny the USSR landing and transit rights. See *Soviet Policy and Practice Toward Third World Conflicts*, p. 85.

intervention without an open confrontation.¹⁵¹ Even though the prospects of a Soviet-U.S. confrontation appeared serious toward the end of the Yom Kippur war -- U.S. forces had been placed on alert in anticipation of a possible Soviet intervention on behalf of Egypt -- the United States still attempted in its policy statements to soft-pedal any public challenge to Soviet prestige in that crisis.¹⁵²

Eschewing Potentially Threatening U.S. Military Postures

While the record shows that the United States has been willing to alert and mobilize additional U.S. forces in times of acute crises with the USSR (e.g., in Berlin, the Yom Kippur conflict, and particularly the Cuban missile crisis), Washington nevertheless has tended to avoid full-scale mobilizations that could be misconstrued by Moscow as signaling a U.S. intention to widen the conflict.

President Truman, while willing to declare a national emergency in response to the Korean war, opposed demands for a full-scale U.S. mobilization partly on the grounds that it would appear too "warlike" and might spark a major Soviet military reaction.¹⁵³ General Walter Bedell Smith, then head of the CIA, advised Truman that even though the Soviets "would probably not rush into general war at once," full-scale mobilization might in time convince the Soviets that it was to their "advantage to seize the initiative by launching an immediate attack against the West."¹⁵⁴

At the point of the 1965 U.S. combat intervention in Vietnam, Lyndon Johnson proved even more cautious than Truman. Johnson both declined to declare a state of emergency and rejected recommendations for a large-scale reserve call-up on grounds that such acts would appear

¹⁵¹Ibid., pp. 178, 251-252, n. 5.

¹⁵²In commenting on the low-key U.S. public stance taken during the crisis, Henry Kissinger writes: "A public challenge could provoke the Soviets to dig in beyond what the Politburo might consider prudent. Many wars have been started because no line of retreat was left open. Superpowers have a special obligation not to humiliate each other." Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1982, p. 595. See also *Soviet Policy and Practice Toward Third World Conflicts*, pp. 50-52, 143.

¹⁵³See *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 419, 422, 427.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 419.

"too provocative and warlike."¹⁵⁵ He believed that such "threatening" acts would at the minimum force the Soviets and Chinese to increase their assistance to Hanoi, and might even provoke their direct involvement in the conflict.¹⁵⁶ Among other things, a reserve call-up would signal the Soviet Union that the United States was ready for war and thus would raise the risk of a major superpower confrontation.¹⁵⁷ While other considerations also influenced Johnson's resistance to a larger and more dramatic U.S. war effort -- considerations such as his concerns about fueling domestic pressures for escalatory actions in Vietnam, the heavy financial costs involved, and the negative effect of increased war measures on his *Great Society* domestic programs -- the Soviet factor nevertheless had much to do with the president's decision to play the Vietnam war in low key.¹⁵⁸

Avoiding Simultaneous Conflicts with the USSR or Its Clients in Other Areas

As previously noted, one of the dominant motivations underlying U.S. caution in Third World conflicts and crises has been the concern that the USSR might escalate horizontally -- that is, move against other territories of vital interest to the United States. The USSR's manifest military superiority in contiguous areas, combined with the limited force deployment capabilities of the United States, has made Washington extremely reluctant to risk becoming involved in a new conflict when its forces have been already engaged elsewhere.

This concern to avoid simultaneous or multifront wars showed clearly in the passive U.S. response to the North Korean seizure of the *Pueblo* at the time of the U.S. combat involvement in Vietnam. Aside from a limited call-up of reserves and the reinforcement of U.S. air and naval forces in South Korea, the United States mounted no military response to the *Pueblo*'s seizure in January 1968.¹⁵⁹ While the priority

¹⁵⁵*Vantage Point*, pp. 149-150.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 140; and *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 282.

¹⁵⁷*Planning a Tragedy*, p. 122.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*; and *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 282.

¹⁵⁹The United States considered, but rejected as too provocative or impractical, recommendations to (1) issue an ultimatum to North Korea and send a destroyer, with air support, into Wonsan harbor to bring the

objective of obtaining the safe release of the *Pueblo's* 82 crewmen importantly conditioned U.S. restraint, so also did Washington's reluctance to provoke a conflict in Korea.¹⁶⁰ President Johnson later wrote in his memoirs: "We knew a major incident could easily erupt into a full-scale war on the Korean peninsula."¹⁶¹ The United States already had one war on its hands in Vietnam and there was no way to predict what the Soviet Union or communist China might do to help North Korea.¹⁶²

Similar concerns animated the Nixon administration's equally passive reaction to the North Korean shoot-down of the unarmed EC-121 reconnaissance aircraft over international airspace in April 1969. After considering various response options, including a single retaliatory air strike against a North Korean airfield, President Nixon decided simply to resume U.S. reconnaissance flights off Korea, but with armed escort.¹⁶³ The president declined to sanction any direct retaliation because he did not want to risk reopening the fighting in Korea.¹⁶⁴ As he later explained in his memoirs: "As long as we were involved in Vietnam, we simply did not have the resources or public support for another war in another place."¹⁶⁵

crew out, (2) bomb the *Pueblo* in Wonsan harbor, before the removal of classified documents and equipment, (3) shell Wonsan harbor or attack another large military installation in North Korea, (4) encourage ROK raids across the DMZ, (5) blockade North Korea, (6) stage salvage operations where the *Pueblo* was seized, and (7) arrange the seizure of a North Korean or even a Soviet vessel in retaliation. See Trevor Armbrister, *A Matter of Accountability*, Coward-McCann, Inc., New York, 1970, pp. 236-239, 258-261.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 285.

¹⁶¹*Vantage Point*, pp. 388-389.

¹⁶²The uncertainty about a Soviet or Chinese reaction was apparently a matter of particular concern to Secretary of Defense (designate) Clark Clifford, who played a dominant role in shaping the eventual U.S. response to the *Pueblo's* seizure. *A Matter of Accountability*, pp. 239, 259. Also see James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy: Political Applications of Limited Naval Force*, Praeger, New York, 1971, p. 34.

¹⁶³Several other military options were also given at least desultory consideration, including the seizure of North Korean ships at sea, the mining of Wonsan harbor, or a shore bombardment of North Korea. See *White House Years*, pp. 313-321; and *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, pp. 382-385.

¹⁶⁴According to Henry Kissinger, the U.S. fears about provoking a "two-front war" were, in retrospect, unjustified as the United States "vastly overestimated North Korea's readiness to engage in a tit-for-tat." *White House Years*, p. 318.

¹⁶⁵*The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 384.

Worry about a two-front war also inspired urgent U.S. diplomacy to avoid a direct military confrontation with the USSR during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. After receiving word that Soviet airborne forces were on alert to move to the defense of Damascus in the event the Israelis continued their drive toward the Syrian capital, President Johnson pressed the Israelis to "cease fire immediately."¹⁶⁶ According to the recollections of senior U.S. military officers involved in the 1967 crisis, "the overriding concern of the government was to avoid the involvement of the United States in a shooting war in the Mideast"; U.S. defense leaders appeared to be "haunted by the prospect of a 'second Vietnam' in the Middle East for which they were totally unprepared." As Lt. Gen. R. C. Mangrum, then assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, recalled, "We were shying away from involvement as hard as we could because of our involvement in Vietnam."¹⁶⁷

Conducting Gradual and Incremental Military Operations

The propensity to move hesitantly and incrementally where Soviet interests have been involved has also characterized U.S. Third World conflict behavior. Four principal factors explain this military behavior.

¹⁶⁶According to Abba Eban, the United States was "thrown into a global alarm" and "near panic" by the 1967 Soviet intervention threat and exerted great pressure on the Israelis to obey the UN Security Council's "cease-fire decision forthwith." See Abba Eban, *Abba Eban: An Autobiography*, Random House, New York, 1977, p. 422; and Moshe Dayan, *Moshe Dayan: Story of My Life*, William Morrow and Company, New York, 1976, pp. 377-378. Washington exerted similar pressures on the Israelis to observe an immediate cease-fire following the Soviet threat to intervene in the 1973 Yom Kippur war. See *Abba Eban*, pp. 536-537; and *Moshe Dayan*, pp. 543-544.

¹⁶⁷See Jonathan Trumbull Howe, *Multicrises: Sea Power and Global Politics in the Missile Age*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, pp. 56-57. According to Admiral Zumwalt, the JCS also opposed any "large-scale" U.S. military action in the 1970 Jordanian crisis because U.S. forces were still tied down in Southeast Asia. *On Watch*, pp. 294-295.

1. Resource and readiness constraints have at times dictated the piecemeal commitment of forces.
2. As a power acting to defend the status quo, the United States has intervened only when the intervention of U.S. combat forces could save the day. Even after such intervention, it has sought to secure its war aims with minimum violence.
3. U.S. leaders have acted on the assumption that sudden, large-scale escalatory moves were more likely than gradual and incremental ones to spark violent external communist reactions and thus lead to wider wars.
4. U.S. decisionmakers have considered gradualism necessary to maintain control of a conflict. Graduated actions allow time for assessing enemy reactions, and, if need be, provide the flexibility for scaling down the level of U.S. military operations so as to prevent an unwanted escalation.

Even though it escalated rapidly, the U.S. combat intervention in Korea was nevertheless conducted in a series of incremental steps.¹⁶⁸ For example, following its initial decision to use U.S. naval and air forces to protect the evacuation of American nationals from Korea, the Truman administration authorized U.S. naval and air forces (but not U.S. ground troops) to provide combat support to ROK forces -- but only within South Korea.

The United States imposed this territorial limitation for two reasons. First, it was not yet convinced that combat operations above the 38th parallel would be required to repulse the enemy offensive. Second, it thought that the possibility of a direct Soviet or Chinese communist intervention might be minimized if the United States limited the scope of its military operations.¹⁶⁹ The Truman administration

¹⁶⁸For a description of these incremental steps between June 24 and June 30, 1950, and an analysis of the decision process that produced them, see *The Korean Decision*, pp. 79-270, 273-355.

¹⁶⁹By limiting its commitment at this point to U.S. air and naval forces, the Truman administration also believed it could, if need be, disengage more rapidly from Korea. The administration also calculated that in the event Soviet or Chinese forces intervened, "a clash with American ships or airplanes would not carry the same psychological

intended that the United States "do only what was necessary to repel the invaders" and "act in such a way as to assure the Soviet Union that it was 'not looking for trouble.'"¹⁷⁰

Gradual escalation was a conscious component of the U.S. strategy in the Cuban missile crisis. The Kennedy administration liked the blockade option precisely because it slowed the escalation, could begin "at a low level that could then be stepped up," and did not rush the Soviets into some irrevocable action.¹⁷¹ As Theodore Sorensen put it:

The blockade had the advantage of permitting a more controlled escalation on our part, gradual or rapid as the situation required. It could serve as an unmistakable but not a sudden or humiliating warning to Khrushchev of what we expected of him.¹⁷²

Beyond the initial measures of the blockade, Kennedy and his ExCom advisers envisaged a series of escalatory steps that could be applied seriatim or in tandem to increase the political, economic, and military pressure on the Soviets. These included extending the blockade to include POL and then all commodities other than food and medicines; increasing low-level reconnaissance flights over Cuba; political action against Cuba, including leaflet drops; air strikes; and finally invasion.¹⁷³

The U.S. entry into and prosecution of the Vietnam war provided perhaps the most striking manifestation of the American use of gradualism and incrementalism. Under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, a sequence of discrete steps progressively enlarged the scope and size of the U.S. combat involvement in the Indochina area. As the battlefield situation in South Vietnam deteriorated, the United States reluctantly moved from its initial advisory and training role, first, to sanctioning the use of Farm Gate aircraft in combat, then, to deploying ground troops for the protection of air bases, and eventually,

overtones for the American people as would the mutual slaughter of infantrymen. The pressure to plunge into an ill-considered war would thus be lessened." Ibid., pp. 166-167.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹See *Kennedy*, pp. 691, 694.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 688.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 711.

to committing U.S. ground and air forces on such a scale that they virtually took over the fighting of the war in the South.

Even greater incrementalism marked the U.S. air campaign against North Vietnam. Following the first and carefully constrained retaliatory strikes against North Vietnam, the U.S. air campaign moved slowly northward to the key installations in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, attacking ever-more-sensitive targets as Washington doled them out, one by one.¹⁷⁴ The Johnson administration resisted the repeated JCS recommendations to sharply increase the air war, believing that a "slowly ascending tempo" would minimize the risks of "flashing" a deeper Chinese and Soviet involvement and preserve U.S. control.¹⁷⁵ As Lyndon Johnson later told his biographer, "If China reacted to our slow escalation by threatening to retaliate we'd have plenty of time to ease off the bombing."¹⁷⁶

Adopting Options That Force the Soviets to Fire First

In crisis situations where the United States has directly confronted or anticipated a possible confrontation with Soviet forces, Washington has tended to eschew assertive military steps that might require the United States to fire first on Soviet forces. Instead, the United States has sought to invoke passive options that would place the burden for initiating U.S.-Soviet hostilities on the USSR. In adopting passive options, the United States has sought to postpone any direct conflict between the superpowers, buy time for negotiations, and provide Soviet leaders with a chance to avoid hostilities altogether by tacitly accepting the U.S. action.

One example of this U.S. propensity, outside the Third World, was the Berlin airlift in 1948. Rather than attempting to break through the Soviet blockade with an armed ground convoy as recommended by the senior U.S. military and civilian officials on the scene, Washington instead opted for the temporizing measure of an airlift.¹⁷⁷ Even though the

¹⁷⁴See *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 3, pp. 284-285, and Vol. 4, pp. 18-19.

¹⁷⁵See *The Vantage Point*, p. 140; and *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 44.

¹⁷⁶*Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 264.

¹⁷⁷As previously noted, both General Lucius Clay and his political adviser, Ambassador Robert Murphy, advocated that the United States

Truman administration initially doubted that Berlin could be successfully resupplied by air, the airlift nevertheless served to gain time for diplomatic negotiations and avoided the immediate risks of a U.S.-initiated clash with Soviet ground forces.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, as Dean Acheson later observed, the airlift "gave the Russians the choice of not interfering or initiating an air attack, which might have brought upon them a devastating response."¹⁷⁹

Similar considerations attracted the Kennedy administration to the blockade option during the Cuban missile crisis. A blockade could be initiated "without a shot being fired on a single Soviet or Cuban citizen," and it also placed the choice of the next move on the USSR. Khrushchev was offered an opportunity to avoid a direct military clash by keeping his ships away.¹⁸⁰

When the United States finally decided to close North Vietnam's harbors in response to the 1972 Easter offensive, policymakers rejected a naval blockade in favor of the more passive instrument of aerial mining, in large part because mining carried fewer risks of triggering a direct confrontation with Soviet naval or merchant ships. Henry Kissinger found mining preferable to a blockade because "after the initial decision it was automatic; it did not require the repeated

break through the Soviet blockade with an armed convoy. See *Present at the Creation*, p. 262.

¹⁷⁸It was some time before Washington recognized the potential of the airlift for resupplying Berlin. Even after the airlift had been operating for a week, "estimates of the maximum that could be brought into Berlin by air were only about one-fifth of the supplies that were ultimately flown in." See W. Phillips Davison, *The Berlin Blockade*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1958, pp. 150-151. Also see *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 123-126.

¹⁷⁹*Present at the Creation*, pp. 262-263. One factor that no doubt contributed to the Soviet restraint in not attacking the airlift was the U.S. monopoly of atomic weapons at that time. This, along with the dispatch of nuclear-capable B-29 bombers to Britain during the Berlin crisis, probably established a limit beyond which the Soviets "felt they could not go without running new and serious risks." However, the U.S. monopoly of atomic weapons did not give the West a clear-cut military advantage, because of the Soviet countervailing superiority in ground forces. In the event of hostilities, this superiority would probably have allowed the USSR to overrun Europe to the Pyrenees. See *Berlin Blockade*, pp. 155-157.

¹⁸⁰See *Kennedy*, p. 688; and *Essence of Decision*, p. 64.

confrontations of a blockade enforced by intercepting ships."¹⁸¹ Senior U.S. naval commanders also favored mining over a blockade because it kept U.S. ships out of danger and was less provocative to the Soviets.¹⁸² As Admiral Zumwalt, then Chief of Naval Operations, put it: "Mining was a 'passive' act that gave the other side the option of whether or not to accept damage and casualties."¹⁸³

One final example of Washington's preference for passive options may be inferred from its intended initial response had the USSR intervened in the 1973 Yom Kippur war. Moscow had threatened to intervene unilaterally, if need be, to stop Israeli forces from completely destroying the Egyptian army; it reportedly had begun to ready units for airlifting to Egypt. In response, the Nixon administration placed U.S. forces on alert and tentatively considered sending U.S. forces to Israel.¹⁸⁴ Apparently, the United States was going to match any Soviet troop buildup in the area but, at least initially, was not going to attempt to physically interdict the Soviet troop airlift to Egypt.¹⁸⁵

Maintaining Central Command and Control over U.S. Military Operations

Since the end of World War II, U.S. presidents and other senior civilian leaders have shown an increasing propensity to exercise tight command and control over U.S. military operations in Third World conflicts and crises. The following factors have encouraged this trend:

¹⁸¹According to Kissinger, a blockade "would produce early confrontations with the Soviets. Every time a ship was stopped we would see a repetition of the drama of the Cuban missile crisis; our challenge and the Soviet reaction to it would have to be acted out over and over again, probably on television. The danger of some slip or of a pretext for serious incident would be too great." See *White House Years*, pp. 1178-1179.

¹⁸²See *On Watch*, pp. 384-386.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 388.

¹⁸⁴See Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 589, 593.

¹⁸⁵This conclusion is speculative in that the USSR never put the issue to a test. The Yom Kippur crisis eased soon after the U.S. DefCon 3 alert, when the Soviets abruptly backed off from their intervention threat.

