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History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam 1960–1968

Part 3

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History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam 1960–1968

Part 3

Graham A. Cosmas

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Foreword

Established during World War II to advise the President regarding the strategic direction of the armed forces of the United States, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) continued in existence after the war, and as military advisers and planners, have played a significant role in the development of national policy. Knowledge of JCS relations with the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense in the years since World War II is essential to an understanding of their current work. An account of their activity in peacetime and during crises provides, moreover, an important series of chapters in the military history of the United States. For these reasons, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that an official history be written for the record. Its value for instructional purposes, for the orientation of officers newly assigned to the JCS organization and as a source of information for staff studies, will be readily recognized.

Written to complement *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy* series, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam* focuses upon the activities of the Joint Chiefs that were concerned with the conflicts in Indochina and later Vietnam. The nature of the activities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the sensitivity of the sources used caused the volumes of the series to be written as classified documents. Classification designations in the footnotes are those that appeared in the classified publication.

This three-part volume describes JCS activities related to the Vietnam War during the period 1960–1968. Originally, the volume was written as a collaborative effort by members of the Historical Division; each part is being updated and published separately. In the preface, Dr. Graham Cosmas discusses the general nature of the revisions that he made in updating the text. Dr. David Armstrong edited the revised version of Part Three; Ms. Susan Carroll compiled the Index; and Ms. Penny Norman prepared the manuscript for publication.

The volume was reviewed for declassification by the appropriate US Government departments and agencies and cleared for release. The volume is an official publication of the Joint Chiefs of Staff but, inasmuch as the text has not been considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it must be construed as descriptive only and does not constitute the official position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on any subject.

Washington, DC

DAVID A. ARMSTRONG
Director for Joint History

Preface

Part III of *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968*, describes the formulation of policies and decisions during the years 1967–1968, the period during which the United States military escalation in Southeast Asia culminated. As it was written well before the war ended, the sources its authors used were quite limited; for example, the *Pentagon Papers* were not then available. Since that time, additional source material on all aspects of the war has become available both in US official records and in histories produced by the other side and made available in English. Using this new material, I have substantially revised and in some cases expanded every chapter of the study, particularly those covering the Tet Offensive and the US reaction to it.

During the period covered by this study, the United States' military effort in Indochina, both in the ground battle in South Vietnam and the air war against North Vietnam, reached its highest level. As the scale and costs of the conflict increased with no sign of a decisive outcome, American public support for the war began to crumble as did the Johnson administration's confidence in its own policies. When the Communists launched their nationwide Tet Offensive early in 1968, the President and his advisers were already taking tentative steps toward limiting the American commitment and turning more of the war over to the South Vietnamese. Although a costly tactical defeat for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, the shock of the Tet Offensive set the Johnson administration on a course of de-escalation from which there was to be no turning back.

Graham A. Cosmas

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History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam 1960–1968

Part 3

1

The Situation, January 1967

At the beginning of 1967, the United States was engaged in a steadily expanding air and ground war in Southeast Asia. Since its inception in February 1965, Operation ROLLING THUNDER, the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, had escalated in the number and significance of its targets, inflicting major damage on transportation networks, industry, and petroleum refining and storage facilities. Yet the campaign showed no signs of achieving either of its stated objectives. The air attacks had not broken the Hanoi government's will to continue the war, and they had not halted or appreciably hindered the flow of North Vietnamese troops and supplies to the fighting in the south. North Vietnam had been able to repair damage and develop substitutes for destroyed facilities rapidly enough to counter the incremental escalation of the US air campaign. With Soviet and Chinese assistance, the North Vietnamese had built a large and sophisticated air defense system. Its guns and missiles extracted a toll in pilots and aircraft for every American raid.[1]

On the ground in South Vietnam, the US force buildup, begun in late 1965, was approaching completion. More than 380,000 American troops were in the country, alongside over 730,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and some 52,000 fighting men from other allied nations. After a year of base building and intensifying combat, the American commander, General William C. Westmoreland, believed that his forces were ready for major offensives that would seize the battlefield initiative from the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. The enemy, however, had been conducting their own buildup, including the infiltration into South Vietnam of regular divisions of Hanoi's army. These units, along with Viet Cong guerrillas and light infantry formations, were countering the American challenge. Within South Vietnam, the enemy sought opportunities to inflict American casualties in large and small engagements. They also concentrated troops at various points on South Vietnam's borders to create a strategic threat to the allies and compel the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, (MACV) to disperse its reserves.[2]

The US joint command structure for conducting the war was well established. Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Commander in Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC) had overall charge of operations in Southeast Asia. Under close supervision from Washington, he directly controlled the ROLLING THUNDER air offensive against North Vietnam. General Westmoreland, as Commander, US Military Assistance Command Vietnam (COMUSMACV), a subordinate joint headquarters under Sharp, directed American combat operations, military assistance, and pacification activities in South Vietnam, as well as air and covert ground operations on an "extended battlefield" in the Laotian panhandle and the southernmost portion of North Vietnam. In Laos, Westmoreland shared military authority with Ambassador William L. Sullivan, whose staff in Vientiane waged their own expanding but publicly unacknowledged war in the northern part of the country against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese.

From Sharp, the chain of command ran to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and President Lyndon B. Johnson, both of whom concerned themselves with every aspect of the conflict. As the war in South Vietnam expanded, these senior officials often communicated instructions and questions directly to General Westmoreland in Saigon rather than passing them through Admiral Sharp in Honolulu. To avoid misunderstandings between the Pacific and MACV commanders, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, made a practice of transmitting all messages from the senior officials, as well as his own, simultaneously to Sharp and Westmoreland. The two commanders in turn sent each other copies of their messages to Washington. Seeking to maintain a united military front in dealing with McNamara, the three officers regularly orchestrated their briefings and messages for the Secretary on policy issues, especially when preparing for McNamara's frequent visits to South Vietnam.[3]

Wheeler also sought a united front with the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, whose relationship with Secretary McNamara was becoming ever more contentious. Since President John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961, the Joint Chiefs increasingly had found themselves relegated to the periphery of national security policy making, supplanted by McNamara and his civilian, so-called "whiz kid," advisers from industry and academe. The Secretary and his assistants repeatedly second-guessed the Chiefs on matters the JCS considered within their professional purview. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson both distrusted their uniformed military advisers, believing that the generals and admirals lacked the political sophistication to deal with the unprecedented strategic problems posed by the nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union. In debates on the defense budget, on weapons selection, and on the handling of international events such as the Cuban missile crisis, the Chiefs' counsel was regularly rejected by McNamara and the President. Even the Chairman was shut out of the president's councils, his advice and proposals funneled through McNamara.[4]

The Joint Chiefs' position in administration councils was marginal even though, by 1967, all the members were Kennedy and Johnson appointees, selected for their willingness to defer to civilian authority and incorporate political, diplomatic, and economic considerations into their thinking about military strategy. The Chairman, General Wheeler; the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Harold K. Johnson; the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral David L. McDonald; the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General John P. McConnell; and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene Jr., all had performed successfully in various command and staff assignments in their respective services. Most had seen combat in World War II or Korea. All had been selected and groomed by their services for the most senior positions.

For all their qualifications and experience, however, none of the incumbent Joint Chiefs possessed the public visibility and prestige of Eisenhower, Marshall, Bradley, Burke, Vandenberg, and the other World War II giants who had preceded them. The last of the senior World War II leaders to serve, Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis E. LeMay, retired in January 1965 bitterly at odds with the Secretary of Defense. President Johnson's Joint Chiefs were unwilling to challenge publicly Johnson's and McNamara's decisions even when they privately disagreed with them. Wheeler attempted to counter McNamara's influence by securing consensus among the Chiefs on major policy issues and avoiding "split papers" revealing service differences. He succeeded in homogenizing military advice but did not gain substantially more influence over administration policy.[5]

President Johnson kept the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the margin of his policymaking for the Vietnam War. The President attempted to oversee every detail of military operations, at the cost of increasing physical and emotional strain. He relied for advice primarily upon a small group of trusted officials—McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and successive presidential national security advisers, McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow. Johnson used his regular Tuesday luncheons with these principals as his main venue for managing the war; for example, the luncheon attendees picked the targets for ROLLING THUNDER. Since General Wheeler did not become a regular member of the Tuesday lunch group until October 1967, the views of the Joint Chiefs that usually reached Johnson were filtered by McNamara. The President used his rare face-to-face meetings with the Joint Chiefs not to seek their advice but to gain their endorsement of decisions he had already made. To forestall open dissent from the Joint Chiefs that the Republican political opposition could exploit, Johnson regularly gave the Chiefs part, but never all, of what they wanted on Vietnam. He thereby kept the generals under the illusion that if they stayed loyal they eventually could move the administration all the way in the directions they favored.[6]