1. The desire to control the pace and scope of conflict in a nuclear age and, in particular, to reduce the risks of unintended escalation or other mishaps that might trigger a wider or more devastating war
2. The conviction that force is but one of several instruments for securing political objectives and that military operations can be effectively integrated with diplomatic, political, and economic considerations only at the center, where the most complete intelligence and other information is available¹⁸⁶
3. The technological advances in communications that have made it possible for political leaders to exercise direct control at progressively lower command levels.¹⁸⁷

While the freedom of action permitted U.S. field commanders in the Korean war was considerably greater than in subsequent conflicts and crises, Korea nevertheless marked the beginning of a significant change in the U.S. civilian and military spheres of responsibility for the conduct of war.¹⁸⁸ Because General MacArthur was held in "almost superstitious awe" after his World War II exploits, the JCS and other U.S. leaders were reluctant to give him direct tactical orders.¹⁸⁹

However, in the strategic conduct of the conflict (such as the decisions to cross the 38th parallel and to avoid violations of the Manchurian and Soviet borders), Washington exercised positive control over MacArthur from the outbreak of the war.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, MacArthur's

¹⁸⁶For a discussion of these integrative and intelligence aspects of presidential crisis management, see Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane, *Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1978, pp. 246-251.

¹⁸⁷See *Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 338-339.

¹⁸⁸William W. Kaufmann, *Policy Objectives and Military Action in the Korean War*, The Rand Corporation, P-886, June 1956.

¹⁸⁹*A General's Life*, pp. 599, 604.

¹⁹⁰For an official listing of the various "Directives, Orders and Memoranda Sent to General MacArthur by the Department of Defense Containing Restrictions Imposed on Him in the Conduct of the Campaign," see U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings before the Joint Senate Committee on Armed Forces and Foreign Relations, Military Situation in the Far East*, 82d Congress, 1st Sess., USGPO, Washington, D.C., 1951, pp. 3192-3193.

public disagreement with the substance of this strategic control -- the rejection of his recommendations both to bomb and blockade communist China and to use Chinese nationalist forces -- eventually led Truman to relieve him.¹⁹¹ Washington maintained its strategic control throughout the Korean conflict, and MacArthur's successors were enjoined from mounting major ground offensives to advance the UN lines without prior authorization from the JCS.¹⁹²

Field commanders, however, were generally permitted broad latitude in the conduct of tactical ground and air operations.¹⁹³ The Far East Air Force (FEAF) commander, for example, had wide latitude in his Korean peninsula air campaigns; only rarely did the JCS become involved with the target assignments, and then "usually only to prescribe broad policy for an entire target system."¹⁹⁴

The Cuban missile crisis marked an even more radical shift in the pattern and degree of control exercised by American political leaders over military operations. Advances in naval communications technology permitted the Cuban quarantine to be run directly out of the White House and the Pentagon, and this, along with the overriding concern to avoid a catastrophic conflict with the USSR, gave government leaders "both the capability and incentives to reach out beyond the traditional limits of their control."¹⁹⁵

In assuming personal direction of the Cuban quarantine, President Kennedy was, in Theodore Sorensen's words, determined "not to let needless incidents or reckless subordinates escalate so dangerous and delicate a crisis beyond control."¹⁹⁶ The Kennedy administration's fine-

¹⁹¹*Korea: The Untold Story of the War*, pp. 476-493.

¹⁹² See, for example, James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. 3, *The Korean War*, Part II, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 1979, p. 580.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 581.

¹⁹⁴*Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁹⁵*Essence of Decision*, pp. 127-128.

¹⁹⁶According to Sorensen, Kennedy "had learned at the Bay of Pigs that the momentum of events and enthusiasts could take issues of peace and war out of his own hands." *Kennedy*, p. 708.

grained management of the naval quarantine, in which political leaders repeatedly gave local commanders direct orders on the details of their operations, had no parallel in U.S. military history.¹⁹⁷ It also established precedents that carried over into the Vietnam war.

Although U.S. field commanders had considerable freedom of action in the tactical conduct of air and ground operations in South Vietnam proper,¹⁹⁸ all out-of-country U.S. military operations were subjected to close and continuous control from either Washington or local U.S. diplomatic officials. Because the U.S. government did not want to provoke an external communist reaction or destroy the 1962 Geneva accords and because it wanted to maintain good relations with the Souvanna Phouma government, it placed all U.S. military activities in Laos, including all air operations against the Ho Chi Minh trail, under

¹⁹⁷Because it circumvented the chain of command and countermanded the authority of local commanders, the Kennedy administration's management of the Cuban crisis greatly pained the military and seriously strained civil-military relations. In one famous example, the chief of naval operations, Admiral Anderson, and Secretary of Defense McNamara openly clashed in the Navy Flag Plot. See *Essence of Decision*, pp. 128-132; see also Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, J. B. Lippincott Company, New York, 1966, pp. 154-156. However, Maxwell Taylor was one senior officer who did not resent President Kennedy's personal control of "the key actions of his military forces," including the movement of "naval units about the Caribbean almost by hand." General Taylor wrote: "This personal intervention was offensive to many of my military associates who regarded it as unwarranted civilian interference, but I did not agree with the criticism. The quarantine was a political gambit in a deadly serious game, and the master player on our side had every reason to keep his hand on the pawns. It was a classic example of the use of military power for political purposes which, after all, is the prime justification for military power." *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 280.

¹⁹⁸Even with the tactical latitude granted him in South Vietnam, General Westmoreland found the "unprecedented centralization of authority in Washington and the preoccupation with minutiae at the Washington level" to have been a major cause for the U.S. failure in Vietnam. According to Westmoreland, "many of the errors could be traced to strong control of the conduct of the war from Washington, a policy born jointly of the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961, which demonstrated the perils of decentralization, and the successful outcome of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, which seemed to indicate that command from the White House was the only way to handle crisis and war in the nuclear age. Yet never was there created a central organization in Washington capable of exercising the necessary control; in the final analysis only the President could make a decision and then only after having listened to a host of sometimes conflicting voices." *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 410-411.

the detailed surveillance and control of the U.S. ambassador in Vientiane.¹⁹⁹

Similar arrangements applied to the U.S. bombing campaign in Cambodia, which was controlled from the American embassy in Phnom Penh after the Lon Nol coup in March 1970. Prior to then, Washington had managed the secret bombing of Cambodia directly, particularly during its early phase from April to August 1969, when the White House specifically approved each attack.²⁰⁰

High-level political control was most evident and pervasive in the air operations against North Vietnam. Fears about provoking a communist Chinese or Soviet reaction and concerns about holding down civilian casualties led senior civilian officials in Washington to exert an extraordinary degree of direct management over the pace, scope, rules of engagement, and designated targets for the U.S. bombing campaign in the North.

Throughout most of the Rolling Thunder campaign, Washington established the number and frequency of air strikes, and often even the size of the striking force.²⁰¹ It closely controlled the release of targets throughout the course of the war.²⁰² Attacks on sensitive targets, such as those in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, required specific White House approval and were subject to special rules of engagement and other restrictions also imposed from Washington.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹See *Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 85, 87, 196, 204, 228.

²⁰⁰*White House Years*, pp. 247-249.

²⁰¹Washington also often specified other parameters for attacks, including "routes of ingress or egress, weapons authorized or prohibited, and restrike authority." See W. Hays Parks, "Rolling Thunder and the Law of War," *Air University Review*, January/February 1982, p. 14. Also see *Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 23.

²⁰²However, it relaxed some target restrictions during the 1972 bombing campaign. *Ibid.*, pp. 227, 237.

²⁰³For a description of the special rules of engagement and other conditions imposed on one such strike, the June 1966 attack on the Hanoi-Haiphong POL storage facilities, see p. 70, below.

"By keeping the lid on all the designated targets," as he put it, President Johnson believed that he could continuously monitor external communist reactions and keep the control of the war in his own hands. He needed this control, he thought, to prevent the United States from crossing the threshold that would trigger a Chinese or Soviet intervention; thus, it was "essential for preventing World War III."²⁰⁴

The propensity of U.S. presidents to exert personal control over U.S. military operations, however, has not been restricted to Third World conflicts and crises in which Soviet interests have been involved. President Johnson, for example, maintained virtual day-to-day control of the 1965 U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic, where a possible reaction by the USSR was not at issue. Under the rules of engagement established for the Dominican operation, U.S. troops were prohibited from taking "aggressive action against anybody, including leftist extremists," except by the direct order of the president.²⁰⁵ A hot line was established between the White House and the U.S. chancery in Santo Domingo so that the president might monitor events there several times a day.²⁰⁶ According to George Ball, President Johnson became so absorbed in day-to-day policy management that he "became, in effect, the Dominican desk officer."²⁰⁷

Ten years later, President Ford took personal charge of the U.S. operations to rescue the crew of the U.S. cargo ship *Mayaguez*, which had been seized by Cambodian-manned gunboats in May 1975.²⁰⁸ Acting as the

²⁰⁴See *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, pp. 264, 269-270, 330-331.

²⁰⁵See John Bartlow Martin, *Overtaken by Events*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York, 1966, p. 685; and Abraham Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1972, pp. 103, 106-107, 127.

²⁰⁶The U.S. special representative in the Dominican Republic, John Martin, reports that President Johnson's "appetite for information was insatiable" and that he talked to him several times a day. *Overtaken by Events*, p. 696.

²⁰⁷*The Past Has Another Pattern*, pp. 328-329.

²⁰⁸See *Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations*, pp. 108-109.

"principal crisis manager" throughout the *Mayaguez* affair, Ford had overall command of the military forces involved in the rescue²⁰⁹ and was able through military communication links to control even naval aircraft already airborne for a strike against the Cambodian mainland.²¹⁰

These cases, along with the even more striking example of President Carter's communication links with the U.S. hostage rescue mission at Desert One in the wastelands of Iran,²¹¹ testify the extent to which modern communication technology has made the White House a potential focal point for the control of U.S. forces on the battlefield.

The invasion of Grenada in October 1983 constituted a major exception to this trend toward closer White House control of U.S. military operations in Third World countries. Believing that U.S. civilian officials had meddled far too much in previous Third World military involvements, most particularly in Vietnam, Reagan administration officials made a conscious effort during the Grenada operation to rely on established command channels and to leave the conduct of the invasion to local U.S. military leaders.²¹² In the case of the U.S. peacekeeping mission in Lebanon, however, the Reagan administration accorded U.S. field commanders far less freedom of

²⁰⁹However, unlike in the Cuban missile crisis, in this crisis the president's orders were communicated through the normal Defense Department and military chains of command. Ibid., pp. 119, 223.

²¹⁰This strike from the U.S. carrier *Coral Sea* was held up for 20 minutes at President Ford's direction because of a radio broadcast from Phnom Penh. Apparently because of this delay, the strike was never completed, as the Navy aircraft jettisoned their ordnance into the sea. In all, President Ford ordered four air strikes against Cambodia, but the fourth was inexplicably never carried out. Since he had not cancelled the fourth air strike, he later attempted to find out from the Pentagon who had "contravened" his authority; he reports that he never received a "satisfactory" answer to his queries. See Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal*, Berkley Publishing Corp., New York, 1980, pp. 274-276.

²¹¹See Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Failed Mission," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 18, 1982, p. 72.

²¹²For accounts of the wide latitude accorded U.S. commanders in the Grenada operation, see Richard D. Halloran, "Military Influence Is Seen Expanding," *The New York Times*, November 2, 1983, p. A28; Gerald F. Seib, "No More Micromanagement of the Military," *Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 1983, p. 34; and "Testing Time: 'Reagan Was Reagan,'" *Newsweek*, November 7, 1983, p. 82.

action. Because of sensitive political considerations, U.S. combat operations in that country were more closely governed by policies and rules of engagement set in Washington.²¹³

²¹³ Shortly before the U.S. marines were finally withdrawn from Lebanon in early 1984, the Defense Department established a new military command in Lebanon "on a much shorter leash from Washington." The military chain of command to Beirut was simplified so as to allow military and civilian decisionmakers in Washington to monitor and control more closely the U.S. forces stationed in the area. See Richard Halloran, "Pentagon Moves to Simplify Chain of Command to Beirut," *The New York Times*, February 23, 1984, p. A10. Also see Richard Halloran, "Rules Governing the Marines Are Reported Under Review," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1983, p. A6; Thomas L. Friedman, "America's Failure in Lebanon," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 8, 1984, pp. 42-43, 65-66; and Anne Keegan, "Marine Plaint: Can't Shoot Back," *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 1983, p. 6.

III. CONSTRAINTS RELATING TO HUMAN COSTS OF CONFLICT, PUBLIC OPINION, NEGOTIATIONS, AND POLICIES OF OTHER STATES

Several factors in addition to the overriding concern to control the risks of conflict with the Soviet Union have significantly conditioned U.S. military strategies and tactics in Third World conflicts: (1) the avoidance of civilian casualties; (2) public opinion regarding U.S. combat casualties; (3) negotiations; and (4) the policies and attitudes of other states.

CONSTRAINTS STEMMING FROM U.S. CONCERNS TO AVOID CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

In all Third World conflicts and crises in which American forces have engaged, U.S. decisionmakers have sought to minimize friendly and enemy civilian casualties, as well as other unnecessary collateral damage. In the main, this traditional concern has been motivated by:

- Deeply rooted humanitarian and moral convictions about avoiding injury to innocent noncombatants¹
- The desire to adhere to the law of war²
- The desire to maintain domestic support for continued U.S. involvement in a conflict by demonstrating that the United States was fighting a moral and just war
- The desire to maintain international support, particularly among important U.S. allies, and to minimize international criticism or condemnation

¹For a discussion of the long-standing moral prohibitions against attacks on civilians and the principles of *proportion* and *discrimination* that underlie the concept of a just war, see William V. O'Brien, *The Conduct of Just and Limited War*, Praeger, New York, 1981.

²For a survey of the law of armed conflict applicable to air operations, see Department of the Air Force, *International Law -- The Conduct of Armed Conflict and Air Operations*, AFP 110-31, Washington, D.C., November 19, 1976.

- The desire to sustain the cooperation of and not to undermine popular local support for friendly governments in whose territory the United States was conducting its military operations.

Avoiding Strategic Options That Would Produce High Civilian Casualties

Humanitarian concern has influenced U.S. leaders to shun strategic options that would generate high noncombatant casualties. President Truman, for example, opposed the expansion of the Korean war not only because he feared Soviet intervention but also because, as he put it, "most of all," he "did not wish to have any part in the killing of millions of innocents as would surely happen if the fighting were allowed to spread."³ In Truman's view, the bombing of Chinese cities would inevitably have involved the use of nuclear weapons and by his estimate would "have killed some 25,000,000 innocent women, children and noncombatants."⁴

Moral considerations also weighed heavily in the Kennedy administration's decision to reject the "air strike" option at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. Most members of the ExCom, and the

³See Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman*, Vol. 2, *Years of Trial and Hope*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1956, pp. 382, 391.

⁴Robert H. Ferrell, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1980, p. 304. A November 1950 internal State Department memorandum, while giving no casualty estimates, listed a number of arguments against the U.S. use of the atomic bomb in China. It warned that the use of this weapon "without international sanction" would, among other consequences, (1) seriously damage the "moral position" of the United States, (2) constitute a "shattering blow" to the unity and the future development of the United Nations, (3) "encourage Soviet participation in the war under conditions by which the U.S. moral position would be irreparably damaged while the Soviets would suffer the minimum condemnation," and (4) generate such a feeling of "revulsion" in Asia that U.S. influence "among non-Communist nations of Asia would deteriorate to an almost nonexistent quantity." See "Use of the Atomic Bomb in China," memorandum from the planning adviser, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Emmerson) to the assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk), November 8, 1950, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950*, Vol. 7, *Korea*, USGPO, Washington, D.C. 1976, pp. 1098-1100.

president's brother, Robert Kennedy, in particular, "could not accept the idea that the United States would rain bombs on Cuba, killing thousands and thousands of civilians in a surprise attack."⁵

Believing that a surprise attack would constitute a "Pearl Harbor in reverse" and would "blacken the name of the United States in the pages of history," the ExCom spent many fruitless hours attempting to devise a means of providing advance warning to the Cuban population without compromising the effectiveness of an air attack.⁶ According to Robert Kennedy, the inability to solve the advance warning problem and the belief that "a surprise attack would erode if not destroy the moral position of the United States throughout the world" convinced the president to reject the air strike.⁷

Similar considerations led U.S. leaders during the Vietnam war to shun military options that would cause a high number of civilian casualties. The Johnson administration rejected recommendations that the United States knock out the North Vietnamese dike system, in part because of the heavy civilian casualties that this would have entailed and the domestic and international furor that it would have created.⁸

One of the principal arguments of the Johnson administration officials opposed to expanding the bombing campaign in North Vietnam was the likely cost to the United States in terms of domestic and world opinion because of the increased civilian casualties that might be generated. As the Defense Department's May 1968 draft presidential memorandum put it: "The picture of the world's greatest superpower killing or seriously wounding 1000 non-combatants a week while trying to pound a tiny backward nation into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one."⁹

⁵See Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1971, p. 15.

⁶According to Robert Kennedy, the ExCom "spent more time on this moral question during the first five days than on any other single matter." Ibid., p. 17. Also see Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1965, pp. 684-685.

⁷*Thirteen Days*, p. 27.

⁸See Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1971, p. 369; and *The Pentagon Papers*, Senator Gravel Edition, Vol. 4, Beacon Press, Boston, undated, p. 251.

⁹*Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 172.

Richard Nixon also resisted attacking the dikes in North Vietnam because, in his words, "the resulting floods would have killed thousands of civilians." While Nixon believed that only the destruction of the dikes or the use of tactical nuclear weapons could bring the Vietnam war to a rapid end, he rejected both courses of action so as to avoid "the domestic and international uproar that would have accompanied the use of either of these knockout blows."¹⁰

Adopting Rules of Engagement That Minimize Civilian Casualties

As a second consequence of this humanitarian impulse, the United States, when engaged in combat, has adopted rules of engagement and other precautionary measures to hold down enemy as well as friendly civilian casualties.

During the Korean conflict, the United States pursued an unstated but "very real policy" of maintaining humanitarian standards and avoiding needless noncombatant casualties.¹¹ At the outset of the bombing campaign against North Korea in June 1950, President Truman wanted no "indiscriminate" bombardment of North Korea, and the FEAF was ordered to confine its attacks to "purely military targets."¹²

As a result of this policy, U.S. air operations were restricted: Incendiary munitions could not be used in B-29 attacks against major North Korean industrial centers, and leaflets had to be dropped warning civilians to leave industrial areas before such targets were attacked. In addition, higher headquarters usually disapproved of massed air attacks, even against military targets, if these might possibly be interpreted as aimed at the civilian population of North Korea.¹³

¹⁰See Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1978, p. 347.

¹¹The political and military restrictions stemming from these "humanitarian motives were not precisely defined but were usually manifest by some higher authority's disapproval of suggested operations." See Robert Frank Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1961, p. 41.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., pp. 41-42, 178-181, 186, 208, 481.

Toward the end of the Korean conflict (May 1953), when the FEAF was attempting to exert maximum air pressure on the enemy to force a truce settlement, U.S. bombers attacked North Korean irrigation dams to flood, and thereby to interdict, local communist rail and road communications. In breaching the irrigation dams, the FEAF also destroyed the North Korean rice crop in the adjacent areas covered by the floodwaters. It did not, however, attack the North Korean rice crop as such.¹⁴ This practice contrasted sharply with that in Vietnam, where strikes against the North Vietnamese dike system were strictly prohibited.

The United States took greater care in Indochina than it had taken in Korea to limit noncombatant casualties.¹⁵ The greater U.S. sensitivity to the civilian casualties no doubt reflected the more unconventional nature of the fighting in Vietnam, where there were no front lines and where the issue of aggression was not as clear as it had been in Korea.¹⁶ Also, the U.S. involvement in Indochina was both domestically and internationally much more controversial than was the UN-sanctioned U.S. intervention in Korea. Furthermore, the Vietnam war was fought with pervasive, on-the-spot media coverage of virtually all U.S. military operations. Finally, the Vietnamese communists were far more experienced and adept at waging political and propaganda warfare to manipulate world opinion against the United States than were the North Koreans.¹⁷

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 624-627.

¹⁵Except for restraints such as those mentioned above, the FEAF was given relatively wide leeway for interdiction and other air operations in Korea. Few targets, even many military installations in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, were off-limits to U.S. attack, and in contrast to its practice in Vietnam, the United States did not allow the communists to use populated areas as sanctuaries in which to shelter military supplies, logistic repair facilities, and troops. Indeed, according to one USAF history of the war, soon after such targets were discovered, streams of light bombers would arrive "to drop incendiary and delay-fuzed bombs on the towns and villages sheltering Red supplies." Ibid., pp. 209, 480-481.

¹⁶As Secretary of State Dean Rusk observed in an interview in 1965, part of the difficulty of the Vietnam war from the standpoint of U.S. public opinion was that "the issue of aggression was 'not clear': the troops that were coming in were not coming in 'in formation' as had been the case in Korea." See Henry F. Graff, *The Tuesday Cabinet*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970, p. 44.

¹⁷Throughout the U.S. bombing campaigns against North Vietnam,

Whatever the reasons, the United States tended to place great stress on the minimization of civilian casualties throughout the Indochina war. Even in South Vietnam, where U.S. operations were much criticized for the excessive use of aerial firepower, napalm, herbicides, and harassment and interdiction (H&I) fire, and for generating large numbers of refugees, U.S. air and ground force commanders nevertheless attempted to establish and enforce rules of engagement and other combat procedures to minimize noncombatant casualties and unnecessary damage to civilian property.¹⁸ For example, to reduce the risks of attacks against civilians and friendly troops, forward air controllers (FACs) were routinely required to control and mark the targets for tactical air strikes in South Vietnam.¹⁹

The U.S. air operations outside South Vietnam were also strictly controlled and stringently restricted to avoid civilian casualties. In Laos, where the United States did not want to alienate or undermine the Souvanna Phouma government, the U.S. embassy prohibited any U.S. air attacks close to populated areas and required that all air strikes be controlled by FACs and that targets in some areas be validated by

Hanoi alleged indiscriminate U.S. air attacks against "civilian residential areas," the Red River dike system, hospitals, and other nonmilitary targets. Such claims were often given wide credence in the international press and at times led Washington to impose additional restrictions on the U.S. air campaign. For example, after the DRV "accused the United States of blatantly attacking civilian structures and of having caused substantial civilian casualties" during air strikes in December 1966 against a rail classification yard and a vehicle depot in the Hanoi area, Washington prohibited further attacks on all targets within 10 nm of Hanoi without specific presidential approval. See *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 135; U. S. Grant Sharp (Admiral, U.S. Navy [Ret.]), *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*, Presidio Press, San Rafael, California, 1978, pp. 122-123; and W. Hays Parks, "Linebacker and The Law of War," *Air University Review*, January-February 1983, pp. 2-30.

¹⁸For discussions of the various rules of engagement, tactical operating procedures, and other restraints related to minimizing civilian casualties from U.S. ground force actions in South Vietnam, see William C. Westmoreland (General, U.S. Army [Ret.]), *A Soldier Reports*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1976, pp. 286-287; and Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981, pp. 52, 62-65, 99-102, 233-234, 263-264.

¹⁹William W. Momyer (General, USAF [Ret.]), *Air Power in Three Wars*, Department of the Air Force, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1978, pp. 266-269, 278.

Laotian officers.²⁰ Even along the Ho Chi Minh trail, where communist truck parks were often located some distance from the roads, the U.S. embassy limited attacks "to 200 yards either side of the road network unless strike forces were under control of a FAC, unless the Laotians approved the strike."²¹ This restriction was imposed to prevent hitting both friendly villages and the Laotian road watch teams deployed along the trail network.²²

Concerns about avoiding civilian casualties and holding down collateral damage also severely constrained U.S. air operations against North Vietnam, particularly during the Johnson years. While, as previously noted, many of the restrictions placed on the U.S. bombing campaign were motivated by fears of possible Soviet and Chinese communist counteractions, many stemmed from humanitarian considerations and from the eagerness of Washington decisionmakers to avoid actions that might alienate U.S. domestic or international opinion.²³

During the 1965-1968 Rolling Thunder bombing campaign against North Vietnam, the Johnson administration imposed stringent rules of engagement and other restrictions to minimize civilian casualties: It limited air attacks against targets in heavily populated areas, especially in the "restricted" and "prohibited" zones around Hanoi and Haiphong; it prohibited attacks in poor weather on targets close to civilian-inhabited areas; it restricted SAM-suppression strikes in populated areas; and it required that pilots have a positive visual identification of the target before attacking it.²⁴

²⁰See *ibid.*, pp. 196-197; see also Charles A. Stevenson, *The End of Nowhere*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1972, pp. 214-215.

²¹*Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 86, 196.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

²³According to Admiral Sharp, the Johnson administration's decisionmakers had a virtual "obsession" about civilian casualties and were overly sensitive "to reactions of other nations and the media." In Sharp's view, the solution to this "civilian-casualty obsession" was quite simple. "Once the decision is made to use military power to settle a political issue, that power should be used to its full effectiveness to get the war over as quickly as possible. All other considerations should be secondary. That is the way to reduce civilian and military casualties." See *Strategy for Defeat*, pp. 128-129 (emphasis in the original).

²⁴See *Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 133-134, 176-177, 227.

Before releasing targets for air strikes in built-up areas, Washington leaders frequently required estimates of the civilian casualties that might result; if the numbers were too high, the targets would not be cleared for attack.²⁵ According to General Momyer, "the pressure to hold down damage to civilian targets prevented missions that would have been run in World War II and Korea."²⁶

When attacks were authorized against targets in populated areas, special rules and restrictions were often imposed to minimize collateral damage. The June 1966 strikes against the Hanoi-Haiphong POL storage facilities, for example, required that the attacking forces:

execute strikes only under optimum weather conditions, with good visibility and no cloud cover; make maximum use of experienced Rolling Thunder pilots; select a single axis of attack that would avoid populated areas; make maximum use of ECM [electronic countermeasures] to hamper SAM and AA [antiaircraft] fire control, in order to limit pilot destruction and improve bombing accuracy; make maximum use of high-precision delivery munitions consistent with mission objectives; ensure minimum risk to third-country nationals and shipping; and limit SAM/AA suppression to sites outside populated areas.²⁷

Unquestionably, the constraints placed on the bombing campaign against the North cost the United States additional aircrew lives.²⁸ Equally unquestionably, the North Vietnamese systematically exploited these constraints to further their war effort. Knowing that urban centers and most towns were off-limits to U.S. air attacks, the North Vietnamese routinely sheltered armaments and other military supplies in the residential areas of Hanoi and Haiphong, and in the villages, towns,

²⁵See *Strategy for Defeat*, pp. 127-128.

²⁶*Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 179, 188.

²⁷W. Hays Parks, "Rolling Thunder and the Law of War," *Air University Review*, January-February 1982, p. 14.

²⁸Among other things, the extreme precautions imposed to avoid civilian casualties often required U.S. planes attacking targets in North Vietnam "to follow perilous, circuitous routes that exposed them much longer than necessary to enemy anti-aircraft fire." *Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 176-177.

and cities along their rail and road networks.²⁹ The United States, therefore, had to try to destroy these supplies either before they were stored in the urban sanctuaries or when they were being shuttled from one sanctuary to another, usually at night or in poor weather.³⁰

During the 1972 Linebacker I and II bombing campaigns, the Nixon administration reduced substantially or lifted entirely many of the heaviest constraints observed during the Rolling Thunder campaigns.³¹ Among other changes, U.S. aircraft were given much greater freedom to attack targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area; B52s were allowed for the first time to bomb above the 20th parallel in North Vietnam, and, in the December Linebacker II bombing, were employed extensively against military-related installations in the DRV capital itself.³² The availability of smart bombs allowed strikes on targets prohibited until then because of the risks of high civilian casualties.³³ However, even in these expanded and intensified air attacks, the United States still sought to "minimize incidental or collateral casualties and damage to civilian property consistent with strike force security." Both Linebacker campaigns clearly attempted to remain well within the prohibitions established by the law of war.³⁴

²⁹U.S. reconnaissance photographs routinely showed "vehicles lined bumper to bumper" and supplies "stacked on each side of the street" in the residential areas of Hanoi and Haiphong. Ibid., p. 188.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹For the Linebacker I bombing campaigns, the "prohibited" areas around Hanoi and Haiphong were eliminated entirely, and the "restricted" areas around the two cities were decreased to 10 and 5 nm, respectively. For an analysis of the various differences between the Rolling Thunder and Linebacker bombing campaigns, see *Air University Review*, January-February 1983, pp. 2-30.

³²*Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 240-241.

³³One such target was the Lang Chi hydroelectric facility in the Red River valley, 63 miles northwest of Hanoi, which was estimated to be capable of supplying some 75 percent of Hanoi's industrial and defense electric power requirements. Attacks on the facility had been prohibited because it was estimated that as many as 23,000 civilians would be killed if the dam were breached. However, the availability of laser-guided bombs permitted aircraft from the Seventh Air Force to destroy the Lang Chi turbines and generators without damaging the dam or spillway. See *Air University Review*, January-February 1983, pp. 11-12.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 11, 27. Also see *America in Vietnam*, p. 405.

Assuring the Safety of U.S. Civilians

Along with minimizing civilian casualties, the United States has traditionally sought to assure the safety of its own civilian nationals in overseas conflicts. The security of U.S. civilians has influenced U.S. Third World military behavior in two ways.

First, U.S. military power has long been used to protect American citizens threatened by civil warfare or external aggression in foreign lands, and most of the post-World War II U.S. interventions in the Third World have been made to protect American lives. For example, the United States *initially* sent air and naval combat forces to Korea not to stop the invasion but to cover the evacuation of U.S. State Department and other civilian nationals from South Korea.³⁵ Similarly, the United States intervened in Lebanon in 1958 and in the Dominican Republic in 1965, at least in part, to protect or evacuate American citizens.³⁶

The May 1975 Marine assault landings on Tang Island and the accompanying U.S. air strikes against the Cambodian mainland were aimed primarily at securing the release of the *Mayaguez* and its American crew.³⁷ Finally, the paramount objective of the 1983 U.S. invasion of

³⁵Glenn D. Paige, *The Korean Decision*, The Free Press, New York, 1968, pp. 138-139.

³⁶According to President Eisenhower, U.S. troops were dispatched to Lebanon in 1958 both "to protect American lives" and "to encourage the Lebanese government in defense of Lebanese sovereignty and integrity." In the case of the 1965 intervention in the Dominican Republic, U.S. troops were sent both to prevent a Castro-type communist takeover of that country and to evacuate Americans and other foreign nationals endangered by the fighting there. In the opinion of John Martin, the U.S. special representative in Santo Domingo, "President Johnson had no choice but to send the troops. There can be no question that, with the police and military demoralized and all but defeated, with thousands of armed and embittered civilians roaming the streets, U.S. lives were endangered. Had the President not sent the troops, the rebels probably would have defeated the San Isidro troops, spread the rebellion throughout the Republic, killed some Americans and some Dominicans, and in the end established a communist-dominated government." See Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956-1961*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York, 1965, p. 274; John Bartlow Martin, *Overtaken by Events*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York, 1966, p. 705; *Vantage Point*, pp. 191-192; and Under Secretary of State Thomas Mann, "The Dominican Crisis: Correcting Some Misconceptions," *Department of State Bulletin*, November 8, 1965, p. 733.

³⁷See Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane,

Grenada was to secure the safety of and evacuate the 800 to 1000 American medical students and senior citizens residing on the island.³⁸

Second, the United States has frequently sought to remove U.S. civilians from harm's way prior to initiating military actions that might embroil them in a conflict or place them in jeopardy of enemy reprisals. Thus, President Kennedy saw to it that the some 2800 American civilians residing at Guantanamo were evacuated by ship and aircraft before he announced the U.S. quarantine against Cuba.³⁹ Lyndon Johnson reports in his memoirs that he resisted recommendations that the United States mount air strikes against North Vietnam in 1964 in part because he feared Viet Cong reprisals "against American women and children in Saigon."⁴⁰

Following the seizure of the U.S. hostages in Iran, Jimmy Carter exerted great pressure, particularly on U.S. companies with employees still in Iran, to secure the evacuation of all Americans from that country to free the way for possible U.S. punitive actions.⁴¹ Moreover, in planning the subsequent mission to rescue the hostages, President

Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1978, pp. 108-141.

³⁸See "Text of Reagan's Announcement of Invasion," *The New York Times*, October 26, 1983, p. 16.

³⁹President Kennedy ordered the evacuation because he feared, first, that Cuba might attack Guantanamo in retaliation for the quarantine and, second, that the United States might eventually have to invade Cuba. Of the 2809 U.S. civilians (mostly women and children) removed from Guantanamo, 2430 were evacuated by ship and 379 by aircraft. The evacuation was conducted in great haste on Monday, October 22, and was completed before the president's speech announcing the quarantine on that Monday evening. See David Detzer, *The Brink: Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*, Thomas Y. Crowell, Publishers, New York, 1979, pp. 164-168.

⁴⁰Concern about the lives of American dependents in Saigon was, of course, only one of the several reasons President Johnson rejected recommendations to bomb the North in 1964. As previously mentioned, the president also wanted to avoid a major reaction from communist China and the Soviet Union. In addition, Johnson hesitated because such an attack might provoke Hanoi to retaliate by launching its ground forces against South Vietnam, which at that point had a "political base" that was still "too shaky to withstand a major assault by the Communists." See *Vantage Point*, p. 121.

⁴¹One example of the pressures exerted to remove the Americans from Iran is revealed in President Carter's diary entry of November 10, 1979: "I told Cy [Vance] to get all [other] Americans out of Iran. The Fluor

Carter stressed that the U.S. force "should try to limit casualties, since that reduced the chances of any hostile actions against other Americans" remaining in Iran.⁴²

The safety of the large number of U.S. citizens now visiting or residing overseas will likely loom as an important factor in any future U.S. military operations in the Third World.

CONSTRAINTS RELATING TO U.S. COMBAT CASUALTIES, PUBLIC OPINION, AND THE VIETNAM SYNDROME

U.S. Combat Casualties and Public Opinion

At every stage of conflict, U.S. military and civilian leaders instinctively have sought to avoid unnecessary American combat casualties. The concern to minimize military losses accounts in large part for the U.S. military's traditional propensity to substitute firepower for manpower in warfare -- a battlefield practice that prevailed in both the Korean and Vietnam wars.⁴³

In both conflicts, U.S. military and civilian leaders also placed constraints on certain operations so as to hold down combat losses. To reduce aircrew losses, for example, air commanders established minimum pull-out altitudes for U.S. strike aircraft in Korea.⁴⁴ During the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign, President Johnson insisted that U.S. officials "weigh heavily in each case whether U.S. losses might be excessive" in attacking targets in North Vietnam.⁴⁵ As a result, civilian officials frequently refused to approve targets that they considered of insufficient value to merit the probable cost in American

Company has refused so far to cooperate, since their employees carry a special pass from Khomeini. I told Cy to tell them either to get out or we were revoking their passports." See Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, Bantam Books, New York, 1982, p. 461.

⁴²Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Failed Mission," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 18, 1982, pp. 64, 69.

⁴³For comments on the uses of artillery and air strikes to hold down U.S. combat casualties in Korea and Vietnam, see Maxwell Taylor (General, U.S. Army [Ret.]), *Swords and Plowshares*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1972, pp. 136-137; see also *America in Vietnam*, pp. 70, 96.

⁴⁴*The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953*, p. 484.