By late 1966, Secretary McNamara and his civilian assistants were locked in contention with the Joint Chiefs of Staff over the direction of ROLLING THUNDER. From the start of the campaign, the Joint Chiefs had urged rapid escalation of

the bombing offensive, with strikes on all of North Vietnam's principal military and industrial targets as well as its major seaport, Haiphong. At the advice of McNamara and other civilian officials, however, President Johnson chose to expand the program slowly. Initially, he kept the most important targets off limits to air attack. Influenced by "limited war" theory, which viewed military force primarily as a diplomatic bargaining tool, Johnson also was obsessed with avoiding actions that could provoke a wider war with Communist China and possibly the Soviet Union. Since China had committed tens of thousands of air defense troops and engineers to assist North Vietnam, Johnson had reason for concern.[7]

Throughout the first year and a half of ROLLING THUNDER, the civilian-military tug-of-war continued. Pressed by the Joint Chiefs and Admiral Sharp, Johnson gradually expanded the air campaign, allowing strikes on a lengthening list of the important targets. McNamara acquiesced in this expansion but became increasingly skeptical of the effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER. The bombing clearly had not weakened Hanoi's will to continue the war. In addition, according to civilian experts commissioned by McNamara to analyze the campaign, the air attacks had not significantly diminished North Vietnam's capacity to send men and supplies to the south. When air strikes during summer and autumn 1966 against North Vietnam's petroleum refining, storage, and transportation system, long advocated by the military, produced only inconclusive results, the Defense Secretary's doubts were reinforced. By the end of the year, McNamara was urging the President to cease expanding ROLLING THUNDER and to consider a full or partial bombing halt as an inducement to North Vietnam to open negotiations to end the war. The JCS vehemently dissented from these proposals.[8]

Regarding the campaign in South Vietnam, the civilian leaders and the Joint Chiefs alike approved General Westmoreland's strategy of using US troops principally in attacks on the enemy's large units and logistics bases ("Search and Destroy" operations) while the South Vietnamese regular and territorial forces operated in support of pacification. During 1966, however, McNamara and the Joint Chiefs disagreed over whether and how much to reinforce Westmoreland's command. The Joint Chiefs endorsed a proposal by Sharp and Westmoreland to build up MACV to a total strength of 542,500 personnel by adding infantry, armored cavalry, and tank battalions equivalent to another division plus five tactical air squadrons and numerous combat and logistical support units. The military leaders argued that MACV required the additional troops to counter a North Vietnamese and Viet Cong buildup and contended that the larger American force would bring the war to an earlier conclusion.

McNamara questioned whether Westmoreland really needed more US troops. On the basis of statistical input-output analyses of MACV's order of battle and casualty statistics, the Defense Secretary concluded that an increase in American forces would not produce a proportional increase in enemy losses because the Communists usually could avoid battle when they wished to. Instead, additional reinforcements

would simply multiply the human, political, and economic costs of the war to the United States, undermining the nation's capacity to outlast the enemy in a prolonged contest. Westmoreland, McNamara argued, had enough troops to punish and neutralize the enemy's large units, which was the most that could be expected from "search-and-destroy" given the political and geographical limits of the war. Rather than feeding in more American soldiers, the United States should shift its priorities to improving the South Vietnamese forces so that they could conduct a more effective pacification campaign.

The JCS themselves undermined the military's campaign for more troops in Vietnam. They informed McNamara that, to meet Westmoreland's full request without dangerously weakening forces earmarked for NATO and other commitments, it would be necessary to mobilize more than 600,000 reservists. President Johnson considered such a mobilization politically out of the question, ruinous to his cherished Great Society domestic program.

The immediate issue was resolved by compromise. Warned by Wheeler that his maximum proposal was "in trouble in the Washington arena" and aware that without mobilization, the size of the force that the services could sustain in Vietnam was limited, Westmoreland scaled back his troop request. He had his staff develop plans for what he called a "level-off" force sufficient to wear down the enemy in a lengthy conflict and sustainable without using the reserves. He estimated this force at between 480,000 and 500,000 men and indicated that the lower number would suffice during 1967. After discussions with Westmoreland in Saigon, McNamara on 14 October recommended a minimum reinforcement that would bring MACV's strength to about 470,000 men by mid-1968. President Johnson accepted the recommendation, which did not require a mobilization of reserves.[9]

As 1967 began, the Johnson administration presented a public face of unity and optimism on Vietnam, but this façade masked internal doubts and unresolved disagreements. Secretary of Defense McNamara had concluded that there was "no reasonable way to bring the war to an end soon."[10] He was urging the President to prepare for a long struggle by topping off both American troop strength in South Vietnam and the bombing offensive against the north. McNamara advocated a search for a negotiated settlement of the war, including a pause or cessation of ROLLING THUNDER as an inducement to Hanoi to come to the peace table. By contrast, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, seconded by Sharp and Westmoreland, continued to press their campaign to move the administration by stages to a larger military effort—more US troops in the south, more bombing in the north—although Westmoreland was willing to live with a ceiling on his ground forces.

President Johnson had conflicting objectives. He wanted to keep the war limited, in order to avoid a wider conflict with China or the Soviet Union and to minimize the diversion of resources and political capital from his domestic reform program. Yet he was equally determined not to "lose" South Vietnam to the Communists, if only because such a defeat also could endanger his Great Society. He

gave conflicting signals to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at once exhorting them to "kill more VC" and restricting the military measures they could use. Trying to make strategy by compromise, Johnson was maneuvering himself into a military escalation at once too large to be indefinitely sustainable politically and economically and yet too limited to bring about a battlefield decision. Aware of the paradox, and of the growing public opposition to the war in the United States, Johnson nevertheless saw no alternative to continuing his political balancing act into 1967.[11]

In contrast to the Americans, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were firmly committed to their own strategy of escalation and were fully confident of ultimate success. In October 1966, the Politburo in Hanoi decided to "intensify the military and political struggle in South Vietnam." To this end "the operations of our main force units would have to be developed to a new level to meet our requirements to annihilate enemy battalions, to be able to annihilate entire American and satellite brigades, and to drive each individual puppet division to its knees."[12] Clearly, 1967 would be a year of collision between the irresistible force and the immovable object.

2

Action on the Diplomatic Front

McNamara made his recommendation that the President seek peace negotiations in the context of an administration search for a formula and venue for talks with North Vietnam. Notwithstanding the failure of the "peace offensive" of January–February 1966, the United States did not relax its efforts to negotiate a settlement of the Vietnamese war. Throughout the world, US diplomats were constantly alert to detect the slightest sign that that the other side was prepared to talk seriously about peace. They examined every lead in the belief that US military successes during 1966 and what they thought should be dwindling enemy hopes for a clear-cut military victory would eventually lead to fruitful negotiations. Unfortunately, as North Vietnamese histories make clear, the other side's hopes had not diminished to any noticeable extent. Firm in their confidence of ultimate success, the North Vietnamese would be difficult negotiating partners at best.[1]

In mid-November 1966, one of the diplomatic listening posts flashed a signal that the enemy might be shifting his position toward willingness to negotiate. This signal touched off a concerted effort by the United States, lasting until the end of February 1967, to get peace talks started. During this period, US diplomats were in direct contact with the North Vietnamese in Moscow and attempted to achieve another such contact in Warsaw. They also sought to enlist the support of Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin, Prime Minister Harold Wilson of Great Britain, and UN Secretary General U Thant. Eventually, all their efforts ended in a failure that was followed by a year-long lull in significant diplomatic activity.

These negotiations were of concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff because of their potential effects not only on the immediate tactical situation in Southeast Asia but also on long-term strategic interests of the United States. Nevertheless, as was the case with so much of the Johnson administration policy, the JCS were not asked for formal views on any aspect of these peace efforts. Their position on some elements of the question was available to Secretaries McNamara and Rusk through a presentation the Chiefs had made in May 1965. At that time, the JCS had stated

the minimum conditions for halting the bombing of North Vietnam: cessation of infiltration into and withdrawal from South Vietnam and Laos of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces; agreement between North and South Vietnam to settle future differences peacefully; and an immediate exchange of prisoners. The first of these conditions became the core of the administration position in the diplomatic maneuvering of late 1966 and early 1967.[2]

Operation MARIGOLD

Action in the new diplomatic offensive began in Saigon in mid-November 1966. The Polish representative on the International Control Commission, Mr. Janus Lewandowski, offered to present the US position to the North Vietnamese Government—which, he claimed, was prepared to negotiate a definitive political settlement of the Vietnam War. Lewandowski had first suggested to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., that Hanoi was prepared to negotiate in June and thereafter had held occasional conversations on the subject with Lodge. This remained an academic exercise, however, until November, when Lewandowski announced that he was about to go to Hanoi and repeated his offer to state the US position to the North Vietnamese and to see whether negotiations could be arranged.[3]

Acting on instruction, Lodge spelled out for Lewandowski the US position in several mid-November meetings. The US government was primarily interested in the reaction of Hanoi to a formula designed to overcome North Vietnamese objections to granting military concessions in return for a halt to the ROLLING THUNDER bombing. The formula consisted of two phases: first, a halt to the bombing without a specific simultaneous compensating de-escalation, but on the clear understanding that both sides would later take reciprocal but unspecified de-escalatory steps; second, the actual implementation of these reciprocal steps. In the second phase, Hanoi's actions would appear to be in response to actions taken by the United States subsequent to the bombing halt rather than as a response to the bombing halt itself. If, as part of the second phase, Hanoi agreed to withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, the United States would not insist that the North Vietnamese acknowledge that they had been there in the first place.