⁴⁵In May 1967, President Johnson ordered a temporary halt of air strikes within ten miles of Hanoi because he believed that such strikes were "costing more than the results justified." *Vantage Point*, pp. 368, 377.

aircraft and pilots.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the concern to avoid civilian casualties and reduce the risks of expanding the Vietnam conflict on occasion outweighed the effort to minimize military losses in the air campaign.⁴⁷

While a matter of constant concern to U.S. leaders, American combat casualties begin to directly influence U.S. warfighting strategies when these losses grow to the point where they seriously undermine U.S. public support for a war. Henry Kissinger said about the U.S. incursion into Cambodia: "For Americans, of course, the key criterion was our casualties."⁴⁸

Initially, over 60 percent of the American public supported U.S. combat involvement in both the Korean and Vietnam wars.⁴⁹ John Mueller attributes this initial high level of support to the "rallying-round-the-flag" often observed at the beginning of conflicts, when the public wants to support the country's leadership in time of trouble.⁵⁰

However, as U.S. casualties began to mount in Korea, after China entered the fighting, and in Vietnam, after U.S. ground forces became progressively engaged in that conflict, public support for the war dropped significantly.⁵¹ According to Mueller's calculations, in each conflict "every time American casualties increased by a factor of 10, support for the war dropped by about 15 percentage points."⁵²

⁴⁶For statements about how expected aircrew losses influenced the selection of targets in North Vietnam, see U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings before the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, Air War Against North Vietnam*, 90th Cong., 1st Sess., USGPO, Washington, 1967, pp. 100, 278, 283, 291-292, 294-295, 303-304, 328, 333, 348.

⁴⁷See above, p. 70 and n. 28.

⁴⁸Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1979, p. 508.

⁴⁹See John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 1973, pp. 51, 57.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 53, 58.

⁵¹According to Mueller, U.S. public support for the war in Korea dropped some 25 percentage points after China entered the war and U.S. casualties increased sharply. However, it declined very little during the remaining 2-1/2 years of the war. In the case of the Vietnam war, where U.S. casualties mounted gradually, public support for the war declined more slowly. By the end of 1969, however, when the Vietnam war "had been going on over a year longer than the Korean conflict and American losses had well surpassed those suffered in Korea," public support for the Vietnam war "for the time reached levels clearly lower than those found in the earlier war." Ibid., pp. 51, 56-57.

⁵²Mueller suggests that public support for the Korean and Vietnam

Recognizing that continued high U.S. casualty levels would increase public disenchantment and opposition, U.S. leaders in both the Korean and Vietnam conflicts eventually shifted U.S. strategies to reduce casualties. In both conflicts, this shift encompassed new, explicit battlefield policies to hold down U.S. military losses and programs to build up indigenous forces so that they might take over more of the fighting.

Following the communist Chinese intervention in Korea, General Ridgway initially was charged with holding South Korea and maintaining pressure on the communists for a negotiated truce by destroying "the greatest possible number of enemy forces with the least possible loss of his own men."⁵³ Concerns about casualty rates did not become a major factor in the U.S. battlefield strategy until the latter half of 1951, when UN forces launched a series of attacks to secure more favorable defensive positions and to exert pressure on the truce talks.⁵⁴ These attacks cost U.S. and other UN forces some 40,000 casualties. The secretary of war, Frank Pace, wrote General Ridgway in October 1951 that the losses in Korea had produced a "strong adverse reaction at home, and particularly in Congress" and indicated that the "home-front feeling" was that "there had not been sufficient improvement in the over-all situation to warrant such expenditure of blood."⁵⁵

wars was related to the "*logarithm* of the total number of American casualties that had been suffered at the time of the poll." He further suggests that "*Americans in the aggregate reacted in similar ways to the two wars*. While they did weary of the wars, they generally seem to have become hardened to the wars' costs: they are sensitive to relatively small losses in the early stages, but only to large losses in later stages." Ibid., pp. 60-62 (emphasis in original).

⁵³James F. Schnabel, *U.S. Army in the Korean War, Policy and Direction: The First Year*, Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D.C., 1972, p. 397.

⁵⁴However, concerns about the potential effect of continued U.S. casualties on American public opinion had been voiced earlier in the year. During a JCS-State Department meeting in February 1951, General Vandenberg "wondered how long the U.S. public would tolerate the trade of 'irreplaceable Americans for expendable Chinese.'" See James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. 3, *The Korean War*, Part I, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 12, 1978, p. 459.

⁵⁵See Matthew B. Ridgway (General, U.S. Army [Ret.]), *The Korean*

Because of such concerns and because Ridgway could himself see no real purpose in sacrificing more U.S. casualties to seize additional Korean territory when truce talks were in progress, U.S. and other UN forces went over to active defense in November 1951, eschewing any further major ground offensives in the war.⁵⁶ For the remainder of the Korean conflict, the United States relied mainly on air attacks to maintain pressure on the enemy and reduced ground operations to a minimum. The "estimated cost in personnel losses" dominated all decisions on military operations.⁵⁷

Along with this shift in ground strategy, the United States sought to expand the ROK army so that it might assume a larger share of the fighting. Aside from building up the UN reserves -- which was needed

War, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1967, pp. 190-191.

⁵⁶General Ridgway wrote of this decision as follows: "Military men, and statesmen, too, will long debate the wisdom of stopping that proud Army in its tracks at the first whisper that the Reds might be ready to sue for peace. To my mind it is fruitless to speculate on what might have been. If we had been ordered to fight our way to the Yalu, we could have done it -- if our government had been willing to pay the price in dead and wounded that action would have cost. From the purely military standpoint the effort, to my mind, would have not been worth the cost. A drive to the line of the Yalu and the Tumen would have cleared Korea of the Chinese enemy. But he would have still been facing us in great strength beyond those rivers. The seizure of the land between the truce line and the Yalu would have merely meant the seizure of more real estate. It would have greatly shortened the enemy's supply lines by pushing him right up against his main supply bases in Manchuria. It would have greatly lengthened our own supply routes, and widened our battlefield from 110 miles to 420. Would the American people have been willing to support the great army that would have been required to hold that line? Would they have approved our attacking on into Manchuria? . . . I doubt it." Matthew B. Ridgway (General, U.S. Army [Ret.]), *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1956, pp. 219-220.

⁵⁷While some observers later criticized the decision to relax ground pressure on the enemy in Korea, one military historian pointed out that maintaining the offensive would have "meant a rapidly growing list of casualties for the Eighth Army. . . . With terrain rather than military victory as the objective," he did not know "how long the Eighth Army could have sustained a costly offensive before stern criticism arose in the United States." See Walter G. Hermes, *United States Army in the Korean War. Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D.C., 1966, pp. 507-508.

because UN defensive lines were only lightly manned in some sectors -- the expansion of ROK forces was seen as a way of reducing U.S. casualties. As General Mark Clark, the new U.S. Far East commander, put it to the JCS in June 1952, an expansion of ROK forces "not only would substantially increase the number of Asiatics fighting communism and effect a corresponding reduction in American casualties but would considerably increase the flexibility of the Eighth Army for subsequent operations."⁵⁸

In Vietnam, as American ground forces were progressively committed to combat and military casualties mounted, popular support for the Vietnam war declined steadily. By the end of 1967, when the total number of U.S. casualties had grown to over 115,000, the percentage of the Americans opposing the war (45 percent) about equaled the percentage supporting it (46 percent).⁵⁹

The growing domestic resistance to the war and its costs led the Johnson administration in late 1967 to consider modifying Vietnam strategy so as to reduce U.S. combat losses and turn more of the fighting over to South Vietnamese forces.⁶⁰ In December 1967, President

⁵⁸Shortly after taking command in May 1952, General Clark recommended that the ROK army be increased from about 250,000 to 415,000 men. The JCS, while concerned about the drain on U.S. equipment stocks from such an increase, went along with this recommendation partly because "it would lead to a reduction of U.S. casualties." See James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. 3, *The Korean War*, Part II, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 1979, pp. 807-808, 849-851.

⁵⁹War, *Presidents and Public Opinion*, p. 55.

⁶⁰During 1967, the Johnson administration worried that the United States might not be able to stay the course in Vietnam if public opposition increased. This point was made in a May 1967 memorandum from the Defense Department's Systems Analysis Office recommending against any major additional U.S. troop commitments to Vietnam: "If we are to stay, we must have the backing of the US electorate. As we divert resources from other national goals, as US lives are lost, and as the electorate sees nothing but endless escalation for the future, an increasing fraction will become discouraged. If this keeps on in the future as it has in the past, we will have to leave SEA [Southeast Asia] before stability is achieved, losing all that we have invested up to that point, and foregoing the general stability of the world which was established as a result of the Korean War. If we are not to lose everything, the trends will have to be changed: the increase in unfavorable public opinion will have to be slowed; the development of SVN [South Vietnam] society will have to be speeded." *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 457.

Johnson approved a recommendation from Secretary McNamara that the United States "undertake a new study of operations in the South aimed at reducing U.S. casualties and giving the South Vietnamese greater responsibility for their own security."⁶¹

The 1968 Tet offensive, however, forced a much more comprehensive and urgent reappraisal of U.S. strategy in Vietnam. Among its other consequences, the February offensive prompted the JCS to recommend a call-up of reserves to provide more troops for the fighting in Vietnam and to reconstitute the U.S. strategic reserve.⁶² After weighing the pros and cons of calling up reserves, President Johnson in March 1968 decided against this course of action.

According to Johnson, four factors shaped his decision against a reserve call-up and sending large numbers of additional troops to Vietnam. First, and "most important," another massive communist attack appeared "increasingly unlikely." Second, the "South Vietnamese were clearly improving militarily and getting in shape to carry a heavier combat load." Third, America's "financial problems remained serious . . . the Congress still had not passed a tax bill and we faced a large budgetary deficit." Fourth, "domestic public opinion continued to be discouraged as a result of the Tet offensive and the way events in Vietnam had been presented to the American people in newspapers and television. Critics of our policy became more and more vocal as contention for the Presidential nomination heated up."⁶³

With regard to the fourth factor, Johnson recalls in his memoirs: "All my advisers expressed deep concern about the divisions in our country. Some of them felt that those divisions were growing rapidly and might soon force our withdrawal from Vietnam."⁶⁴

⁶¹*Vantage Point*, pp. 373, 378.

⁶²For a discussion of the considerations underlying the JCS request for a reserve call-up, see Section II, n. 32.

⁶³*Vantage Point*, p. 415.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 418. Administration advisers saw a direct link between this growing domestic unrest and U.S. casualty rates in Vietnam. As a February 29, 1968, Defense Department draft presidential memorandum put it, if the U.S. is to substantially increase its forces in Vietnam, "We will have to mobilize reserves, increase our budget by billions, and see U.S. casualties climb to 1,300-1,400 per month. Our balance of payments will be worsened considerably, and we will need a larger tax increase -- justified as a war tax, or wage and price controls. . . . It will be difficult to convince critics that we are not simply destroying South

Rather than risk intensifying these domestic divisions by a greater combat commitment to Vietnam and heavier U.S. casualties, Johnson instead opted for a shift in U.S. strategy. He decided to stabilize the war effort in the South by placing a cap on further significant U.S. troop deployments to the area and to seek an early opening of peace talks with the Hanoi regime by de-escalating the air war against North Vietnam.

The incoming Nixon administration also saw its options to be severely constrained by the adverse trends in domestic opinion. President Nixon recalls that in early 1969 he did not believe that "the American public would support the strong action that could have brought the war to an end then."⁶⁵ The strong action to which the president referred included renewing the bombing against North Vietnam, mining its ports, destroying its dike system, and using tactical nuclear weapons.⁶⁶ He estimated that escalating the ground war in South Vietnam would:

have required up to six months of highly intensified fighting and significantly increased casualties before the communists would finally be forced to give up and accept a peace settlement. . . . [T]here was no way that I could hold the country together for that period of time in view of the numbers of casualties we would be sustaining.⁶⁷

Believing escalation unmanageable, the Nixon administration instead adopted a new strategy designed to wind down the American role in the Vietnam conflict. This involved the *Vietnamization* program to build up South Vietnamese forces to take over the fighting and the progressive withdrawal of U.S. troops to placate the American public and reduce combat casualties. As it had done in the case of the ROK army in South

Viet Nam in order to 'save' it and that we genuinely want peace talks. This growing disaffection accompanied, as it certainly will be, by increased defiance of the draft and growing unrest in the cities because of the belief that we are neglecting domestic problems, runs great risks of provoking a domestic crisis of unprecedented proportions." *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 564. Also see *ibid.*, p. 560.

⁶⁵See ABC News transcript *Nightline*, "Vietnam Peace Accords -- A Look Back," January 27, 1983, p. 6.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 5-6; see also *Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 347.

⁶⁷*Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 347.

Korea, the United States had initially neglected to build up the military capabilities of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The Vietnamization program therefore required several years to complete.⁶⁸

Although the U.S. troop reductions in Vietnam were advertised as linked to compensatory improvements in ARVN capabilities, the pressures of domestic opinion forced the troop pullouts to take on a life of their own.⁶⁹ The Nixon administration found the public's appetite for withdrawals to be virtually "insatiable" and felt compelled to continue the force reductions even in early 1972, when it knew that a major communist offensive was imminent.⁷⁰

In addition to withdrawing forces, the Nixon administration took other steps to reduce further U.S. casualties in Vietnam. General Abrams, the new U.S. commander in Vietnam, was told "that American casualties had to be reduced lest the United States fail to last the course." According to Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Nixon ordered Abrams "to make the reduction of American casualties" a primary objective of his command in Vietnam.⁷¹

As antiwar sentiment grew in the United States, the Congress sought increasingly to limit the continued U.S. participation in the war. Senate and House opponents of the war introduced one amendment after another, usually attached to military appropriation bills, aimed at restricting further U.S. combat operations in Indochina or proposing a total withdrawal of U.S. forces by a date certain. A number of these amendments were only narrowly defeated, and the threat that they posed

⁶⁸For the views of former South Vietnamese military leaders about the shortcomings of the U.S. Vietnamization effort, see Stephen T. Hosmer, Konrad Kellen, Brian M. Jenkins, *The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders*, Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., New York, 1980, pp. 35-38, 79-91.

⁶⁹Since any stop to the withdrawals would trigger public protests in the United States, the troop reductions tended to be determined by an "immutable timetable," independent of the battlefield situation prevailing in South Vietnam. See Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston 1979, pp. 479, 984, 1101.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 1101.

⁷¹See *America in Vietnam*, pp. 136, 146.

forced the Nixon administration "into unending rearguard actions to preserve a minimum of flexibility for negotiations."⁷² Among other things, these congressional initiatives impelled the administration to continue U.S. troop withdrawals at a rate sufficient to forestall a congressionally mandated pullout.

Adverse public opinion and the threat of possible congressional action forced the Nixon administration to pull back from the 1970 U.S. incursion into Cambodia earlier than had been planned.⁷³ The anticipation of similar reactions led Washington to withhold U.S. forces from the 1971 South Vietnamese incursion into Laos. Indeed, because of these constraints, the incursion, which ended in an ARVN rout, had to be accomplished without any direct on-the-spot U.S. airlift, FAC, or advisory support.⁷⁴

Following the signing of the Paris peace accords in January 1973, the Congress voted to ban all further U.S. military activity in Indochina after August 15, 1973, an act that terminated the U.S. bombing of Cambodia and set the stage for the communist takeover of Indochina less than two years later.

The Vietnam Syndrome

A continuing legacy of the U.S. involvement in Indochina is the so-called Vietnam syndrome. The trauma of that experience has made the American public and the Congress extremely leery of and highly resistant to any involvements that might draw U.S. forces into another foreign conflict. Neil Livingstone and Manfred Von Nordheim described the effect on the Congress as follows:

The ghost of Vietnam is a lingering presence during every debate over American foreign policy. It haunts the U.S. Congress. To a generation of American politicians it is the single most traumatic episode of their political lives, a collective experience rivaling the impact that the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War had on their predecessors. The Vietnam experience has circumscribed the

⁷²*White House Years*, p. 513.

⁷³*Ibid.*, pp. 507, 512-513.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 998-1000. Also see *Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 498.

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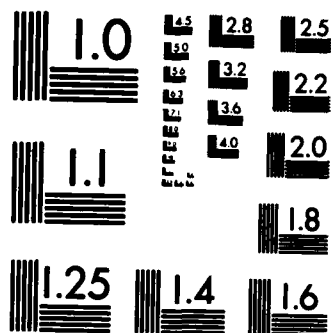
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American capacity for intervention abroad. The fear expressed by those in Congress of making a misstep which could commit the U.S. to another disastrous intervention is perhaps the dominant feature of America's foreign policy today as it emerges from Capitol Hill.⁷⁵

To reassert its constitutional prerogatives over "questions of peace and war" and to prevent other Vietnams, the Congress in November 1973 passed the War Powers Resolution.⁷⁶ The resolution requires the president "in every possible instance [to] consult with Congress before introducing United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances."⁷⁷

The War Powers Resolution also requires that the president, in the absence of a declaration of war, report to the Congress within 48 hours after U.S. armed forces are introduced "(1) into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances; (2) into the territory, airspace or waters of a foreign nation, while equipped for combat, except for deployments which relate solely to supply, replacement, repair, or training of such forces; or (3) in numbers which substantially enlarge United States Armed Forces equipped for combat already located in a foreign nation."⁷⁸

⁷⁵See Neil C. Livingstone and Manfred Von Nordheim, "The United States Congress and the Angola Crises," *Strategic Review*, Spring 1977, pp. 42-43.

⁷⁶For a comprehensive review of the evolution of the War Powers Resolution and its impact on U.S. military operations, see John H. Sullivan, *The War Powers Resolution, A Special Study of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (House of Representatives)*, USGPO, Washington, D.C., 1982.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁷⁸The president is required to set forth in the report "(A) the circumstances necessitating the introduction of United States Armed Forces; (B) the constitutional and legislative authority under which such introduction took place; and (C) the the estimated scope and duration of the hostilities or involvement." *Ibid.*, p. 288.

Within 60 days after such a report is submitted, the president is required to terminate such use of U.S. armed forces "unless the Congress (1) has declared war or has enacted a specific authorization for such use of United States Armed Forces, (2) has extended by law such sixty-day period, or (3) is physically unable to meet as a result of an armed attack on the United States."⁷⁹ Finally, the resolution provides that "at any time that United States Armed Forces are engaged in hostilities outside the territory of the United States, its possessions and territories without a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization, such forces shall be removed by the President if the Congress so directs by concurrent resolution."⁸⁰

While the June 1983 Supreme Court ruling against the "legislative veto" threw into serious question the constitutionality of the War Powers Resolution, that resolution, at least up to now, has discernibly chilled U.S. military responses to Third World conflicts.⁸¹ The remainder of this section discusses instances in which the War Powers Resolution or other congressional actions have constrained U.S. options for meeting communist or communist-backed challenges in the Third World.⁸²

⁷⁹The 60-day period may be "extended for not more than an additional thirty days if the President determines and certifies to the Congress in writing that unavoidable military necessity respecting the safety of United States Armed Forces requires the continued use of such Armed Forces in the course of bringing about a prompt removal of such forces." Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Stanley Brand, House of Representatives general counsel, in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, declared that the legislative veto provision of the War Powers Resolution is "clearly invalid in light of the Supreme Court's holding, but the rest of the bill's status is unclear." Brand advocated that the Congress repeal the War Powers Resolution and write a new act. In related testimony before the committee, Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth W. Dam said that the Reagan administration "still considers valid the requirements that the president consult Congress before sending troops abroad and that he report formally to Congress afterward." Dam also said that even in the absence of the legislative veto portion of the War Powers statute, the Congress could still "force the president to withdraw troops by cutting off their appropriations." See *The Washington Post*, July 20, 1983, p. 4, and July 21, 1983, p. 5. For an account of the June 23, 1983, Supreme Court decision striking down the "legislative veto," see *The New York Times*, June 24, 1983, pp. A-1, B4-B5.

⁸²While not a constraint on U.S. action per se, according to Henry

The Fall of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, 1975. Presidents Nixon and Ford both contend that the War Powers Resolution and other congressional actions contributed in a major way to the demise of the U.S.-supported governments in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in 1975. With regard to the loss of South Vietnam, they argue that the Congress denied them "the means to enforce the Paris agreement at a time when the North Vietnamese were openly and flagrantly violating it."⁸³ Moreover, by reducing U.S. economic and military aid to South Vietnam and by signaling "an increasing desire to cut off all support," the Congress gravely weakened and demoralized the Saigon regime's defense against the 1975 communist offensive.⁸⁴

President Ford reports that two weeks before the final collapse in Saigon, the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee gave him the clear message to "get out fast." Senator Jacob Javits told Ford, "I will give you large sums for evacuation but not one nickel for military aid."⁸⁵

The Angolan Civil War, 1975-1976. In December 1975, the Senate voted to cut off all further U.S. covert or overt assistance to the noncommunist factions fighting the Soviet- and Cuban-supported Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in Angola.⁸⁶ While the

Kissinger, congressional leaders would probably have objected to the dispatch of American forces to the Middle East even if they had been needed to resist a unilateral Soviet military intervention in the 1973 Yom Kippur war. President Nixon was determined, if need be, Kissinger wrote, "to match any Soviet troop buildup in the area and leave it to the Congress to terminate his move." Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1982, p. 593.

⁸³See Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal*, Berkley Publishing Corp., New York, 1980, p. 243; see also Richard M. Nixon, *The Real War*, Warner Books, New York, 1980, p. 117.

⁸⁴*A Time to Heal*, p. 243. For South Vietnamese accounts of how congressional aid cutbacks contributed to the 1975 collapse, see *The Fall of South Vietnam*.

⁸⁵*A Time to Heal*, p. 248.

⁸⁶Prior to the December 19, 1975, Senate vote cutting off further U.S. assistance, the United States, through the CIA, had provided about \$30 million of covert military assistance to the UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) and FNLA (National Liberation Front of Angola) forces fighting the MPLA and Cubans for control of Angola. Following the Senate vote, the House also voted to cut off funds on January 27, 1976. For a discussion of the background and

congressional opposition stemmed from a variety of concerns, including a strong reluctance to see the United States side with South Africa in that conflict, the Congress clearly wanted to forestall this country's becoming further engaged in "military action, either directly or through proxies, in Angola."⁷

The Zaire Airlift, 1978. In the view of many observers, the War Powers statute deterred the Carter administration from using U.S. forces more aggressively to rescue the Americans and Europeans trapped in the Zaire conflict in 1978. According to Assistant Secretary of State Douglas Bennet, the statute conditioned the "executive branch's decisionmaking process in Zaire" and made "bold ventures less feasible."⁸

The Marine Peacekeeping Mission in Lebanon, 1983-1984. Congressional actions and attitudes significantly limited the U.S. military peacekeeping mission in Lebanon. To secure congressional approval (under the War Powers statute) for the marines to remain in Lebanon after they had taken hostile fire in late August 1983, the Reagan administration had to agree on an 18-month time limit for the deployment. Furthermore, it had to assure the Congress that it would seek further congressional authorization "if circumstances required any substantial expansion in the number or role of the U.S. armed forces in Lebanon."⁹

implications of the congressional action on Angola, see Neil C. Livingstone and Manfred Von Nordheim, "The United States Congress and the Angola Crisis," *Strategic Review*, Spring 1977, pp. 34-44. For examples of the arguments pro and con in the Senate debate on continued aid to Angola, see *The Congressional Record*, Senate, December 15, 1975, pp. S22151-S22156; December 17, 1975, pp. S22526-S22534; and December 18, 1975, pp. S22782-S22785 and S22793-S22807.

⁷See *The Congressional Record*, Senate, December 19, 1975, p. S23051.

⁸See *The War Powers Resolution*, pp. 278-279.

⁹The legislation authorizing the marines to remain in Lebanon was the product of long and hard negotiations between the Reagan administration and the Congress. In signing the legislation, President Reagan issued an accompanying statement that reiterated the executive branch's long-held reservations about the constitutionality and applicability of certain sections of the War Powers Resolution. See presidential statements and letters relating to U.S. forces in Lebanon, *Department of State Bulletin*, November 1983, p. 54; "Statement by Reagan on Resolution," *The New York Times*, October 13, 1983, p. A8; and Steven R. Weisman, "Reagan Signs Bill Allowing Marines to Stay in Beirut," *The New York Times*, October 13, 1983, p. A1.

After 241 U.S. servicemen died in the terrorist truck-bombing of the Marine headquarters in Beirut on October 23, 1983, however, the newly won congressional backing for the peacekeeping mission began to erode. Within less than two months, the renewed debate over whether the marines should remain in Lebanon indicated that Congress might vote to cut off funds to support the 1800-member marine contingent.⁹⁰ The increasing congressional pressure for withdrawal, along with the near collapse of the Lebanese government and army in early 1984, led President Reagan to remove the marines to ships off the Lebanon coast in February 1984.

In the view of the Reagan administration, the renewal in late 1983 of the congressional debate over the marine deployment severely undermined U.S. policy in Lebanon. According to President Reagan: "It hindered the ability of our diplomats to negotiate, encouraged more intransigence from the Syrians and prolonged the violence."⁹¹

The Ongoing Conflict in El Salvador. The Vietnam syndrome and the War Powers Resolution have unquestionably constrained the Reagan administration's response to the continuing insurgency in El Salvador, as reflected in the limitations that the administration has placed on the U.S. military advisory role in El Salvador. Among other restrictions, the administration has limited the numbers of U.S. military advisers serving in the country and prohibited U.S. advisers

⁹⁰Representative Samuel Stratton of New York, a high-ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, asserted in mid-December that Congress could muster enough votes to cut off funds for the support of the marine peacekeeping mission. Stratton said: "You can't find anybody anymore in either party who favors keeping them there, where they are sitting ducks." See James McCartney, "Effort Seen to Withdraw U.S. Troops," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 18, 1983, p. 19.

⁹¹Secretary of State George Shultz also contended that the congressional debate over the marine deployment "just totally took the rug out from under U.S. interests" in Lebanon by leading Syria to doubt U.S. resolve. Secretary Shultz went on to argue that the congressional reluctance to deploy U.S. troops in situations where casualties are likely to occur served to undercut the credibility of military power as an instrument of U.S. policy. See John M. Goshko, "Shultz Says Hill Partly to Blame in Mideast Failure," *Washington Post*, March 2, 1984, pp. A1 and A22; and "Excerpts From President Reagan's Speech on Foreign Policy and Congress," *The New York Times*, April 7, 1984, p. 6.

from accompanying Salvadoran forces in combat or operational patrols.⁹²

While some of these constraints may later be lifted, the Congress will clearly attempt to keep a tight rein on U.S. operations in El Salvador. As Representative Clarence Long, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, put it: "We in Congress, especially my subcommittee, will not allow this country to be drawn bit by bit into another Vietnam."⁹³

The congressional reluctance during the past decade to support or sanction new U.S. military involvements in the Third World essentially reflects the absence of a national consensus that U.S. vital interests warrant such involvement. Indeed, with the exception of the *Mayaguez* and Grenada operations, which had the widely accepted aim of rescuing U.S. nationals and which were terminated rapidly, none of the actual or prospective U.S. military involvements in the Third World has drawn strong public support. In the absence of public conviction that U.S. vital interests are at stake, recent experience suggests that the Vietnam syndrome will continue to constitute a barrier to U.S. military interventions in the Third World.⁹⁴

⁹²U.S. advisers in El Salvador have complained that these restrictions "make it impossible for them to observe how aggressive Salvadoran soldiers are on combat patrols or in fire fights." In February 1982, the U.S. ambassador in El Salvador reprimanded two soldiers and ordered another out of the country for carrying M-16 rifles and other combat equipment into a guerrilla contested area. *The War Powers Resolution*, p. 279.

⁹³See Clarence Long, "Some Salvadoran Progress but I'm Not Optimistic," *Washington Times*, July 15, 1983, p. C1.

⁹⁴A recent manifestation of this continued bent to avoid military involvements was the House of Representatives vote, 341 to 64, on May 23, 1984, to prohibit the "introduction of U.S. combat troops in El Salvador or Nicaragua unless there is a 'clear and present danger' to the United States, its embassy or its citizens." See Margaret Shapiro, "House Votes Curb on Use of Troops," *Washington Post*, May 24, 1984, p. A15.

CONSTRAINTS RELATING TO NEGOTIATIONS

The United States proved far more eager than its communist adversaries both to initiate and to maintain the negotiatory process in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. In the first place, its war aims were defensive and limited to the restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*. Second, it wanted to obviate the costs and risks of continued conflict and to secure the release of American prisoners. Third, it believed that it had to demonstrate a willingness to seek a negotiated settlement so as to maintain domestic and international support for a continued war effort.

Dean Acheson reports that following the Chinese entry into the Korean war U.S. officials attempting to open truce talks with the communists "cast about like a pack of hounds searching for a scent."⁵⁵ When truce talks with the communists finally began, Washington ordered its field commanders in Korea "to bend every effort toward realizing an armistice quickly."⁵⁶ In the case of Vietnam, the United States tried from the outset of its combat involvement to open a dialogue with Hanoi so as to bring the war to an end by diplomatic means. As President Johnson described the process:

From 1965 until January 1969 we were in virtually continuous contact, either directly or through intermediaries, with leaders in Hanoi or their representatives. Hardly a month passed throughout that period in which we did not make some effort to open the gateway to peace. Until March 31, 1968, every attempt we made was ignored or rejected by the North Vietnamese.⁵⁷

Moreover, once negotiations began, the United States cautiously avoided the political onus of being the party to cause their breakdown. During the Korean negotiations, U.S. field commanders were ordered not to break off the armistice talks without Washington's approval. If the

⁵⁵Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1969, p. 532.

⁵⁶See Mark W. Clark (General, U.S. Army [Ret.]), *From the Danube to the Yalu*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York, 1954, p. 69.

⁵⁷*Vantage Point*, p. 233.

truce talks failed, Washington wanted the U.S. public and the world to understand that the responsibility clearly lay with the enemy. As a JCS directive stated: "It must be abundantly clear that we have used persistence and patience to obtain agreement on terms which will appeal to world opinion as reasonable and just."⁹⁸ After the Vietnam peace talks opened, the Nixon administration evidenced a similar concern to avoid any actions that might cause domestic or international opinion to blame the United States for a breakdown of the negotiations.⁹⁹

Negotiations have tended to constrain U.S. warfighting strategies in two ways. First, negotiations have encouraged U.S. leaders to defer the adoption of high-risk or high-cost military options in the hope that a negotiated solution would obviate the need to exercise such options. The Johnson administration, for example, deferred escalatory decisions about Vietnam on more than one occasion, "until it had been determined whether some possibility for negotiations existed."¹⁰⁰ Nixon did not take stronger military action against North Vietnam when he assumed office, he said, because he had inherited a "negotiating process" in which he "had more faith than was later justified."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. 3, *The Korean War*, Part II, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 1979, pp. 595-596.

⁹⁹For example, at the time of the Paris talks in December 1972, President Nixon instructed Kissinger that "if the negotiations are to be broken off, it must be absolutely clear that they [the North Vietnamese] were responsible for breaking off the negotiations rather than me." *Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 730.

¹⁰⁰See *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4., pp. 140-141.

¹⁰¹In a 1983 television interview, Nixon regretted that he had not taken strong action in 1969. "In retrospect I believe we should have done it, and I would have done it if I knew then what I had learned later. . . . I would have been tough enough to do what we did in 1972. And that is, to bomb the military targets in the North and to reduce the ability of the North to support the troops in the South that they were supporting. I believe it would have been very effective in 1969 -- as a matter of fact, more effective even than it was in '72, because by then, by '72 there was a very large buildup." See ABC news transcript *Nightline*, "Vietnam Peace Accords -- A Look Back," January 27, 1983, pp. 5-6.

Second, U.S. expectations about the enemy's terms for settling a conflict or his terms for entering negotiations have also tended to circumscribe U.S. battlefield strategies. In Korea, U.S. decisionmakers were convinced that the communists would accept nothing less than a territorial division of the country along prewar lines, namely at about the 38th parallel. Thus, U.S. leaders were disinclined to allow U.S. and other UN forces to advance into North Korea and absorb additional casualties when such an advance "would make an early negotiated settlement of the Korean fighting impossible."¹⁰²

Indeed, after UN forces had established strong defensive positions near the 38th parallel in October 1951, U.S. military and civilians tended to accept the existing line of contact in Korea as the provisional demarcation line for an armistice.¹⁰³ The acceptance of this line, along with the U.S. concern to hold down casualties, ended any further UN ground offensives for the remainder of the war.¹⁰⁴ Some senior U.S. officers believed the decision to adopt an "active defense" in Korea to be a serious error in that it denied the United States the military leverage to pry concessions from the communists at the truce talks and thereby prolonged the war by at least a year.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²See Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War. Policy and Direction: The First Year*, pp. 352, 384. According to General Ridgway, U.S. ground commanders also "hesitated to fight for ground that an early armistice might require them to relinquish." *The Korean War*, p. 188.

¹⁰³Hermes, *United States Army in the Korean War. Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, pp. 118-121.

¹⁰⁴General Ridgway reports that in early 1952 he deferred plans for even limited-objective attacks in Korea because of "indications of progress in the truce talks." In Ridgway's view, the attacks "would have caused a sharp rise in battle casualties with nothing like commensurate results." *The Korean War*, p. 191.

¹⁰⁵Admiral C. Turner Joy, the chief U.S. negotiator in Korea, believed that the U.S. acceptance of the existing battle line as a provisional demarcation line in November 1951 was "the turning point of the Armistice Conference and a principal reason progress slowed to a snail's pace from then on. . . . We were no longer negotiating from a position of strength but from a position of stalemate." See C. Turner Joy (Admiral, U.S. Navy [Ret.]), *Negotiating While Fighting*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, 1978, p. 5, and idem, *How Communists Negotiate*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1955, p. 129.

In contrast to the Korean negotiations, which circumscribed U.S. activities in the ground war, the Vietnam peace talks constrained the bombing campaign against North Vietnam. Apparently believing Hanoi's repeated threat that it would not negotiate while the United States bombed its territory, President Johnson, after first limiting U.S. air strikes to below the 20th parallel in March 1968, ordered a total bombing halt of North Vietnam on October 31, 1968.

The United States established three conditions, which Hanoi tacitly accepted, for continuing the bombing halt: (1) that the peace talks be "prompt and serious"; (2) that Hanoi not violate the DMZ between North and South Vietnam; and (3) that there be no large-scale communist ground, rocket, or artillery attacks against South Vietnam's major cities.¹⁰⁶ The communists began to violate these tacit understandings soon after the peace talks opened.

Despite North Vietnamese violations, the incoming Nixon administration hesitated to resume the bombing of the North lest it "wake the beast of public protest" and cause the United States to be charged with torpedoing the negotiations.¹⁰⁷ "None of us," Henry Kissinger recalled, "had the stomach for the domestic outburst we knew renewed bombing would provoke -- even if it were the result of North Vietnamese betrayal of the understandings that had led to the bombing halt."¹⁰⁸ As a result of these concerns, the Nixon administration abstained from resuming any full-scale bombing of North Vietnam during three years of fruitless public and private negotiations with the Hanoi regime.

However, Washington allowed limited air strikes against the North during this period. At the time of the 1968 bombing halt, the United States stipulated that reconnaissance aircraft would continue to fly over North Vietnam.¹⁰⁹ Within a month after the bombing halt, North

¹⁰⁶See *Vantage Point*, pp. 514-517.

¹⁰⁷*White House Years*, p. 244.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁰⁹*Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 215.