The US also asked Lewandowski to make additional points, including: (1) the United States was serious about its willingness expressed in the Manila Conference communiqué to remove its troops from South Vietnam and dismantle its military bases there; (2) the US was prepared to accept a genuinely neutral and nonaligned South Vietnam; (3) the US was prepared to abide by the results of genuinely free elections in South Vietnam; (4) the United States would accept a reunification of Vietnam freely negotiated by the two Vietnamese states once peace and order were restored in South Vietnam, enabling it to meet the North on an equal footing; and

finally, (5) the United States believed that the Geneva accords of 1954 and 1962 were an adequate basis for peace in Southeast Asia, but that truly effective neutral machinery for supervision and control would be required.[4]

The initiative, codenamed MARIGOLD, began to unravel as soon as Lewandowski returned to Saigon from Hanoi. When the Polish diplomat reported on what he had told the North Vietnamese, it was at once apparent to Lodge and Secretary of State Dean Rusk that Lewandowski had misstated the US position on the bombing halt. Lewandowski had omitted from his statement to the North Vietnamese any mention of the US two-phase formula he had been asked to present. To the contrary, he had implied to the Communists that the United States would stop bombing merely to obtain negotiations and without compensating military de-escalation—a position the US Government had consistently refused to take.

On 5 December, at Lewandowski's suggestion, the US Ambassador to Warsaw, John Gronouski, met with Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki to confirm that the US position was as Lewandowski had reported it. This was intended as a step toward direct US-North Vietnamese talks in the Polish capital. In fact, Gronouski under instructions indicated that several points in Lewandowski's demarche needed clarification. Rapacki responded that it was improper for the US to insist on interpreting Lewandowski's points at this juncture. In addition, the Polish foreign minister complained about US bombing attacks in the vicinity of Hanoi on 2 and 4 December. Rapacki alleged that the attacks were a deliberate escalation in contrast to an earlier de-escalation the North Vietnamese had asserted they had detected during Lewandowski's visit to Hanoi.[5]

The raids had resulted from a lapse in coordination between American military operations and diplomacy. The bombing in progress in early December was ROLLING THUNDER 52, approved on 11 November, which had authorized air attacks on twelve targets within ten miles of Hanoi and Haiphong. Bad weather, however, had delayed the authorized attacks until late November and early December when US planes struck within five miles of the center of Hanoi. Ironically, President Johnson on 11 November had temporarily withdrawn authority for additional ROLLING THUNDER 52 strikes near Hanoi so as not to "rock the boat" during British Foreign Secretary George Brown's visit to Moscow. Still in effect on 5 December, this suspension had not halted the raids about which Rapacki complained.[6]

Following Rapacki's objections, President Lyndon Baines Johnson continued to withhold authority to attack the withdrawn targets, rejecting requests from CINCPAC that they be struck. His decision, according to General Earle Wheeler, was "heavily influenced by the sensitive activities now in train." The President did not, however, curtail the bombing further at this time. Nevertheless, bad weather prevented any air attacks on North Vietnam during the period 5–12 December. During this period, Ambassador Gronouski was unable to arrange a meeting with the North Vietnamese Ambassador in Warsaw. He did meet three times with Rapacki, but the Foreign

Minister did nothing but haggle over the interpretation of Lewandowski's report and contend that the US bombing had raised a new issue which was not involved in the original arrangements for the Warsaw talks.[7]

On 13 December, the skies cleared over Hanoi, and on that and the following day the US resumed bombing near the North Vietnamese capital. MARIGOLD continued to unravel. On the 13th, Rapacki called in Gronouski and told him that the North Vietnamese were now unwilling to hold talks in Warsaw and they would have to be postponed. The postponement continued even though the State Department on 14 December instructed Gronouski to tell the Polish government that Washington was now willing to limit the negotiations only to the US proposal for a two-phase de-escalation and was willing to pursue talks either directly with North Vietnam or through the Poles. On 15 December, Rapacki informed Gronouski that the North Vietnamese wished to terminate all conversations on the possibility of direct talks. The North Vietnamese remained adamant even in the face of an offer by President Johnson, transmitted through Gronouski, to end all bombing within ten nautical miles of the center of Hanoi for an "indefinite" period if talks with North Vietnam could be "gotten under way shortly."[8]

When Rapacki objected to this proposed linkage, President Johnson made a further concession. Still intent on getting talks started, if only to appease US domestic public opinion, he decided to halt the bombing within ten nautical miles of Hanoi without a prior commitment to negotiate from North Vietnam. On 23 December, the JCS issued appropriate instructions to CINCPAC, and the next day Gronouski informed Rapacki of the action that had been taken. This unilateral concession produced no results. On 30 December, Rapacki told Gronouski that the North Vietnamese had decided not to enter into talks with the US in Warsaw.[9]

Operation MARIGOLD ended in failure. The question remains—indeed it was raised in the press by critics of administration policy—whether different tactics by the United States might have led to direct meetings between US and North Vietnamese representatives. The critics claimed that the bombing attacks in December, coming at a critical juncture, gave evidence of bad faith on the part of the United States, with the result that the North Vietnamese withdrew their offer to talk. Another, and equally valid, speculation is that Hanoi only agreed to talk in the first place on the basis of a false and misleading presentation by Lewandowski that the United States was prepared to stop the bombing without military conditions. Once the North Vietnamese leaders discovered that the United States still demanded compensating military de-escalation in return for a bombing halt, they employed the early December bombings as an excuse to reject direct negotiations. A third interpretation, voiced by some of Johnson's advisers at the time and by Communist bloc diplomats since, was that the Poles never had anything firm from Hanoi and were simply playing the United States along for obscure purposes of their own.[10]

Appeal to U Thant

On 19 December, when it was becoming apparent that the Polish Government would be unable to arrange direct secret negotiations between US and North Vietnamese representatives, Ambassador to the UN Arthur Goldberg wrote a letter to UN Secretary General U Thant asking him to join in the peace effort. Specifically, Goldberg requested that the Secretary General take whatever steps he considered necessary "to bring about ... discussions which could lead to a ... ceasefire." The Ambassador reaffirmed that "a cessation of hostilities could be the first order of business at a conference or could be the subject of preliminary discussions."[11]

On 30 December, the Secretary General replied, repeating a three-point program he previously had proposed. The three points, of which the first was the most essential, were a halt of US bombing of North Vietnam, a scaling down of fighting in South Vietnam by both sides, and US negotiation with those actually fighting (presumably the Viet Cong). U Thant declared that the United States, as a powerful nation, should "take the initiative for peace and show an enlightened and humanitarian spirit" by accepting his three points and in addition join the other parties to the conflict in an extended holiday truce. The following day, Goldberg reaffirmed the US Government's offer to end all bombing of North Vietnam "the moment there is an assurance, private or otherwise, that there would be a reciprocal response toward peace from North Vietnam." He asked U Thant to use every means at his disposal to determine what tangible de-escalation step North Vietnam would take in response to an end to ROLLING THUNDER. Nevertheless, Goldberg insisted, hostilities could not be ended by "either appeals for or the exercise of restraint by only one side...." Goldberg stated that the US welcomed the Secretary General's holiday ceasefire proposal but regretted that the other parties had so far shown no interest in it.[12]

Even before writing his letter of 30 December to Goldberg, U Thant had begun secret discussions with Hanoi. By 3 January, he was reported by the *New York Times* to be hopeful of a "positive response" from North Vietnam "once the United States unconditionally ended the bombing."[13] This finding obviously did not meet the oft-repeated condition of the United States that cessation of bombing be accompanied by some reciprocal military de-escalation by the North Vietnamese. In the end, U Thant proved unable to extract any answer from Hanoi beyond insistence on an unconditional termination of US air attacks. The United States, meanwhile, initiated diplomatic action through still other channels.

Operation SUNFLOWER

Following the collapse of MARIGOLD, the US Government sought to establish a direct channel of communication with Hanoi through the diplomatic

missions of the two countries in Moscow. This new effort began on 10 January 1967, when John Guthrie, Deputy Chief of the US Mission, passed a message to Le Chang, the North Vietnamese Charge. "The United States Government, the message read, "places the highest priority in finding a mutually agreeable, completely secure arrangement for exchanging communications with the government of the DRV about the possibilities of achieving a peaceful settlement of the Vietnamese dispute."[14]

A subsequent message, passed through the same channel on 20 January, elaborated the US view of the matters that might be discussed. These included, in addition to any subject proposed by Hanoi, the following: arrangements for the reduction or cessation of hostilities; compliance with essential provisions of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962, including the withdrawal from South Vietnam of forces from outside; arrangements for a free settlement by North and South Vietnam of the issue of reunification; recognition of the independence and territorial integrity of North and South Vietnam or of a reunified Vietnam; South Vietnam's international posture, including its relationships with other nations; appropriate provisions for the internal political structure of South Vietnam, including freedom from reprisals and free political participation; and appropriate means for insuring compliance with all the provisions agreed to.[15]

On 27 January, Le Chang delivered Hanoi's reply in the form of an *aide memoire*. Beginning with a denunciation of the "absurd and arrogant" US conditions for peace talks and charges that the US was escalating the war and the bombing, the reply reiterated the hard Hanoi line: "unconditional cessation of bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV being materialized, the DRV could then exchange views with the United States concerning the place or date for contact between the two parties...." If negotiations did take place, the North Vietnamese contended, "the most current solution to the Vietnam problem" would be the proposals previously put forth by North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front. Reinforcing the definitive nature of this reply, the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh, publicly repeated its main points the next day in an interview with a left-wing Australian journalist.[16]

On 2 February, Guthrie handed Le Chang an interim reply to these communications from Hanoi. The US Government agreed to discuss previous Communist proposals or any other matter in secret talks. Turning to the question of attacks on North Vietnam, the US Government pointed out that bombing within ten nautical miles of the center of Hanoi had already been stopped. It renewed the offer to de-escalate further under the two-phase plan proposed the previous November through the Poles. The Tet holiday truce, scheduled for the period 8–12 February, might be a good time to begin discussions on such an approach.[17]

Before any reply to the message of 2 February had been received, the diplomatic action shifted to London, where Soviet Premier Kosygin arrived on 6 February for policy talks with the British Government. Hoping that the British might be

able to persuade Kosygin to bring pressure to bear on North Vietnam to negotiate, the US Government briefed its ally thoroughly on its efforts to open talks. At two sessions on 6 February, the British presented the US two-phase de-escalation plan and the list of subjects for secret discussion given to the North Vietnamese on 20 January. Kosygin made no response to this presentation. When pressed by the British to urge the North Vietnamese to state unequivocally that they would negotiate if the bombing stopped, Kosygin refused.[18]

At this point, the US Government dispatched its definitive reply to the North Vietnamese *aide memoire* of 27 January. This reply took the form of a letter from President Johnson to Ho Chi Minh, delivered to North Vietnamese diplomats in Moscow on 8 February so as to coincide with the Wilson-Kosygin talks still in progress in London. In his letter, Johnson offered a new de-escalation package. He declared that he was prepared "to order a cessation of bombing against your country and the stopping of further augmentation of United States forces in South Vietnam as soon as I am assured that infiltration into South Vietnam by land and by sea has been stopped." The day before sending this letter, Johnson had informed Wilson of its contents, stressing the point that the US could not "accept...the exchange of guarantee of safe haven for North Vietnam merely for discussions which thus far have no form or content, during which they [the North Vietnamese] could continue to expand their military operations to the limit."[19]

The Wilson-Kosygin talks continued throughout the duration of the Tet holiday truce, which Johnson extended for a day at Wilson's request. The negotiations were confused by a breakdown in communication between the Americans and British over the exact sequence of proposed de-escalation steps. Prime Minister Wilson assumed that the US was holding to its Phase A and B formula under which the Americans would stop bombing in return for only an assurance that North Vietnam would cease infiltration of the south somewhat later. Wilson conveyed this version to Kosygin only to have Johnson, in his letter to Ho Chi Minh, enunciate a harder line. Attempts by Johnson to clarify the situation failed. The British were left embarrassed and angry, and Kosygin departed from London with no message for Hanoi. Shortly after he boarded his plane for home, the United States resumed attacks on North Vietnam.[20]

On 15 February, Ho Chi Minh sent his reply to Johnson's letter. The Vietnamese leader harshly accused the United States of employing "the most inhuman weapons" and the "most barbarous methods of warfare" against his people. He blamed the United States for "the extremely serious situation in Vietnam" and rejected any form of negotiation until the United States stopped "unconditionally its bombing raids and all other acts of war" against North Vietnam. Thus, SUNFLOWER ended at the same deadlock as every previous peace overture. The United States demanded a quid pro quo for stopping the bombing, and North Vietnam refused to discuss anything else until the US unconditionally ended its air attacks.[21]

The JCS Express Their Views

Although generally excluded from the making of diplomatic policy, the JCS became peripherally involved in SUNFLOWER, on questions relating to the Tet truce. On 9 February, General Wheeler, on behalf of the JCS, urged Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and the President to cut short the Tet ceasefire, which the Chiefs had opposed from the beginning, on the ground that the enemy was using its temporary freedom from US attacks to make large-scale supply movements. At McNamara's recommendation, President Johnson rejected Wheeler's proposal, emphasizing the "very delicate" diplomacy then in progress.[22]

On the 11th, after learning from McNamara of the administration's decision not to resume bombing of North Vietnam after the end of the Tet ceasefire until Kosygin left the United Kingdom, Wheeler expressed "serious reservations" about the additional delay. Besides the "potential danger" to US forces in Vietnam, Wheeler said, he was "gravely concerned" that the Soviets and British, "for their own reasons, not necessarily the same," would attempt to "delay, obstruct, and obfuscate" resumption of ROLLING THUNDER even after Kosygin departed from London. In addition, Wheeler complained that the administration had "subverted" its own policy of insisting that it would not halt the bombing of North Vietnam solely for a promise of talks. Instead, "we have delayed the resumption of our offensive operations ... in return for a half-promise to propose to the Hanoi leadership that they should engage in talks with the US government." Wheeler recommended that the United States resume its air and naval attacks on North Vietnam "promptly on the departure of Mr. Kosygin from the United Kingdom." Apparently agreeing with Wheeler's assessment, the administration on 13 February ordered the resumption of military action against North Vietnam.[23]

After SUNFLOWER had reached its unproductive end, the JCS, acting on their own initiative, presented Secretary McNamara with a new statement of their views on negotiation, along with a request that they be given the opportunity to comment on any future formulation of US policy on the subject. McNamara passed the Chiefs' memorandum to Secretary Rusk. However, this new statement of the military's views, although initiated on 1 February, was not complete until 27 February, by which time Ho Chi Minh had slammed the door on negotiations on terms acceptable to the United States.

The JCS developed their views as answers to questions asked by General Maxwell Taylor in a 30 January report to the President on his recent visit to South Vietnam. Looking to the future, Taylor recommended that the government establish firm positions on key aspects of a settlement, including what price the US should exact for a cessation of bombing in the north. The JCS declared that the minimum price for a bombing halt should be verified cessation of all North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam and Laos. Because an end of the bombing was one of the United States' most important negotiating assets, additional concessions

should be sought. These should include: cessation of North Vietnamese military operations in South Vietnam including support and direction of the Viet Cong; verified beginning of withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, the demilitarized zone, and the Laotian panhandle; and significant reduction of North Vietnamese/Viet Cong acts of terrorism in South Vietnam. Further concessions, not immediately needed but ultimately necessary to restore peace, would be: withdrawal of all North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, the demilitarized zone, and areas in Laos not occupied by Communists prior to the signing of the Geneva Accords of 1962; an end to all acts of terrorism in South Vietnam; and an agreement to exchange prisoners.

Verification of these measures should be by unilateral inspection and policing by the belligerents themselves rather than by the demonstrably inadequate method of international supervision and inspection. If, however, the United States should accept verification by an international commission, it should be an entirely new body, free of the serious deficiencies of the existing International Control Commission, and should be in place and functioning effectively before any US forces were withdrawn. To avoid a stalemate at the conference table, a fixed agenda should be established. Communist stalling or intransigence on agenda items should be met with resumption of bombing of North Vietnam. Military operations elsewhere should be pressed vigorously during negotiations.[24]

Ho Chi Minh's letter of 15 February spelled failure for the MARIGOLD and SUNFLOWER diplomatic initiatives. In spite of the various formulas advanced and the one significant bombing restriction put into effect by the United States, the North Vietnamese remained firm in their position that the US must stop all bombing of their country completely, permanently, and unconditionally before negotiations could begin. The leaders in Hanoi were still convinced that they possessed the long-term strategic advantage in the war, notwithstanding the tactical successes scored by American, South Vietnamese, and Free World military forces during 1966. Untroubled by the international distractions and domestic political dissent that plagued President Johnson and with their war effort underwritten by the Soviet Union and Communist China, Ho and his comrades were willing to explore the possibility of a diplomatic settlement of the conflict, but only on their own terms. Until America accepted the reality of defeat, the North Vietnamese were perfectly content to fight on. Redoubled efforts on the battlefield by both sides were therefore in order for 1967. In particular, as fighting resumed at the end of the Tet stand-down, the US military leaders hoped to win approval for intensified operations against the enemy war-making potential centered in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