Vietnamese attacks on these reconnaissance flights caused Washington to order "protective reaction" strikes against the SAMs and antiaircraft artillery (AAA) that were firing on the U.S. aircraft. From that point on, protective reaction strikes were periodically directed against all elements of the DRV's air defense system that threatened U.S. air operations in Laos and reconnaissance flights over all of North Vietnam.¹¹⁰

Moreover, as North Vietnam continued to violate the bombing halt with attacks on South Vietnamese cities and "with an unprecedented movement of men, equipment, and supplies into South Vietnam," the Nixon administration in January 1971 eventually sanctioned an increasing number of special air strikes against the North Vietnamese supply concentrations below the 20th parallel.¹¹¹ These strikes were of such limited strength and duration, however, that they were unable to seriously impede the massive communist military buildup north of the DMZ.

Among other things, the North Vietnamese exploited the bombing halt to rehabilitate and improve their road networks north of the DMZ. These logistic improvements, along with the steady buildup of supplies along the DMZ, permitted Hanoi in 1972 to mount the type of large-scale, conventional invasion of the South that never would have been possible during the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 217.

¹¹¹According to General Momyer, between January 1971 and March 1972 the United States conducted "more than 300 strikes south of the 20th parallel" against North Vietnamese air defense installations and supply concentrations. In one such strike on December 30, 1971, some "1000 sorties were flown against 41 targets above the DMZ." Ibid., pp. 215, 217. President Nixon states that he ordered that bombing raids be resumed in late 1971 after "Saigon was shelled -- in clear violation of the terms of the 1968 bombing halt agreement" and after he had received "ominous reports of a big military buildup north of the DMZ as well as a continued stepping up of enemy activity in the South." Nixon also recalls that these U.S. raids produced an "immediate and intense" domestic outcry. See *Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 584.

¹¹²See *Air Power in Three Wars*, pp. 195, 217.

By early 1972, a full-scale North Vietnamese invasion of the South appeared imminent. However, even in this circumstance, the Nixon administration refused to allow General Abrams to mount air strikes north of the DMZ to disrupt the enemy's preparations. According to Henry Kissinger, the government feared being accused of provoking the communist invasion: "We had to lean over backwards to neutralize those ready to blame their own government for every crisis."¹¹³

Thus, while the United States had originally agreed to the bombing halt in order to speed the negotiated settlement of the war, the bombing halt became an end in itself and deprived the United States of its most important source of military leverage to force a rapid peace settlement. The Nixon administration felt that it could not resume the sustained bombing of the North "except in reaction to an overwhelming provocation," such as eventually occurred at the end of March 1972, when 40,000 North Vietnamese troops and some 400 armored vehicles invaded South Vietnam.¹¹⁴

Aside from its strategic lessons, the U.S. air campaign against North Vietnam also exemplified the subordination of military operations to the negotiating process. The numerous temporary bombing halts and changes in bombing lines during different stages of the war converted U.S. air operations at times to a faucet -- to be turned on or off, depending upon the prevailing status of negotiations.

To support specific peace initiatives and to make it "politically easier for North Vietnam to accept negotiations,"¹¹⁵ the Johnson administration ordered no fewer than 16 bombing pauses or cutbacks between May 1965 and November 1968.¹¹⁶ These pauses and changes in

¹¹³See *White House Years*, pp. 1099-1100.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 1100.

¹¹⁵The bombing pauses were seen as a way to "minimize the loss of North Vietnamese face" if they agreed to enter peace talks. As Secretary McNamara put it in July 1965: "It may be politically easier for North Vietnam to accept negotiations and/or to make concessions at a time when bombing of their territory is not currently taking place." See *Strategy for Defeat*, p. 95.

¹¹⁶For a listing of these bombing pauses, see *Vantage Point*, p. 578. In Lyndon Johnson's view, the limited bombing campaign against North Vietnam was an act of "seduction, not rape." As he later told Doris Kearns: "I saw our bombs as my political resources for

bombing lines seriously diminished the effectiveness of the Rolling Thunder campaign by allowing the North Vietnamese to repair damaged bridges, roads, and other logistic networks and to move military supplies closer to South Vietnam. During the nearly six-day bombing pause at Tet in 1967, for example, the communists mounted an unprecedented resupply effort, moving more than 22,000 tons of supplies from the North to areas below the 19th parallel.¹¹⁷

Lyndon Johnson later told Nixon that "all bombing pauses were a mistake" and had "accomplished nothing."¹¹⁸ This view was fully shared by Maxwell Taylor, a former U.S. ambassador to Saigon, who wrote:

The repeated bombing pauses, designed to allow Hanoi the opportunity to give us a signal, were taken by the enemy as an indication that our leaders were not sure of themselves and were unlikely to continue bombing in the face of domestic and international pressures.¹¹⁹

CONSTRAINTS RELATING TO THE ATTITUDES AND POLICIES OF OTHER COUNTRIES

American military behavior in Third World conflicts and crises has also been conditioned to varying degrees by the attitudes and policies of other countries. As a great power with worldwide interests and influence, the United States has necessarily had to take into account the reactions of other nations to its Third World involvements. Most important, the United States has wanted to maintain the cohesion of its alliances as a bulwark against the Soviet Union. As a result,

negotiating peace. On the one hand, our planes and our bombs could be used as carrots for the South. . . . On the other hand, our bombs could be used as sticks against the North, pressuring North Vietnam to stop its aggression against the South." See *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 264.

¹¹⁷See *Strategy for Defeat*, pp. 146-148.

¹¹⁸*Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 431. Despite Johnson's admonishment against bombing pauses, Nixon fine-tuned the Linebacker I bombing campaign in accordance with positive or negative changes in the North Vietnamese negotiating stance. Like Johnson, who had ordered Christmas pauses from 1965 to 1967, Nixon also stopped the Linebacker II bombing on Christmas day, 1972. This respite allowed the North Vietnamese to "recock" their depleted SAM defenses around Hanoi and cost the United States the loss of several B-52s when attacks were resumed the next day.

¹¹⁹*Swords and Plowshares*, p. 403.

Washington has tended to give particular weight to the attitudes of its principal allies and has sought to avoid actions that might disrupt or weaken the alliance.

Moreover, the United States has often had to rely on the support of other countries to establish the legality or political legitimacy of its military actions in the Third World. For example, the United States attached great importance to the UN mandate that legitimized the American intervention in Korea. Washington worked assiduously to secure the endorsements from the Organization of American States (OAS) that provided the legal basis for the 1962 quarantine of Cuba and the 1965 U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic.¹²⁰ The quest for legitimacy and legality has also led the United States to require, as a precondition to its interventions in the Third World, that a government authority of the country involved formally request the American intervention.¹²¹

Finally, in certain conflicts and crises, the United States has required from its allies both physical support, such as base and transit rights for staging airlifts or air strikes, and military participation. In both Korea and Vietnam, the United States wanted other nations to share the burden of the fighting, in part to buttress the legitimacy of the intervention, but also because the American public is more likely to support U.S. combat involvement if other nations also participate.

Because the national interests and policies of allies have often diverged from those of the United States, Washington has had to adjust its Third World involvements to accommodate their views. The remainder of this section discusses U.S. Third World interventions in which the actions or policies of other states have significantly influenced U.S. military strategies or tactical operations.

¹²⁰The Kennedy administration, however, was prepared to institute the quarantine of Cuba even if it could not get OAS approval for the action. See *Kennedy*, p. 699.

¹²¹See Herbert K. Tillema, *Appeal to Force: American Military Intervention in the Era of Containment*, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1973, p. 34.

The Korean War

Because the United States intervened in Korea under a UN mandate and because the Truman administration believed that the United States needed a strong alliance with Western Europe to contain the Soviet Union, it paid particular deference to allied attitudes in its conduct of the Korean war. Indeed, a cardinal objective of Truman's policy throughout the Korean conflict was to "preserve maximum solidarity in the UN and especially with British commonwealth nations."¹²²

As a result of this policy, the United States accorded Britain and the other Western cobelligerents in Korea a virtual veto over decisions affecting the strategic conduct of the war. The Europeans' voice in strategic decisions clearly exceeded the magnitude of their actual combat contributions.

From the outset of the war, Washington strenuously sought troop contributions from the European and other UN members. Despite U.S. promises to equip and otherwise underwrite any UN forces sent to Korea, the UN member states were slow to commit troops.¹²³ The European powers hesitated to uncover their own defenses by sending forces to Korea, and Britain and France were already fighting in Malaya and Indochina.

The reluctance of other UN members to send military forces both irritated and worried U.S. military leaders. They feared that the absence of allied troop contributions would undermine U.S. domestic support for both the Korean conflict and the buildup of U.S. forces in Europe. As one JCS memorandum summarized the situation: "The American people would hardly make sacrifices for NATO as long as the countries of Western Europe were dragging their feet."¹²⁴

As a result of constant U.S. prodding, the ground troop contributions from other UN states eventually reached 39,000 in 1953, including 24,000 from the British commonwealth. This was only slightly more than 10 percent of the more than 300,000 U.S. ground forces in Korea during the same year.¹²⁵

¹²²See *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Korean War*, Part I, p. 370.

¹²³For a discussion of the various U.S. efforts to get other UN states to commit forces to Korea, see *ibid.*, pp. 147-150, 174, 497-500.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 148-150.

¹²⁵As of July 31, 1953, some 14 UN countries had ground combat

Once Chinese forces entered the Korean fighting, the European and other UN cobelligerents severely constrained U.S. warfighting policies and buttressed the Truman administration's predisposition to keep the Korean conflict limited. The Europeans strongly opposed any escalation or extension of the war. They feared that escalation might set off World War III, provoke a Soviet attack on Europe, or at the minimum embroil the United States in "an exhausting war with communist China," a war that would divert America's attention and resources away from building up the defense of Europe.¹²⁶

To forestall widening the war, the Europeans, and the British in particular, demanded that the United States consult with them prior to making any escalatory moves and consistently objected to any proposals for, or even hints about, bolder military actions.¹²⁷ The UN cobelligerents adamantly opposed such options as the bombing of or hot pursuit in Manchuria, the use of tactical nuclear weapons, the deployment of nationalist Chinese forces to Korea, and the blockade of China.¹²⁸ The British feared that the use of Chinese nationalist forces or a blockade of China would extend the war into the Taiwan area and might trigger a communist Chinese retaliation against Hong Kong.¹²⁹

troops in Korea. These included approximately 302,000 from the United States, 14,000 from the United Kingdom, 6,000 from Canada, 5,500 from Turkey, and 2,000 from Australia. All other states provided token contingents of fewer than 2,000 men. Hermes, *United States Army in the Korean War. Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, p. 513.

¹²⁶Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War. Policy and Direction: The First Year*, pp. 289-290.

¹²⁷According to General Mark Clark, "Relations with the British on the Korean problem always were delicate. Because of her greater contributions to the fight Britain quite naturally thought that she had a greater stake in the Far East generally and the Korean War in particular than the other countries in the United Nations, and that therefore she should have a greater voice in the Korean affair." See *From the Danube to the Yalu*, p. 115.

¹²⁸For discussions of European views about these escalatory steps, see Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War. Policy and Direction: The First Year*, pp. 250, 290, 317-321; Hermes, *United States Army in the Korean War. Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, pp. 11, 322, 409; and *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, pp. 381-382, 385, 394-413, 438.

¹²⁹Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War. Policy and Direction: The First Year*, pp. 318-319.

In addition to opposing any escalation or widening of the war, the Europeans pressed the United States to quickly negotiate an armistice agreement in Korea, even if this required significant compromises. As one official history of the truce talks described it:

Disturbed by the drains of the Korean commitment, some of the European members of the United Nations Command became anxious to redirect the attention of the United States towards the needs of NATO. But until the war was concluded, there was little hope for a shift in emphasis. Thus, NATO national interests dictated that an armistice be negotiated quickly, so that they could devote their efforts to their own domestic and colonial problems and, at the same time, secure more sympathetic consideration, militarily and economically, from the United States.¹³⁰

These European policies and attitudes unquestionably influenced the Truman administration's decision not to escalate the war in Korea. The United States, then as today, considered Western Europe to be of cardinal importance to U.S. security. Washington was extremely reluctant to embark on any course of action in Korea that might risk a Soviet riposte and leave America to confront the USSR without the support of its European allies.¹³¹

Some American officials later questioned the wisdom of the Truman administration's decision to internationalize the conflict in Korea, holding that this had prevented a U.S. victory. Former Ambassador Robert Murphy, for example, contends that had the United States "gone into Korea without international allies, we would have played to win. The United Nations was a restraining influence."¹³²

¹³⁰Hermes, *United States Army in the Korean War: Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, p. 502.

¹³¹See, for example, *Truman Memoirs*, Vol. 2, p. 15; and Robert H. Ferrell (ed.), *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1980, p. 304.

¹³²Robert D. Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, Doubleday and Co., Garden City, New York, p. 360.

The 1954 Decision Not to Intervene in Indochina

The noncooperation of U.S. allies actually prevented a U.S. combat involvement in Indochina in 1954, when Britain and other allies refused to join the United States in a cooperative intervention to support the French forces surrounded at Dien Bien Phu. While President Eisenhower recognized that the principal burden of any intervention in Indochina would fall on the United States, he believed that token forces supplied by other nations, as in Korea, "would lend real moral standing to a venture that otherwise could be made to appear as a brutal example of imperialism."¹³³

Eisenhower's view was strongly endorsed by congressional leaders, who told him that the United States must not intervene unilaterally, but only as a member of an international coalition that included the free nations of Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and the British commonwealth.¹³⁴ Despite the energetic U.S. diplomatic efforts to muster such a coalition, the British government refused to join the venture.¹³⁵ As a result, the Eisenhower administration decided against direct U.S. combat intervention and confined its assistance to the French forces to the provision of additional military equipment, supplies, transport aircraft, and some 300 USAF maintenance personnel.¹³⁶

¹³³Dwight D. Eisenhower, *White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1963, p. 340.

¹³⁴In addition to the precondition about allied participation in the intervention, Eisenhower reports that congressional support was also contingent on the following conditions: (1) "The French must agree to accelerate their independence program for the Associated States so there could be no interpretation that United States assistance meant support of French colonialism," and (2) "The French must agree not to pull their forces out of the war if we put our forces in." Ibid., p. 347. Also see Stephen Jurika, Jr. (ed.), *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: The Memoirs of Admiral Arthur W. Radford*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, 1980, pp. 398-401, 449.

¹³⁵*Mandate for Change*, p. 347.

¹³⁶See *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, History of the Indochina Incident 1940-1954*, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, August 21, 1971, pp. 377-390, 489.

U.S. Airlifts to the Middle East

The actual or expected denial of overflight or landing rights by allies has on occasion seriously complicated U.S. airlift operations, or led U.S. military leaders to advise against a U.S. involvement in a particular Third World conflict. During the Jordanian crisis in 1958, for example, the U.S. plans for the resupply of the British intervention forces in Jordan from the U.S. Air Force base at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, had to be changed because the Saudi government at the last minute "withdrew permission for U.S. planes to sortie to Jordan from this base."¹³⁷ At the time of the 1970 Jordanian civil war, U.S. defense officials advised against American ground involvement in the Middle East, in part because they expected Turkey and Greece, among other countries, to deny the United States landing or overflight rights for such an operation.¹³⁸

During the 1973 Yom Kippur war, the U.S. arms airlift to Israel was seriously complicated by the denial of transit bases in Spain, Turkey, and Greece and overflight rights in other NATO areas. According to Henry Kissinger, "All our NATO allies except Portugal, the Netherlands, and the Federal Republic of Germany (for a time) either directly or indirectly dissociated from the airlift and banned our overflight of their territories."¹³⁹ As a consequence, American transport aircraft staging from Germany to Israel had to detour nearly 2000 miles from their optimal flight paths.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷*Waging Peace, 1956-1961*, pp. 279-280.

¹³⁸See Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. (Admiral, U.S. Navy [Ret.]), *On Watch*, Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., New York, 1976, pp. 293-303.

¹³⁹At the outset of the airlift, the Portuguese stalled in granting permission for the United States to refuel transport aircraft at the Lajes airfield in the Azores. According to Kissinger, the Portuguese government "had no national interest in antagonizing the Arab nations" and sought to extract from the United States "some military equipment for its colonial wars in Mozambique and Angola." The Portuguese government granted the refueling rights only after President Nixon had "threatened to leave Portugal to its fate in a hostile world." See Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1982, pp. 520, 708-709.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 709.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

As previously noted, the Kennedy administration rejected an invasion or surprise air strike against Cuba in part because these acts would produce serious international fallout. Robert Kennedy was particularly concerned that a surprise attack would undermine America's moral position and turn the rest of the world against it. The government's Latin American experts concurred in this view, holding that a massive U.S. air strike that killed thousands of innocent Cubans would "damage the United States permanently in the hemisphere."¹⁴¹

Since a blockade would avoid civilian casualties and attacks on Cuban soil, ExCom members saw it as "more appealing to other nations."¹⁴² In their view, (1) the OAS and other U.S. allies would more readily support a U.S. blockade against the Soviets than an attack on Cuba and (2) if the United States began with a blockade, the allies would more likely support "whatever air-strike or other action was later necessary."¹⁴³

Thus, perceptions about allied and international reactions importantly reinforced the Kennedy administration's decision to adopt the blockade as the initial U.S. step in the Cuban crisis. Such perceptions also led the Kennedy administration, at least at the outset of the blockade, to stop only the shipment of offensive weapons to Cuba, a restriction the administration saw as "least likely to anger allies engaged in the Cuban trade."¹⁴⁴

The Kennedy administration's calculations about probable OAS and other allied support for the blockade proved substantially correct. However, even though America's NATO allies gave the United States their political backing in the crisis, none seemed "willing to go to the brink over Cuba."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1965, p. 804.

¹⁴²See *Kennedy*, p. 688.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵*The Brink*, p. 177.