3

Rolling Thunder Gains Momentum, February–June 1967

The Bombing Resumes

On 13 February 1967, a day after the Tet stand-down came to an end, the aerial offensive against North Vietnam resumed. During the months that followed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff won approval for successive ROLLING THUNDER programs that gradually intensified operations against targets in Route Package (RP) VI, the vital northeast quadrant of North Vietnam. This area included Hanoi, the port of Haiphong, and many other key facilities supporting the war and was the point of entry for much of the military aid furnished by the Soviet Union and China.[1]

At the time operations resumed, however, prospects for an intensified campaign against the North did not appear bright. As of early 1967, US bombing in the northeast quadrant was closely restricted. President Johnson had established a thirty nautical mile circle around Hanoi in which aircraft could strike only surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites, fuel storage facilities, and transportation lines. In November 1966, in an effort to save the MARIGOLD diplomatic initiative, Johnson had added a ten-mile prohibited zone around the North Vietnamese capital in which even overflights required mission-by-mission authorization. Haiphong had its own ten-mile restricted zone, and there was a fifty-kilometer deep buffer zone along the Chinese border. During the next several months, CINCPAC and the JCS would make repeated efforts to expand attacks within these restricted circles.[2]

ROLLING THUNDER program 53 (RT 53), still in effect, according to Admiral Sharp fell "considerably short of what could have been an initial step in bringing more positive pressure to bear on Hanoi in 1967." Sharp emphasized the need for

a long-range program covering all of what he considered to be key target systems. This was an approach CINCPAC had long advocated and which he had gradually developed and refined. Submitted to the Joint Chiefs on 18 January, Sharp's most recent plan called for steady pressure, avoiding peaks and depressions, against six key target systems in RP VI as a means to destroy North Vietnam's "war making potential." The six target systems were: 1) electric power; 2) war supporting industry; 3) transportation support facilities; 4) military complexes; 5) petroleum; and 6) Haiphong and other ports. Complete destruction of these systems was not necessary, Sharp declared, since "general disruption" would make them ineffective. Some targets would require periodic restrike.[3]

To Admiral Sharp's frustration, the policy limitations on bombing in Route Package VI had been reinforced by the weather. The northeast monsoon, a persistently decisive factor restricting the effectiveness of the bombing program, had not yet ended. The rainy days and heavy cloud cover caused many delays and cancellations of what strikes were authorized. Nevertheless, the bombing campaign continued.

Within a few days of the resumption of operations against the North, however, the prospects for an expanded program brightened. On 17 February, General Wheeler urged upon the President the importance of striking the North Vietnamese electric power net, even to the point of destroying the entire system, as the next step in graduated pressure upon Hanoi. The Chairman came away from this meeting with the feeling that there was "a new sense of urgency in the atmosphere" that could lead to new strike authorizations. These, he believed, would initially be limited to a slight broadening of the target base but would soon expand into approval of a major increase in pressure on the enemy.[4]

Confirming General Wheeler's optimism, the approval of ROLLING THUNDER 54 on 23 February, just ten days after the resumption of the bombing, marked the beginning of an intensified campaign against the northeast quadrant. President Johnson authorized five new targets plus the RT 53 targets that had not been previously struck because of poor weather (six of the nine authorized under RT 53 had not been hit). At the same time, the number of sorties per month was increased from 13,200 to 14,500.[5] The new targets included four thermal power plants and the Thai Nguyen steel plant, all within or near the Hanoi/Haiphong complex. Thus, targets from two of the six systems CINCPAC had recommended for attack—electric power and war supporting industry—were authorized, and the number of sorties increased. At that time, the President did not approve attacking three additional thermal power plants located in Hanoi and Haiphong, a Hanoi transformer station, and the Haiphong cement plant, all of which the JCS had recommended for RT 54. Attacks against these new targets would not by themselves have a great effect on North Vietnam's total war effort, since the bulk of supplies and equipment was imported and could be interdicted only by hitting the ports and transportation systems. Nevertheless, RT 54 brought increased pressure upon North Vietnam. For

that reason alone, the changes Johnson had authorized were encouraging from the Joint Chiefs' standpoint.[6]

When the President approved ROLLING THUNDER 54, he also approved the extension of SEA DRAGON operations to 20 degrees north latitude and authorized the selective mining of inland waterways in the same area, along with naval gunfire against military shore targets. Johnson thus opened over 75 miles of coastline for interdiction operations against North Vietnam's waterborne logistics in coordination with ROLLING THUNDER. The President also authorized artillery fire from South Vietnam at targets north of the Demilitarized Zone.

Admiral Sharp and his commanders in the field welcomed the authority contained in RT 54. This program represented movement toward the CINCPAC concept of striking against interrelated target systems. Sharp thanked General Wheeler for his efforts in expanding the program and promised that the effect would be "anything but salubrious for Hanoi."[7]

Unfortunately, weather again interfered with the bombing program. Clouds and rain, combined with the Tet truce, caused February to produce fewer sorties than any of the previous nine months. The bad weather continued for most of the month of March.[8]

Along with the weather, political considerations continued to inhibit execution of the ROLLING THUNDER program. When two of the power plants were struck almost immediately after being authorized and for two straight days, the highest levels of government became concerned. Officials feared that closely spaced repetitive attacks against high-value targets might be construed as an escalation of the war. General Wheeler urged Admiral Sharp to see that strikes were made only during breaks in the weather or, that failing, only after an interval of three to five days. The Chairman feared that, if the State Department had to face domestic and foreign charges of escalation, there might be delay in securing authority for attacks against additional important targets, such as the two thermal power plants and cement plant in Haiphong and the main Hanoi power plant and transformer station. Granting such authority, Wheeler said, appeared imminent. On 6 March, he again cautioned CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to avoid jeopardizing the possibility of gaining expanded authority, which he said could be prevented only by an obstacle "created by us."[9]

Although hampered by the weather, within three weeks after the authorization of RT 54, US forces had struck every permitted target at least once. This performance, coupled with increased military supply activity in the Haiphong area, encouraged the Chairman to continue to press for new authority. He was successful. On 22 March, with Presidential approval, the JCS added to the RT 54 target list the two Haiphong thermal power plants, but with the admonition to minimize civilian casualties and to prevent damage to foreign shipping. Because of the weather and political considerations, however, the two targets were not struck until 20

April. Nevertheless, strikes against ROLLING THUNDER targets continued through March and the first three weeks of April.[10]

RT 55 and the MIG Threat

On 22 April, President Johnson approved ROLLING THUNDER 55, a program initiating an integrated campaign against the land, rail, and water lines of communication in the northeast quadrant. Long sought by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC, the program had the ultimate objective of isolating the Hanoi/Haiphong logistics base. The President authorized attacks on ten fixed targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong complex, representing all of the six target systems devised by Admiral Sharp. (By this time, air defense as a primary target system had replaced ports, which were consolidated with the transportation targets.) Among the targets authorized were the Hanoi transformer station, the Haiphong cement plant, one of the Hanoi railroad repair shops, the Haiphong ammunition depot, and important causeways and highway bridges, plus a restrike of the Haiphong POL facilities. The Hoa Lac and Kep airfields were also targeted. Only one target, the Hanoi thermal power plant, was deleted from those requested by the Joint Chiefs.[11]

The airfields were added to the target list in order to weaken the enemy's air defenses, which had been reinforced in recent weeks in response to intensified US attacks in the northeast quadrant. By far the greatest concentration of North Vietnamese surface-to-air missiles, antiaircraft guns, and MIG jet fighters was in Route Package VI. In particular, the threat of MIG attacks had been growing for some time. The Joint Staff had warned in January that unless additional steps were taken, the threat would probably become more acute and suggested that strikes should be made on the fighter airfields. At about the same time, Admiral Sharp outlined six actions to counter the threat, including attacks on MIG bases. From January through March, however, MIG attacks were ineffective. Not a single US plane was lost in twenty-four engagements, whereas eight American aircraft fell to SAMS during the period and forty-three to antiaircraft artillery and automatic weapons.[12]

On 23 March, CINCPAC had appealed for authority to conduct spoiling attacks on Hoa Lac and Kep airfields before MIGs from those bases could seriously interfere with ROLLING THUNDER. Hoa Lac airfield was just nearing completion and Kep had been recently improved. Attacks against them, said Admiral Sharp, would counter the "growing" MIG threat. The JCS included these two targets in their proposal for RT 55, then being readied for presentation. But no authority came during the month of March and for most of April.[13]

April saw a large jump in the number of aerial engagements, and Admiral Sharp renewed his campaign for authority to attack the MIG bases. On 13 April, he cabled General Wheeler a request for permission to strike all of North Vietnam's airfields. Sharp believed that such a program could force the MIGs to move from their North

Vietnamese bases to fields in China. Such relocation, CINCPAC suggested, might be beneficial to the United States, since it could provide an interception point along the Chinese border buffer zone that would disrupt inbound MIG attacks against US strike aircraft. In addition, under these circumstances, US aircraft could engage the MIGs on their return leg to sanctuary in China. Sharp acknowledged, however, that authority for hot pursuit into Chinese airspace would not be given.[14]

ROLLING THUNDER 55 included permission to bomb Kep and Hoa Lac, but with a qualification. Attacks against those bases were to be limited to "small and random harassment strikes designed to attrite aircraft and disrupt support facilities." In spite of this limitation, upon receiving the RT 55 authority, US forces promptly launched a strike against each airfield, losing three of the sixteen attacking aircraft. Secretary McNamara immediately became concerned that the field commanders were attempting to achieve more than the stipulated harassment and attrition, and war critics in the US complained that the actions represented a dangerous escalation of the conflict. The Chairman reassured McNamara that the field commanders had received proper guidance, but he, too, had reason for concern. General Wheeler feared that such vigorous action might jeopardize efforts to gain authority to attack all North Vietnamese airfields. The Chairman suggested to CINCPAC that he exert a restraining influence on his subordinates. Anticipating such a reaction from Washington, Admiral Sharp had already warned his field commanders to restrain their pilots.[15]

Despite the attacks on the two airfields, the number of MIG sightings and encounters continued to grow. The United States lost seven planes to the enemy interceptors during April. In response, Admiral Sharp appealed again for authority to attack the remaining jet-capable North Vietnamese airfields at Kien An and Cat Bi but without success. In spite of the admiral's failure to obtain expanded attack authority, CINCPAC's forces took effective action against the North Vietnamese airfields that were authorized. On I May, US pilots again attacked Kep and Hoa Lac and destroyed sixteen MIGs on the ground. These raids may have provoked the MIGs to come up and fight more aggressively, allowing Air Force and Navy pilots to destroy many of them in air-to-air combat during the following weeks.[16]

Attacks on other targets in the RT 55 list continued and, with the arrival of better weather conditions in April, strikes grew more numerous in the northeast quadrant. In an eight-day period, ROLLING THUNDER forces flew 183 sorties with good success against nine of the ten authorized targets, plus numerous armed reconnaissance strikes throughout Route Package VI. The only RT 55 target not struck during the eight days was the Xuan Mai highway bridge.[17]

RT 56 and the Hanoi Thermal Power Plant

Planning for a new authorization began almost immediately after approval of RT 55. In the new plan, General Wheeler instructed the Joint Staff to include as

fixed targets Phuc Yen and one other MIG-capable airfield—perhaps Kien An—but excluding Gia Lam, the international airport near Hanoi.[18]

On 2 May, CINCPAC received authority to execute ROLLING THUNDER 56. The program included strikes against ten targets in the northeast quadrant, four of which were restrikes against the two Haiphong power plants (to continue until they were destroyed), the Van Dien vehicle depot, and the Yen Vien railroad classification yard. Since three of the new targets were military barracks in areas of concentrated population, the execute message carried a caution to avoid civilian casualties by striking during good weather for positive identification. A SAM depot and a storage facility were also approved. Kien An airfield was to be attacked, along with those bases authorized under RT 55, to achieve maximum destruction of MIG aircraft but at a minimum cost in US aircraft and pilots. Strikes were authorized against all previously approved ROLLING THUNDER targets.[19]

Of seven additional targets for RT 56 recommended by the Joint Chiefs, but not approved, the most important was the Hanoi thermal power plant. Destruction of this plant, in Admiral Sharp's opinion, would cut off electricity in the northeast area except for portable generators; it would turn out the lights of Hanoi and Haiphong. A major obstacle to attacking this target, however, was the danger of civilian casualties. US officials feared that such casualties might increase public opposition to the bombing of North Vietnam. In late April, General Wheeler suggested that WALLEYE, a sophisticated new weapon, be used against the power plant. Fired from a fighter-bomber, WALLEYE, one of the first of a new generation of self-guided "smart" ordnance, could lock on a target electronically and home on it with precision, thereby reducing collateral damage. Admiral Sharp, however, was not convinced that the Navy missile was completely reliable and did not concur in its use at that time. In the meantime, Secretary McNamara advised the Joint Chiefs that if the two Haiphong power plants were destroyed first, it would be easier to secure approval for attack of the Hanoi plant. McNamara recognized, however, that bad weather might prevent striking the Haiphong plants before the President could consider the Hanoi target.[20]

Restrikes on the Haiphong power plants were carried out on 10 May, thus setting the stage for approval of the attack on the Hanoi plant. Within a week, CINCPAC received the requisite authority. Despite Admiral Sharp's reservations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff specified that only two aircraft equipped with WALLEYE would be used in the strike. The Joint Chiefs urged caution to minimize civilian casualties by insuring positive identification of the target. They also urged that the attack be completed before 20 May, in view of the forthcoming visit to Moscow of the British Foreign Secretary and of the twenty-four hour military standdown that the US would observe on the 23rd, Buddha's birthday.[21]

On 19 May, two US aircraft carried out the carefully planned strike against the plant. One bomb fell short and the other hit one end of the complex. A restrike the following day was more successful, and on a still later restrike, the pilot actually

observed and photographed the WALLEYE bomb entering through a window of the generator hall. With these missions, however, the steady expansion of the Route Package VI target list came to an end.[22]

ROLLING THUNDER Is Restricted

Throughout the spring, ROLLING THUNDER strike forces had increased their efforts. Targets destroyed or damaged during March numbered 1,781; in April, the figure was 2,722; and during May, it was 4,325. At the same time, the percentage of attack sorties flown against targets in RP VI rose from 8 percent during March to 15 percent during April and to 16 percent in May. These increases resulted from the new target opportunities in the northeast quadrant opened up by RT 55 and 56. Of twenty targets in RP VI authorized in these programs, all were struck during a five-week period, in contrast to only twenty-two targets hit in that area during all of 1966. During March, April, and May 1967, the damage level in RP VI was greater than during all previous ROLLING THUNDER strikes combined. From 19 to 21 May, bombing close to or within the ten nautical mile restricted zone around Hanoi was particularly intense. Yet even as ROLLING THUNDER reached this climax, a new de-escalation was under discussion in Washington.[23]

As the list of targets authorized and attacked in Route Package VI expanded, President Johnson's advisers realized that ROLLING THUNDER was approaching a critical decision point. General Wheeler himself summarized the problem during a meeting with the President on 27 April. He told the President that the bombing campaign was "reaching the point where we will have struck all worthwhile fixed targets except the ports. At this time we will have to address the requirement to deny to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) the use of the ports."[24] However, attacking the ports, principally Haiphong, constituted a new escalatory step and again raised the specter of a clash with the Soviet Union and China, possibly triggered by inadvertent bombing of their ships in North Vietnamese harbors. In addition, questions of cost effectiveness were emerging about the raids in the northeast quadrant, where the US loss rate in pilots and aircraft was five times that in southern North Vietnam. Were the results of these attacks commensurate with their cost?

Although he had approved most ROLLING THUNDER 55 and 56 targets, Secretary of Defense McNamara renewed his campaign to cut back the bombing of North Vietnam. By early May, McNamara was advocating that the US "finish off major targets and then cut back to the 20th parallel." On 9 May, the Defense Secretary and his deputy, Cyrus Vance, laid out their argument. Citing Wheeler's statement that the US had hit all major targets in North Vietnam except the ports, they declared that the ports should not be bombed or mined "because of the confrontation this might cause with the Soviet Union." Strikes on lesser fixed targets

and armed reconnaissance against movement on roads, railways, and waterways in RP VI also carried a risk of escalation and would not be worth the additional American losses. There continued to be "no evidence" that heavy bombing around Hanoi and Haiphong was weakening North Vietnam's will to continue the fight. Hence, McNamara and Vance recommended that after a strike on the Hanoi thermal power plant, all ROLLING THUNDER bombing be concentrated on the enemy's lines of communication in southern North Vietnam (Route Packages I, II, and III) through which men and supplies flowed to the fighting in the south. At the same time, the administration should reserve "the option and intention to strike" in RP VI "as necessary to keep the enemy's investment in defense and repair crews high throughout the country."