The European NATO states, having lived for years within range of Soviet nuclear weapons, did not want to see Washington threaten world peace over a situation that they "had come to accept as a fact of life."¹⁴⁶ The British government declined President Kennedy's request that the United Kingdom mobilize its military forces during the crisis and also opposed Washington's suggestions that NATO be placed on "alert."¹⁴⁷ In Prime Minister Macmillan's view, the "additional forces made available by 'alert' had no military significance" and "mobilization had sometimes caused war."¹⁴⁸

Even America's close ally and neighbor, Canada, was initially unwilling to honor the North American Air Defense Command's request that the Canadian air force be placed on DefCon 3 alert. Like Macmillan, Prime Minister Diefenbaker "feared that rash mobilization might precipitate some Soviet reaction."¹⁴⁹

The Vietnam War

As was the case in Korea, the United States made an energetic effort to recruit other nations to fight with U.S. forces in Vietnam. Aside from needing their actual combat support, Washington wanted them to participate in the fighting in the hope that their involvement would relieve the U.S. international isolation resulting from the Vietnam intervention and encourage the American public to accept further commitments of U.S. forces to that country.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶The NATO allies were also concerned that the United States not sacrifice European interests to secure the removal of the missiles from Cuba. Prime Minister Macmillan worried that Khrushchev might "try to trade his Cuba position against his ambitions in Berlin and elsewhere. This [he wrote to Kennedy] we must avoid at all costs, as it will endanger the unity of the alliance." See Harold Macmillan, *At the End of the Day, 1961-1963*, Harper & Row, New York, 1973, pp. 189, 211; see also *The Brink*, pp. 176-177.

¹⁴⁷*At the End of the Day*, pp. 190, 195; see also *The Brink*, p. 176.

¹⁴⁸*At the End of the Day*, p. 190 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴⁹At the urging of his minister of defense, Prime Minister Diefenbaker eventually agreed to order the DefCon 3 alert on October 24, 1962. See *The Brink*, p. 177.

¹⁵⁰The importance of third-country involvement in Vietnam to the maintenance of U.S. domestic support for the war was manifest in the Johnson administration's eagerness to have Thai forces in Vietnam. "For the United States the increased force strength was desirable, but the

By 1969, almost 69,000 third-country troops had arrived in Vietnam, including a 48,000-man Korean combat contingent.¹⁵¹ While the combat contributions of these forces, particularly the Koreans, was by no means negligible, the United States had to make heavy financial outlays for some of them.¹⁵² Moreover, there were political costs as well. As Chester Cooper described the situation: "The participating governments frequently had major differences about the conduct of the war and about the terms of a settlement. Considerable effort had to be expended to keep a united political front."¹⁵³

The United States sought particularly to avoid a major break with its allies -- whether or not these allies were cobelligerents in Vietnam -- over the bombing campaign against North Vietnam. International opinion clearly reinforced the Johnson administration's cautious conduct of the Rolling Thunder campaign.

real significance of the increase was that another Southeast Asian nation was accepting a larger role in the defense of South Vietnam. Some officials in Washington also believed that the public would more readily accept a further buildup of U.S. forces if the Thais contributed. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was even more specific when he stated that from a political point of view a Thai contribution was almost mandatory." See Lt. Gen. Stanley Robert Larsen and Brig. Gen. James Lawton Collins, Jr., *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 1975, p. 25.

¹⁵¹In addition to the Koreans, some 7,000 Australian and 11,000 Thai troops had entered Vietnam by 1969. While a number of other countries also had token forces in Vietnam, most nations "preferred to provide civic action and medical assistance as opposed to active military assistance." Some countries were deterred from any military involvement because they feared communist retaliation at home. Germany, for example, "was concerned with the possibility of renewed Soviet pressure on Berlin" and the Republic of China worried that its participation "might bring a Chinese communist reaction in the Formosa Strait." Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁵²According to Chester Cooper, the ROK troops in Vietnam provided 20 percent of South Korea's foreign exchange earnings in 1969. The 1500-man Filipino engineering unit in Vietnam cost the United States "\$39 million between 1967 and 1969 -- \$26,000 per man." The annual U.S. outlay for the 11,000-man Thai contingent was approximately \$50 million. Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, 1970, pp. 266-267.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 267.

Johnson administration officials evinced continual concern about keeping the U.S. bombing below the threshold that would likely "appall allies and friends."¹⁵⁴ In particular, these leaders feared that any sustained bombing of the population centers in North Vietnam would lose the United States the support of such key governments as the UK and Japan and might cause Australia and New Zealand to withdraw their forces from the fighting in Vietnam.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴See *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 4, p. 29.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 156, 251. Also see Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1982, p. 90.

IV. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS OF CONSTRAINTS ON U.S. STRATEGIES AND CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH CONSTRAINTS HAVE BEEN LIFTED

CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF CONSTRAINTS ON U.S. STRATEGIES

The preceding survey suggests several general observations about the constraints imposed on U.S. military strategies in past Third World conflicts and crises.

First, a striking *continuity* distinguishes the fundamental motivations and concerns that have induced American decisionmakers to constrain U.S. combat operations and other military responses in the Third World. The motivations to reduce the risks of conflict with the USSR, hold down civilian and military casualties, negotiate settlements, and avoid the alienation of domestic and international opinion have shaped Washington's response to all major Third World conflicts and crises since World War II. Whatever their political affiliations, U.S. administrations have behaved similarly in imposing constraints. All have consistently avoided actions that might provoke a conflict with the USSR.

Second, individual military constraints often stem from multiple motivations that collectively justify and reinforce the imposition of the constraints. The Johnson administration's prohibition against bombing the population centers in North Vietnam, for example, evolved from the objectives of (1) not provoking Chinese or Soviet intervention in the war, (2) avoiding civilian casualties and collateral damage, and (3) not alienating domestic and world opinion.

Third, while some constraints operate from the outset of a conflict, others come into significant play only later. Because of the initial popular backing of the U.S. combat interventions in Korea and Vietnam, U.S. leaders at first had considerable domestic freedom of action to prosecute those conflicts aggressively. As the wars dragged on and U.S. combat casualties mounted, however, declining domestic public support progressively constricted the battlefield options available to the government.

Finally, and most important, the U.S. strategies in past Third World conflicts and crises have been essentially the product of cumulative constraints. In all cases, purely military objectives have been subordinated to broader political-military considerations. Strategies have tended to evolve more from what the various administrations believed that the United States dare not or should not do than from what the battlefield situation of a particular conflict or crisis might optimally require.

Thus, U.S. strategies have been conditioned largely by the interaction of the motivations and concerns elucidated in this study: the all-important U.S. concern to avoid war with the USSR and the constraints relating to the human costs of conflict, public opinion, negotiations, and the policies of other states. The influence of these motivations and concerns show up clearly in the strategic choices adopted in the Korean conflict, the Cuban missile crisis, and the Vietnam war.

The Truman administration's decision not to widen the war in Korea stemmed primarily from three considerations: the avoidance of Soviet intervention or counteraction elsewhere -- events that might trigger World War III; the reluctance to inflict heavy civilian casualties on China; and the need to preserve allied cohesion for containing the USSR. Following the expulsion of Chinese and other communist forces from South Korea, the U.S. shift to an active defense on the ground was conditioned by the expected terms of a negotiated armistice and by the perceived need to hold down U.S. casualties to preserve public support for the war.

The Kennedy administration opted for a blockade rather than an air strike in the Cuban missile crisis mainly because a blockade was less likely to provoke a Soviet military reaction. Kennedy's choice was also influenced by the humanitarian concern of not inflicting large numbers of Cuban civilian casualties in a surprise attack and the related political concern of not committing an act that would incur worldwide criticism.

In the Vietnam war, the fear of Chinese and Soviet intervention and the desire to hold down civilian casualties dominated the Johnson administration's strategic decisions to confine the ground war to South Vietnam and to eschew closing the DRV's harbors, attacking the Red River dikes, and destroying North Vietnamese vital political and economic centers. Following growing domestic opposition to the war stemming from rising U.S. casualties, President Johnson in the aftermath of the Tet offensive decided to cap the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam and to trade a bombing halt for Hanoi's agreement to enter peace negotiations.

While the Nixon administration considered various escalatory options after assuming office, it rejected such options because it too feared a Chinese or Soviet reaction. Moreover, it had inherited a negotiatory process that it hoped would bear fruit, and it doubted that it could maintain sufficient domestic support to enlarge the war. To play for time and preserve a modicum of U.S. domestic support, the administration adopted the strategy of Vietnamization, strove to hold down U.S. casualties, and began to withdraw U.S. troops.

The decisions to eschew high-risk options in Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam were reinforced by two other factors: U.S. leaders believed that the less risky strategies that they had chosen to pursue would ultimately pay off, and, at the same time, they doubted that the high-risk options proposed as alternatives to these strategies would prove militarily decisive.

Lest the reader think that the motivations conditioning U.S. military responses in the Third World apply solely to high-level conflicts or have somehow become outmoded, he need only note what Jimmy Carter wrote in his diary on November 10, 1979, about the requirements for a punitive operation against Iran in the event of harm to the U.S. hostages:

We want it to be quick, incisive, surgical, no loss of American lives, not involve any other country, minimal suffering of the Iranian people themselves, to increase their reliance on imports, sure of success, and unpredictable.¹

¹Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, Bantam Books, New York, 1982, p. 461.

The recent U.S. military involvements in Lebanon and Grenada also testify to the continuity in the motivations constraining U.S. combat behavior. In both cases, the concerns to minimize American military losses and to avoid civilian casualties or unnecessary collateral damage strongly conditioned U.S. military actions.² In the Grenada invasion, U.S. commanders were ordered to "maneuver with unusual caution" to hold down U.S. casualties. This ground rule, along with the equally strong admonishment to employ U.S. firepower with great restraint and surgical precision so as to minimize urban destruction and civilian casualties, markedly slowed the advance of the U.S. forces on Grenada and disrupted the invasion timetable.³

CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH CONSTRAINTS HAVE BEEN LIFTED

American decisionmakers as a rule have proved willing to lift constraints on U.S. operations in a Third World conflict, or to override usually observed political-military prohibitions, when strong U.S. action has been required to (1) preserve the safety of U.S. forces and/or other Americans and (2) gain leverage with an adversary to break out of a strategic bind.

²The rules of engagement governing the U.S. marine peacekeeping mission in Lebanon stressed the need for U.S. personnel to protect civilian lives and property. The rules allowed the marines to return fire only when directly targeted or attacked and to use only a "minimum degree of force to accomplish any mission." Following the October 23, 1983, terrorist attack on the Marine Battalion Landing Team Headquarters at the Beirut airport, increasing emphasis was given to holding down further U.S. losses in Lebanon. As Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam put it in January 1984, "consistent with the mission they [were] performing, everything possible [was] being done to protect the marines from attack and minimize casualties." See Anne Keegan, "Marine Complaint: Can't Shoot Back," *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 1983, p. 6; Thomas L. Friedman, "America's Failure in Lebanon," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 8, 1984, pp. 62-66; and Kenneth N. Dam, "Policy Options in Lebanon," Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, January 11, 1984, *Department of State Bulletin*, February 1984, p. 29.

³See B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., "U.S. Says Invasion Looks Successful," *The New York Times*, October 27, 1983, pp. A1 and A18; and "Grenada Invasion: A Series of Surprises," *The New York Times*, November 14, 1983, p. A1.

Preserving the Safety of U.S. Forces and U.S. Nationals

The Korean war provides several examples of U.S. leaders lifting or being willing to lift constraints so as to preserve the safety of U.S. armed forces. One such occasion occurred in November 1950, shortly after Chinese forces entered North Korea, when Washington received word of General MacArthur's intention to interdict these troop movements by bombing the Yalu River bridges. Because of the grave dangers involved in the mass bombing of targets so close to Manchuria, American leaders initially withheld approval for these strikes. However, once MacArthur certified that bombing of the Yalu bridges was "essential to the safety" of his forces, permission for the attacks was granted.⁴ President Truman told Dean Acheson at the time that he "would authorize anything necessary for the security of the troops."⁵

President Truman was also prepared to authorize the bombing of Chinese air bases in Manchuria had communist air operations imperiled the safety of the UN forces in Korea.⁶ He told Prime Minister Attlee of Britain that in the event communist aircraft attacked UN ground forces, "every airfield in sight would be bombed in order to protect our troops."⁷

⁴Washington granted MacArthur permission to attack only the Yalu bridges and warned him that there "must be no violation of Manchurian territory." Areas immediately adjacent to Soviet territory remained off limits to U.S. attacks. See Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman*, Vol. 2, *Years of Trial and Hope*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1956, pp. 375-376; Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1969, p. 464; and Robert Frank Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1961, pp. 210-216.

⁵*Present at the Creation*, p. 464.

⁶*The United States Air Force in Korea*, p. 648.

⁷See James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. 3, *The Korean War*, Part I, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 12, 1978, pp. 377-378.

Finally, although for military and political reasons U.S. leaders did not want to employ atomic weapons in Korea in 1950-1951,⁸ they might nevertheless have sanctioned the use of atomic bombs to prevent the U.S. expeditionary force from being overwhelmed in a major military disaster. In August 1951, the Joint Strategic Plans Committee of the JCS concluded that atomic weapons should be used tactically in Korea "'if necessary to prevent disaster to our forces in the Far East' but only after full consideration of the dangers of an enlarged conflict."⁹ Even though Washington was prepared to evacuate U.S. forces from Korea if need be, it was not prepared to accept their destruction or capture.

While U.S. forces in Vietnam were never immediately threatened with a military disaster, U.S. leaders undoubtedly would have used strong measures to assure their security. Lyndon Johnson recalls that he turned down General Westmoreland's request for additional troops in spring 1968 largely because the battlefield situation had markedly improved in South Vietnam following the initial setbacks of the Tet offensive. However, Johnson also reports that "if Westmoreland had insisted that only a large number of reinforcements stood between his men and disaster, I would have managed to find them."¹⁰

⁸General Maxwell Taylor lists three principal military reasons why U.S. officials did not want to employ the atomic bomb in Korea: "In the first place, we had too few of them at that time to risk their expenditure so far from the major threat to our security which, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) agreed, was in Europe and not on the mainland of Asia. A secondary reason was that the mountainous terrain of Korea would have limited the effectiveness of these weapons which were not designed for such a battlefield. Finally, it was feared that their employment here might reveal shortcomings which would have diminished their deterrent effect elsewhere." See Maxwell Taylor (General, U.S. Army [Ret.]), *Swords and Plowshares*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1972, p. 134.

⁹See James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. 3, *The Korean War*, Part II, Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 1979, pp. 613-614. For other discussions of U.S. contingency planning for the use of atomic weapons in Korea, see *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Korean War*, Part I, p. 372; and Omar N. Bradley (General of the Army) and Clay Blair, *A General's Life*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1983, pp. 649-650.

¹⁰Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1971, p. 415.

The Nixon administration justified several of its escalatory actions in Indochina on the grounds that such steps would save American lives and preserve the safety of U.S. forces. The 1969-1970 secret bombing of the communist sanctuaries in Cambodia and the special air strikes against North Vietnamese supply points north of the DMZ in 1970 and 1971 were laid on in part to protect the security of U.S. troops still in South Vietnam.¹¹ Similarly, one of the motivations underlying President Nixon's decision to bomb and mine North Vietnam in 1972 was the danger that an unchecked North Vietnamese offensive would pose to the 69,000 U.S. troops still remaining in South Vietnam.¹²

When the lives of American nationals were at risk and circumstances permitted, the United States has also proved willing to use U.S. foreign air bases without host-country permission.¹³ The U.S. air bases in Thailand were used for the 1975 *Mayaguez* rescue operation even though the Thai prime minister had explicitly told the American charge d'affaires in Bangkok that "Thailand would not permit the use of its bases for U.S. action or retaliation against Cambodia."¹⁴

With no other bases available in the area, the United States had no choice but to rely on its air facilities in Thailand to mount the Marine force helicopter assault on Tang Island, where the *Mayaguez* crew

¹¹See William W. Momyer (General, USAF [Ret.]), *Air Power in Three Wars*, Department of the Air Force, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1978, p. 31; and Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1979, pp. 242, 247, 254.

¹²Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Grosset & Dunlop, New York, 1978, p. 588.

¹³The U.S. willingness to override host-country objections to the use of its facilities has not necessarily been limited to occasions when American lives have been at risk. President Eisenhower, for example, states that in an "extreme emergency it might have become necessary to ignore the Saudi Arabian decision" to deny the use of the U.S. Air Force base at Dhahran for the 1958 U.S. airlift of supplies to British forces in Jordan. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956-1961*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York, 1965, p. 280.

¹⁴See Richard G. Head, Frisco W. Short, and Robert C. McFarlane, *Crisis Resolution: Presidential Decision Making in the Mayaguez and Korean Confrontations*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1978, pp. 110, 114, 131-132.

erroneously was thought to be held. President Ford writes that he knew that the "Thais wouldn't be very happy" about the U.S. action, "but until *Mayaguez* and her crew were safe, I didn't give a damn about offending their sensibilities."¹⁵ The Thai government resented this unauthorized use of its territory and, partly for this reason, subsequently terminated its base agreement with the United States.

Gaining Leverage to Break Out of a Strategic Bind

Toward the end of both the Korean and Vietnam wars, American leaders proved ready to lift constraints in order to establish leverage in armistice negotiations. In spring 1953, President Eisenhower threatened both to extend the Korean war to China and to use atomic weapons to force an agreement at the armistice talks. In 1972, President Nixon ordered the bombing of North Vietnam and the mining of its harbors in order to stem the communist Easter offensive against South Vietnam and to regain leverage for the United States at the Paris peace negotiations.

Both Eisenhower's threats in Korea and Nixon's escalations in Vietnam occurred when the United States:

- Had already made its *maximum feasible concessions* at the negotiating table and was confronting an adversary that was clearly stalling for better terms
- Had suffered more than 40 percent of its total war casualties after negotiations had begun¹⁶
- Faced either abjectly accepting enemy terms or continuing to fight as before, but under increasingly adverse conditions.

¹⁵Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal*, Berkley Publishing Corp., New York, 1980, p. 268.

¹⁶About 45 percent of the U.S. casualties in the Korean war occurred after the truce talks started. In the case of Vietnam, about 41 percent of the U.S. casualties occurred after the Paris peace negotiations began.