McNamara and Vance emphasized that the change in bombing pattern would not be done "for the purpose of getting Hanoi to change its ways or to negotiate." On the off chance of a response, the US should inform the Soviets of the new policy in hopes that Moscow would then urge the North Vietnamese to seize this opportunity to de-escalate the war "by talks or otherwise." Nevertheless, "no favorable response from Hanoi should be expected, and the change in policy is not based on any such expectation."[25]

McNamara's approach received support from an informal group of second-level White House, Defense, and State Department officials who had been meeting since November 1966, with President Johnson's blessing, to consider privately and informally the administration's major problems in Vietnam. Nicknamed the "No Committee" and the "Non-Group," the men assembled weekly for cocktails in the office of Under Secretary of State Nicholas DeB. Katzenbach. Besides Katzenbach, other regular participants were the President's National Security Adviser, Walt Rostow; Under Secretary of Defense Vance; Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John T. McNaughton; and William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. Secretaries McNamara and Rusk and Central Intelligence Agency Director Richard Helms occasionally attended the meetings. No uniformed military representative was a regular member of the group. General Wheeler only learned of it well after its establishment; eventually, he sat in on a few meetings.[26]

By early May, the "No Committee" had reached a consensus that paralleled McNamara's position. The members opposed any further escalation in Route Package VI and favored an increased concentration of air resources in lower North Vietnam. At the same time, they wanted to keep open the option of heavier attacks on the Hanoi-Haiphong area and to continue some bombing there. However, the weight of those attacks should be determined "by careful damage assessment of the targets we have already attacked, plus information on repair, etc." The members supported a strike on the Hanoi power plant, the last significant untouched target on the current list. Walt Rostow summarized for the President: "the weight of opinion outside the JCS is that we now draw a line on going forward on the CINCPAC list; but that we do so without abandoning attacks in the Hanoi/Haiphong area

except as part of a compensated deal." However, the group also agreed that the administration should "apply tougher criteria" to future attacks in RP VI, if only because of the heavy American loss rates sustained there.[27]

Not surprisingly, General Wheeler strongly objected to the civilians' approach. He declared that a cessation of attacks in Route Package VI would be the equivalent of an "aerial Dien Bien Phu." The Chairman remained convinced that the US derived a net military advantage from hitting the Hanoi/Haiphong area, but, as Rostow put it, he "finds it hard to make a firm, lucid case because none of us really knows what the cumulative and indirect effects of the bombing are" around the North Vietnamese capital. On 19 May, Wheeler presented his alternative to members of the "Non-Group." He recommended: 1) Heavier armed reconnaissance in RP VI; 2) Continued strikes on fixed targets, including bridges, roads, rail lines, depots, supply dumps, and POL facilities but avoiding "marginal fixed targets" such as chemical and cement plants; 3) a reduction of the restricted zone around Hanoi from thirty miles in diameter to ten and that around Haiphong from ten to four miles, opening up road and rail lines in the freed areas to armed reconnaissance and allowing additional strikes of previously bombed fixed targets without express authorization; and 4) heavy attacks on all North Vietnamese airfields including Phuc Yen and Gia Lam. Over and above these actions, Wheeler advocated mining and bombing the port of Haiphong, claiming that without this action the overall program of attacks on road and rail lines "makes less sense."[28]

In the end, President Johnson and his advisers settled upon a compromise designed to "hold our family together in ways that look after the nation's interests and make military sense." They authorized the attacks on the Hanoi power plant. Following those strikes, on 21 May, President Johnson withdrew authority for all attacks within a ten-mile circle around Hanoi. Secretary McNamara transmitted this directive to CINCPAC the next day and began shifting the weight of American air power to the southern route packages. (In fact, about two-thirds of all US sorties against North Vietnam already were being flown in those areas.) The administration informed the Russians of this change of bombing pattern, but with no productive diplomatic results. In a concession to the JCS, the new policy was to remain in effect for only a few weeks, during which time all concerned would study the issue anew. A definitive policy change would await the return of Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler from a forthcoming visit to Saigon, where they would discuss with Sharp and Westmoreland both ROLLING THUNDER and a large new ground troop reinforcement request from MACV.[29]

The new restriction had an immediate effect on the number and targets of US air attacks in Route Package VI. During the first twenty-two days of May, American pilots flew 254 sorties against the area. They struck all but one of the authorized targets, severely damaging or destroying many of them. After the 22nd of the month, only thirty-two sorties were flown. Until ROLLING THUNDER 57 was approved in mid-July, the intensity of the bombing subsided around Hanoi. The

strikes that were conducted in the northeast quadrant concentrated mainly on the rail line to China.[30]

The restrictions on operations against North Vietnam came at a time when US military leaders believed they were beginning to obtain substantial results. Admiral Sharp especially deplored the curtailment. In a cable to General Wheeler, he stated his conviction that the intensified bombing of the last several months was beginning to hurt the enemy. "If we want to get this war over with," he declared, "we ought to keep the pressure on Hanoi and move in on Haiphong as JCS have recommended." Sharp reported to Wheeler on 29 May that the operations of April and May had destroyed most of Hanoi's major electric power resources, had brought several key war supporting industries to a virtual standstill, and had increased harassment and disruption of external assistance entering North Vietnam through Haiphong and on the rail lines from China. The air campaign, said CINCPAC, was the only way open to the US for carrying the war home to the enemy. It would be unfortunate to "back off" just when repeated attempts to secure authority for a systematic air campaign were showing results, the pressure was increasing because of this campaign, and the weather was "optimum" over North Vietnam. The Chairman agreed with CINCPAC on the effectiveness of the bombing and indicated that foreign observers in Hanoi, who sent their reports to European superiors, confirmed this opinion.[31]

Driven by these convictions, the military leaders during May and June sought incremental enlargement of the bombing in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. General Wheeler remained optimistic that even with the cutback of 21 May, authority could be obtained to strike worthwhile targets within the ten-mile Hanoi prohibited zone. On 25 May, he urged Admiral Sharp to submit a list of such targets. CINCPAC's recommendations were received on 29 May but not acted upon.[32]

During the following weeks, CINCPAC continued to press for authority to strike new targets and to restrike the more significant ones already hit. Some of his requests were for targets the Joint Chiefs considered to be not of great value. For example, on 17 June the Chairman turned down a CINCPAC request to hit five fertilizer plants because he believed they were not the type of targets that warranted attack. Moreover, they had presumably been rendered inoperable for lack of electricity as the result of strikes against the power system. General Wheeler rejected certain power facilities as targets on grounds that they either were not of significant importance or did not tie into the Hanoi grid system. General Wheeler concurred in other CINCPAC target nominations, but these were already included in the Joint Staff's proposal, then under preparation, for ROLLING THUNDER 57.[33]

While the RT 57 plan was still in preparation, strikes in the Hanoi-Haiphong area were further restricted. On 29 June, Navy planes by accident bombed a Soviet ship in Haiphong harbor while attacking an automatic weapons site in the port area. The incident alarmed President Johnson because it came at a time when US-Soviet relations were strained over the Arab-Israeli war in the Middle East.

Although the President did not demand any change in the overall pattern of air operations against North Vietnam, he did insist that action be taken to prevent any additional incidents during that sensitive time. In response, the Joint Chiefs of Staff the next day created a circle of four nautical mile radius around Haiphong, in which every air strike would require new authorization. For insurance, CINCPAC added a further restriction by requiring his approval of all strikes in the "doughnut" area between four and ten nautical miles from Haiphong.[34]

These events notwithstanding, Admiral Sharp remained convinced that the United States had achieved a position, "albeit late in the game, from which a precisely executed and incisive air campaign of depth and sustaining persistence against all target systems" would bring significant results. He believed that the enemy was "hurting." The successful operations of the previous period should be continued with the widest latitude in planning and execution during the remaining good weather. Sharp pressed this point upon General Wheeler, and he reiterated it to Secretary McNamara when the Defense Secretary and the Chairman visited Saigon in July in preparation for critical decisions on both ROLLING THUNDER and the ground war in South Vietnam.[35]

4

Launching the General Offensive: Operations in South Vietnam, January–May 1967

General Westmoreland's Concept of Operations for 1967

Late in 1966, General Westmoreland predicted that 1967 would usher in a new phase of combat operations in South Vietnam during which allied forces would go over to the offensive. In 1966, the United States and Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF), along with the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam (RVNAF) had engaged in a holding action which prevented a communist conquest of South Vietnam and, indeed, made it impossible as long as the existing military balance prevailed. This success, combined with the buildup of US and FWMAF strength, set the stage for a general offensive.[1]

The "Combined Campaign Plan 1967," promulgated by COMUSMACV and the Chief of the Joint General Staff (JGS) on 7 November 1966, provided the basic guidance to allied forces for the coming year. The plan was not a blueprint for final victory. It did not envision either a total defeat of all enemy forces or control by the Saigon government over all the territory of South Vietnam. The objective of the plan was to extend the area controlled by the South Vietnamese Government and to win victories over Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units.

The plan was based on the assumption that "the people are the greatest asset to the enemy and control of the people is the enemy's goal." Military operations

were designed to deny the Viet Cong access to the people and to food-producing areas. The plan designated National Priority Areas and Areas for Priority of Military Operations which included in their boundaries most of South Vietnam's population, food-producing areas, and lines of communication. Expansions of those in the 1966 plan, the National Priority Areas were four in number and centered on the cities of Da Nang, Qui Nhon, and Saigon and the provinces of An Giang and Vinh Long in the Mekong Delta. The populations concentrated in these areas were to be the focus of intensive pacification efforts (called "Rural Development" in the Saigon government's lexicon). In the Areas for Priority of Military Operations, which encompassed most of the remaining populated regions, US, third country, and South Vietnamese forces would seek to "destroy or drive the enemy into sparsely populated and food-scarce areas." These operations would also "insure the protection of the population [and] control of resources and ... major lines of communications, all of which will facilitate follow-on revolutionary development."