In both cases the escalatory threats and actions were designed to secure only limited objectives, namely, to terminate an exhausting conflict under terms already demanded of the enemy. In neither Korea nor Vietnam was escalation used to win a traditional military victory.

Escalation Threats in Korea. By the time the Eisenhower administration entered office in early 1953, the truce talks in Korea had been going on for over 1-1/2 years. While the negotiations had produced agreement on a number of major armistice issues, including several on which the United States had made significant concessions, the truce talks were hung up on the last important outstanding point -- the voluntary repatriation of prisoners of war. The United States refused to abandon the principle of voluntary repatriation, whereas the communists demanded that all prisoners, willing or not, be repatriated.¹⁷

After reviewing the situation in spring 1953, President Eisenhower concluded that unless the two sides could quickly achieve a satisfactory armistice, the United States would have to change its strategic policy to break the impasse. In Eisenhower's view, to allow the war to drag on would have been "intolerable," particularly since U.S. forces "were sustaining heavy casualties for little, if any, gain."¹⁸

In the event the communist Chinese refused to accede to an armistice in a reasonable time, Eisenhower believed it might be necessary "to go over to a major offensive" in Korea. Aside from the commitment of additional ROK and U.S. ground troops, such an offensive would have required that the war "be expanded outside of Korea -- with strikes against the supporting Chinese airfields in Manchuria, a blockade of the Chinese coast, and similar measures." To keep such an attack from "becoming overly costly" in casualties, the president believed that "we would have to use atomic weapons."¹⁹

¹⁷See Barry M. Blechman and Robert Powell, "What in the Name of God Is Strategic Superiority?" *Political Science Quarterly*, Winter 1982-83, p. 590.

¹⁸See Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York, 1963, p. 178.

¹⁹*Mandate for Change*, pp. 179-180. While Eisenhower seemed to believe that atomic weapons could be effective in dislodging Chinese forces from their positions in Korea, the JCS saw "no good strategic

Eisenhower was reluctant, however, to undertake such an offensive for the reasons that had also troubled his predecessor, namely, the "possibility of the Soviet Union entering the war" and the "rifts" that the use of atomic weapons would create between the United States and its allies.²⁰ Therefore, he attempted to get the communists to give way so that he would to put these plans into operation. In his words, he

let the Communist authorities understand that, in the absence of satisfactory progress, we intended to move decisively without inhibition in our use of weapons, and would no longer be responsible for confining hostilities to the Korean Peninsula.²¹

The United States discreetly dropped word of its intention to expand the war to China and employ atomic weapons where it would reach Soviet and Chinese communist ears -- namely, in India, at the Panmunjom truce talks, and in the area of the Formosa Straits.²² These U.S. threats, along with the intensified U.S. air campaign against North Korea in spring 1953 and the political thaw that followed the death of Stalin in early March 1953, are generally credited with bringing about the communist decision to terminate the Korean war in July 1953.

While some observers differ about the factors that weighed most heavily in China's decision to liquidate the Korean conflict, President Eisenhower and his key advisers clearly thought that it was the atomic threat.²³ When Sherman Adams later asked Eisenhower what had brought

targets within the confines of Korea itself" The JCS saw the most effective use of atomic weapons to be against targets outside Korea. According to the JCS view, if the U.S. "went over to more positive action against the enemy in Korea," it would have to expand the war to Chinese territory and use atomic weapons in "considerable numbers." See the reports of May 1953 National Security Council meetings in "For Eisenhower, 2 Goals If Bomb Was to Be Used," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1984, p. A8.

²⁰*Mandate for Change*, p. 180.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 181.

²²*Ibid.*

²³For alternative views on the role of the atomic threat in bringing the Korean war to a conclusion, see David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1964, pp. 404-406, 416-419; and Blechman and Powell, *Political Science Quarterly*, Winter 1982-83, pp. 589-597.

the communists to agree to the truce in Korea, the president responded without hesitation:

Danger of an atomic war. We told them we could not hold it to a limited war any longer if the communists welched on a treaty of truce. They didn't want a full-scale war or an atomic attack. That kept them under some control.²⁴

Escalations in Indochina. Aside from secretly bombing the communist sanctuaries in Cambodia, the Nixon administration lifted previously imposed constraints at four different times in Indochina. It justified these escalations as necessary defensive moves designed to buy time for the Vietnamization program, to ward off a catastrophic defeat, or to regain leverage to force Hanoi to terminate the war.

The first escalation occurred in May 1970, when American and ARVN ground forces moved into Cambodia. Other escalations took place in February 1971, when ARVN troops made an incursion into Laos; in April and May 1972, when the United States resumed the sustained bombing of North Vietnam and mined its harbors; and in December 1972, when U.S. B-52s and other aircraft attacked formerly off-limits targets in Hanoi and Haiphong.

The May 1970 incursion into Cambodia was aimed primarily at fending off a future military defeat in South Vietnam. Following the coup that overthrew Prince Sihanouk in March 1970, communist forces stationed along the South Vietnam-Cambodia border turned westward and launched an offensive to oust the new Lon Nol government.²⁵

Convinced that the loss of Cambodia would psychologically shatter the Saigon regime and place South Vietnam in an untenable military situation, "threatened from the west as well as the north," President Nixon directed U.S. ground forces and Vietnamese units to invade the communist sanctuaries in Cambodia.²⁶ Because of the resultant domestic

²⁴See Sherman Adams, *Firsthand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1961, pp. 48-49.

²⁵By the end of April 1970, communist forces controlled some 25 percent of Cambodia and were moving toward Phnom Penh. See *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 448.

²⁶*Ibid.*; see also *White House Years*, pp. 475, 486, 490, 493.

uproar in the United States, however, American participation in the incursion was strictly limited in both space and time: U.S. troops were allowed to penetrate less than 25 miles into Cambodia and were withdrawn after only two months of operations.²⁷

The February 1971 Vietnamese incursion into Laos (Lam Son 719) was conceived as a temporary defensive step to forestall an anticipated communist offensive in South Vietnam. By having two ARVN divisions interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail near Tchepone in Laos, U.S. planners hoped to prevent a communist logistic buildup that would enable an offensive later in the year.²⁸ The incursion was seen as a way to buy time for the Vietnamization program to take further root and "enhance Hanoi's incentive to negotiate."²⁹

To avoid the adverse public and congressional reactions that the use of U.S. ground troops in Laos would elicit, Washington made the ground operations a purely Vietnamese affair; American forces provided only air cover and long-range artillery support.³⁰ Denied the services of U.S. combat advisers and air controllers, the ARVN divisions in Laos proved inadequate for the operation.³¹ After some three weeks of

²⁷Kissinger states that the limitations on geography and time placed on U.S. operations in Cambodia "helped only marginally to calm the Congress and the media but certainly kept us from obtaining the operations' full benefit." (*White House Years*, p. 507.) The incursion nevertheless succeeded in taking the steam out of the communist offensive and allowed U.S. forces to capture large stockpiles of communist arms.

²⁸*White House Years*, pp. 986, 989-990.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 990.

³⁰*The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 498. According to Kissinger, President Nixon encountered stiff opposition from his cabinet to any U.S. combat role in the Laos operation. "Since each Cabinet member was concerned about the domestic reaction to American involvement, Nixon at every Laos planning session agreed to reduce the American participation and to put new restraints on our actions. Each of these steps may have been minor; the cumulative impact was considerable, practically and above all psychologically. Filtering down through layers of command, it was bound to convey a sense of hesitation to the field commanders; they in turn had to focus as much on the restraints as on their main job: prevailing on the battlefield." *White House Years*, p. 996.

³¹Aside from serious problems in the South Vietnamese command structure, the Vietnamese forces in Laos were hampered by an absence of trained ground controllers who could speak English to direct U.S. strike aircraft. See *White House Years*, p. 992.

sustained combat, the ARVN forces began to retreat; all had left Laos before the end of March.

The U.S. bombing and mining of North Vietnam in spring 1972 were defensive counters to the Easter offensive that the North Vietnamese launched on April 1. Although it had long been expected by Saigon and Washington, the communist offensive almost succeeded in overrunning South Vietnam. By the time the attack began, U.S. forces in South Vietnam had dropped to 69,000 and ARVN forces, even with massive U.S. air support, were hard pressed to contain the tank-led North Vietnamese assaults around Hue, Kontum, and An Loc.

To help stem this country-wide offensive, which constituted a massive violation of the bombing-halt understanding established in 1968, the Nixon administration in early April ordered U.S. forces to resume the sustained bombing of North Vietnam. The battlefield situation in South Vietnam continued to deteriorate, and in early May, U.S. forces were directed to mine the approaches to Haiphong and other North Vietnamese harbors.³²

Aside from providing air support to the ARVN forces in South Vietnam, the United States had no cards to play other than the bombing and mining in North Vietnam. Believing that the 1972 offensive would prove to be the turning point in the war, the Nixon administration considered these operations essential to re-establishing Washington's depleted bargaining leverage with the Hanoi regime.³³ The only way to bring the conflict to a conclusion "was to carry the war to North Vietnam."³⁴ As Kissinger summed it up at the time the decision to mine was made:

³²At the beginning of May, General Abrams told Kissinger: "[I]t is quite possible that the South Vietnamese have lost their will to fight, or to hang together, and that the whole thing may well be lost." *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 594.

³³Nixon felt that the North Vietnamese offensive "had moved the war into a final stage," when it would be won or lost. *Ibid.*, p. 588. Kissinger also believed that the Easter offensive would be the turning point in the war. He writes: "I was convinced that, whatever the outcome of the offensive, it would end the war. This was Hanoi's last throw of the dice. One way or another, there would now be serious negotiations; their substance would depend upon which side prevailed on the battlefield. If South Vietnam collapsed, the war would have ended in a debacle. If Saigon, with our help, held back the entire North Vietnamese army, Hanoi would have no choice but to come to terms." *White House Years*, p. 1098.

³⁴See *White House Years*, pp. 1113, 1116.

The mining would shake Hanoi's faith that time was on its side. It would strengthen morale in South Vietnam. It would give us an additional bargaining counter for the return of our prisoners. It might accelerate negotiations.³⁵

The final U.S. escalation in the war, the 1972 Christmas bombing of formerly off-limits targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, was aimed at forcing North Vietnam to abandon its stalling tactics in the Paris peace negotiations and quickly settle the war on the terms it had already agreed to. By early December 1972, almost all the remaining problems in the peace agreement had been ironed out, often as a result of U.S. concessions, because, according to Kissinger, by that time Nixon "wanted the war over on almost any terms."³⁶ However, in mid-December the communist negotiators began to stall and reject terms they had accepted earlier.

According to Kissinger, Hanoi at this point had made a new "strategic decision to prolong the war, abort all negotiations, and at the last moment seek unconditional victory once again."³⁷ Fearing that the incoming Congress might cut off funds for the war in January, Nixon felt "only the strongest action" would suffice to bring the communists to immediate terms.³⁸ He ordered massive B-52 bombing attacks against targets in Hanoi and Haiphong. The B-52s were chosen partly for shock effect, but also because they could strike even in the poor weather conditions prevailing over North Vietnam at that time of year.³⁹

³⁵Ibid., p. 1183.

³⁶Ibid., p. 1446. Nixon reports that as of December 9, 1972, "there remained only one major unresolved issue, the DMZ. In fact, the North Vietnamese had already agreed to it during the November negotiations." *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 731.

³⁷*White House Years*, pp. 1439, 1446.

³⁸See *ibid.*, pp. 1446-1447; and *Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, pp. 732-734.

³⁹During the 11-day bombing campaign, some 729 B-52 and 2123 tactical sorties were flown over North Vietnam. At the end of the campaign, when Hanoi's SAM and other air defenses had been exhausted, the B-52s were bombing with virtual impunity and probably could have continued the campaign without further loss to enemy action. See *Air Power in Three Wars*, p. 241.

The Christmas bombing quickly brought the communist negotiators to accept the peace terms that they had agreed to earlier in the month. This ended the U.S. combat involvement in Vietnam.⁴⁰

In sum, the Nixon administration's escalations in Indochina were essentially defensive and designed to extricate the United States from the war under terms that were at best only marginally acceptable. Moreover, all occurred after the United States had made known its intention to disengage unilaterally from the ground war in Vietnam and had begun to withdraw its troops.

The most serious escalations -- the 1972 mining and bombing of North Vietnam -- took place only after the United States had already made its maximum concessions at the peace table. This included the crucial concession embodied in Washington's October 1970 standstill cease-fire proposal that permitted North Vietnamese forces to remain in South Vietnam.⁴¹ After that concession, the United States could give in to little more than Hanoi's infamous demand that America hand over South Vietnam by overthrowing the Thieu regime⁴².

The 1972 escalations against North Vietnam also occurred in a markedly different international environment from that existing during the Johnson administration's Rolling Thunder bombing campaign. The Nixon visit to China and the detente with the USSR had substantially eased the tensions between Washington and those communist powers. Improved relations, along with the obviously defensive purpose of the U.S. retaliations against North Vietnam, reduced the risks of any external communist military reactions to the bombing or mining.⁴³

⁴⁰The U.S. bombing in Cambodia, however, continued until August 1973, when it was terminated as a result of congressional action.

⁴¹The United States had abandoned the mutual withdrawal formula in May 1969 but did not explicitly accept the right of North Vietnamese troops to remain in South Vietnam until the October 1970 standstill cease-fire proposal. See the remarks by Peter W. Rodman, a former Kissinger assistant, in *Some Lessons and Non-Lessons of Vietnam: Ten Years after the Paris Peace Accords*, Conference Report, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., 1983, p. 16.

⁴²By dropping its long-standing demand that the United States oust the Thieu regime, Hanoi in October 1972 essentially accepted the peace terms that the United States had offered for over two years.

⁴³Indeed, rather than being worried about possible Soviet military countermoves, Nixon's chief concern in 1972 was that the mining and

Finally, the escalations came late in an already unpopular war and elicited tremendous popular and congressional opposition at home. By the time the peace agreement was signed in 1973, the U.S. government lacked the public support even to attempt to enforce it.

The United States had sought to preserve the Korean armistice essentially by the same means it had used to secure the cease-fire, namely, the threat to use atomic weapons and to carry the war to China in the event hostilities were resumed.⁴⁴ The United States announced shortly after signing the Korean armistice agreement that if the fighting broke out again, "in all probability, it would not be possible to confine hostilities within the frontiers of Korea."⁴⁵ The credibility of this threat, along with the strong defensive lines that were established along the DMZ in Korea and continued to be manned partly by U.S. forces, served to maintain the peace in Korea.

None of these conditions pertained in the case of South Vietnam. South Vietnam's long borders with Cambodia and Laos allowed no strong permanent defenses and required that ARVN forces be spread thinly around

bombing might cause Moscow to cancel his forthcoming visit to the USSR. However, both the Chinese and Soviets reacted mildly to the 1972 escalations, and Moscow received Nixon on schedule. See *White House Years*, pp. 1176-1179, 1193-1197.

⁴⁴The Eisenhower administration clearly contemplated the use of atomic weapons in the event of a renewed communist attack in Korea. At a National Security Council meeting on December 3, 1953, Eisenhower agreed with the JCS judgment that if the Chinese communists resumed the war in Korea, the U.S. should respond with a massive atomic air strike against targets in China. In his words, "We should certainly respond by hitting them hard and wherever it would hurt most, including Peiping itself." Secretary of State Dulles, however, saw "grave disadvantages" to immediate attacks against Chinese cities because such attacks would involve the United States in "general war with China and probably also with the Soviet Union because of the Sino-Soviet alliance." Dulles argued instead for initial courses of action that would be "less likely to involve the Soviet Union in the war." According to the Dulles and State Department view, the first course of action would have been a "full atomic strike in Korea itself." The second would have involved the "bombing of troop concentrations in and near the area of Korea." See "For Eisenhower, 2 Goals If Bomb Was to Be Used," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1954, p. A8.

⁴⁵See Walter G. Hermes, *United States Army in the Korean War*:

the country and thus vulnerable to defeat in detail.⁴⁶ No American forces remained in Vietnam to deter the resumption of hostilities.

The United States had expended so much domestic tranquillity on extricating itself from Vietnam that it had no appetite for reinvolverment of any kind. When the North Vietnamese began to violate the Paris accords by sending new forces into South Vietnam in early 1973, the Nixon administration refused to mount even a token bombing response because of the public and congressional uproar that this would have created.⁴⁷ Nor could the administration stop the Congress from cutting vital U.S. economic and military aid to South Vietnam, cuts that severely weakened South Vietnam's capability to defend itself.⁴⁸

Despite Nixon's assurances that this country would aid South Vietnam in the event of a major attack,⁴⁹ the Ford administration, because of congressional opposition, could do nothing to militarily assist South Vietnam in spring 1975, when it was overwhelmed by a North Vietnamese offensive.⁵⁰ Thus, the ultimate failure of the U.S. Vietnam strategy was that it could neither force North Vietnam to terminate the conflict nor, in the absence of a permanent peace, contribute to, much less provide for, the sustained defense of South Vietnam.

Truce Tent and Fighting Front, Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D.C., 1966, pp. 492-493.

⁴⁶For a description of the problems in South Vietnam's defense posture on the eve of the communist offensive in 1975, see Stephen T. Hosmer, Konrad Kellen, Brian M. Jenkins, *The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders*, Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., New York, 1980, pp. 131-151, 159-160, 167, 207-208.

⁴⁷As Kissinger told Nixon in April 1973, when they had decided not to resume bombing in response to the peace agreement violations: "If we didn't have this damn domestic situation, a week of bombing would put this agreement in force." Kissinger was referring to the growing Watergate scandal, as well as to the strong antiwar sentiment in the Congress and public at large. See Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1982, p. 326.

⁴⁸See *The Fall of South Vietnam*, pp. 29-35.

⁴⁹At his meeting with Thieu at San Clemente on April 2-3, 1973, President Nixon reportedly told Thieu that "The U.S. will meet all contingencies in case the agreement is grossly violated. . . . You can count on us." Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁰*A Time to Heal*, pp. 242-249.

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