The Combined Campaign Plan called for a general division of responsibility between the US and FWMAF forces and the RVNAF. The American and third country allied troops were assigned the mission of attacking enemy main forces, base areas, and supply systems and of driving the enemy main forces away from the civilian population. The South Vietnamese regular units, supplemented by the territorial Regional and Popular Forces, were to support the revolutionary development program, defending government centers, and protecting national resources, particularly rice and salt. However, this division of labor was not rigid. US and Free World forces would be available to reinforce the RVNAF in the territorial security mission; the RVNAF General Reserve (the marine and airborne divisions) and the corps reserve units would participate in operations against the enemy's main forces.[2]

The Antagonists

In planning operations for 1967, the MACV staff assumed that, while the enemy was no longer able to win a military victory, he still possessed a formidable force. MACV J–2 estimated that at the beginning of January 1967, the enemy had about 280,575 regular North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops in South Vietnam, supported by an uncertain but significant number of part-time guerrillas and civilian auxiliaries. His reinforcement rate was 8,400 men per month by infiltration from North Vietnam and 3,500 by recruitment in South Vietnam. The enemy was able to sustain in South Vietnam a combat force of more than 150 maneuver battalions. An additional two North Vietnamese divisions and one regiment were deployed just across the northern border. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong regular units were armed with excellent Communist bloc infantry small arms, rocket launchers, and mortars. They equaled in infantry firepower US and FWMAF battalions and in many respects outgunned South Vietnamese battalions. With these troops,

according to MACV intelligence, the enemy could attack in regimental and greater strength in all of South Vietnam's four corps areas.

To gain control of South Vietnam, the enemy, according to the MACV J–2, would seek to wear down the will to resist of the free world forces and their governments by means of an "offensive-defensive" strategy. Credited by the Americans to North Vietnamese Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap, but actually the product of a collective leadership, this strategy called first for developing strong multi-division forces in dispersed regions with access to supplies and secure areas. Then the enemy would seek to entice allied and South Vietnamese forces into places where dug-in Communist troops could inflict heavy casualties upon them. At the same time, the enemy would continue guerrilla and harassment operations throughout the country in order to disperse and tie down allied forces.[3]

Although it was not apparent to American officials at the time, the Vietnamese communists were engaged in their own factional struggle over military strategy in South Vietnam. On one side were General Nguyen Chi Thanh, the senior North Vietnamese commander in the south, and his supporters in the Hanoi Politburo. They advocated the aggressive expansion of large-unit warfare, including maximum efforts to engage and destroy US forces. On the other side, a group of officials, reportedly including Giap himself, considered direct confrontation with American firepower to be unproductive and overly costly in casualties. While not totally opposed to large-unit actions, they preferred to place primary reliance on guerrilla operations to wear down Saigon and its allies. As of early 1967, Thanh's faction was ascendant. For the time being, the enemy would try to meet MACV's forces head on.[4]

To oppose the enemy, Generals Westmoreland and Cao Van Vien, the Chief of the Joint General Staff, had at their disposal a total of 1,171,800 troops—735,900 South Vietnamese forces of all types, 383,300 US forces, and 52,600 soldiers of other nations, the vast majority South Korean. The allies had available 258 maneuver battalions, of which 153 were South Vietnamese, 82 were US, and 23 were free world allies. The allies thus enjoyed an advantage of about 4 to 1 in numbers and 3 to 1 in equivalent maneuver battalions. The latter ratio was calculated according to a CINCPAC formula that rated one US/FWMAF battalion as equivalent to three South Vietnamese or North Vietnamese/Viet Cong battalions.[5]

CINCPAC's rating of American and allied battalions as superior to Vietnamese battalions of both sides was based partly on the larger size of the former but also on the Americans' access to overwhelming supporting arms—artillery and airpower. The allies' air fleet was especially dominant. As of 1 January 1967, their several air forces deployed some 1,150 tactical strike aircraft on bases in South Vietnam and Thailand and on aircraft carriers in the Tonkin Gulf. Although there were many demands for missions by these aircraft—such as ROLLING THUNDER and the BARREL ROLL and STEEL TIGER operations in Laos—free world air forces early in 1967 were flying about 10,000 attack sorties per month in South Vietnam in support of ground troops. In addition to the tactical aircraft, about fifty US Air

Force B–52 strategic bombers stationed on Guam were available to support General Westmoreland's operations under the ARC LIGHT program. At the beginning of 1967, the B–52 sortie rate in effect was 725 per month.[6]

Strengthening ARC LIGHT

During the early months of 1967, the Johnson administration took several steps to improve the efficiency of ARC LIGHT operations. On 1 February, the sortie rate was raised to 800 per month. On 22 February, President Johnson, accepting a JCS recommendation of 8 December 1966, sought approval of the Thai government to base B–52s at U Tapao. At the Thai base, the heavy bombers would be within 400 miles of their targets as compared to the 2,600-mile distance from Guam. When the Thai government gave its assent on 2 March, Secretary McNamara's office, the same day, authorized the start of the necessary construction at U Tapao using currently available funds.[7]

Also on 2 March, Secretary McNamara expanded the authority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to approve ARC LIGHT strikes to include Laos and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) south of the demarcation line. As in the case of the original authorization, which applied only to strikes in South Vietnam, the delegated authority was subject to certain conditions: strikes against targets in the DMZ required prior concurrence from the US Embassy in Saigon and the South Vietnamese government; strikes in Laos required prior concurrence from the US Embassy in Vientiane and the Laotian government; Washington authorities had to be informed of targets 24 hours in advance of strikes to permit deferral or cancellation if necessary. On 3 March, the Joint Chiefs delegated this newly acquired authority to CINCPAC and the Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command (CINCSAC). In practice, MACV headquarters nominated the targets for ARC LIGHT, which received almost automatic approval up the rest of the chain. This arrangement allowed COMUSMACV to use the heavy bombers in regular and responsive support of his operations.[8]

CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY

During January, MACV launched two large-scale operations in III Corps Tactical Zone aimed at destroying base complexes that the enemy had occupied for years and used to rest, resupply, and train his troops. CEDAR FALLS, the first of these operations, was aimed at the "Iron Triangle," an area of some sixty square miles immediately northwest of Saigon. Intelligence reports indicated that elements of several Viet Cong and North Vietnamese main force units were in this area. More important, the "Iron Triangle" reportedly contained the headquarters of VC Military

Region 4, which controlled political, labor, and propaganda activities, as well as guerrilla operations, in the Saigon/Cholon area. Destruction of this headquarters was the primary objective of CEDAR FALLS.

The operation began on 4 January, with B–52 strikes to soften up the objective area before the ground assault. After four days of intensive bombardment, a multi-division force of twenty-three battalions, under operational control of the Commanding General, II Field Force, Vietnam (II FFORCEV) jumped off in the attack. Elements of the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment sealed off the objective area and then methodically searched it for seventeen days. While seeking out and destroying enemy troops and installations, the allies removed the civilian population from the area and resettled them elsewhere to deprive the Viet Cong (VC) guerrillas of support.

Planned and launched rapidly on the basis of current intelligence, CEDAR FALLS caught the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese by surprise. By the time the operation ended on 26 January, a total of 720 enemy had been reported killed and another 200 captured. Among the prisoners were a dozen important VC officers and political officials. The Americans uncovered and destroyed a large underground tunnel complex, including the facility housing Military Region 4. The headquarters yielded an intelligence windfall of more than 490,000 pages of enemy documents, providing MACV analysts a solid base of data on the VC organization in and around Saigon that would be valuable in planning future security operations. American forces lost 72 killed and 337 wounded in the operation, and the South Vietnamese suffered 11 killed and 8 wounded.[9]

JUNCTION CITY, an even larger assault on an enemy base area, began within a month of the conclusion of CEDAR FALLS. The target of the new operation was War Zone C, a 150-square mile jungle-clad plateau seventy miles northwest of Saigon close to the border of Cambodia. According to intelligence reports, War Zone C sheltered not only enemy troops and base areas but also the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the headquarters in command of all operations in the southern half of South Vietnam.

On 22 February, a combined US/South Vietnamese force of 36 battalions moved into War Zone C to begin JUNCTION CITY. In the first of three planned phases of the operation, the US 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, the US 173rd Airborne Brigade, and two South Vietnamese Marine battalions cordoned off War Zone C on all sides. After the blocking forces were in place, three battalions attacked northwest in search and destroy operations through the center of the zone. In this phase, in spite of the size of the allied forces committed, and in spite of the fact that the enemy had made elaborate plans and preparations for defense and counterattack, only two major actions occurred. On 28 February, an enemy battalion attacked a company from the 3rd Brigade, 1st Division, and was repulsed, leaving behind 167 dead. Another battalion of the 3rd Brigade beat off a coordinated mortar and ground assault by an unknown number of enemy on the night of 10 March.

The intensity of combat increased during the second phase of JUNCTION CITY, which began on 18 March. US troops executed search and destroy operations in the eastern portion of War Zone C, and the enemy struck back. Under orders from COSVN to concentrate main force units to fight "one or two battles aimed at annihilating entire American battalions," enemy regulars launched three separate regimental-strength attacks on battalion-size US formations. All were repulsed with heavy losses. After these attacks, the Americans continued search and destroy operations in War Zone C until 15 April, when the campaign was ended.

Although the main command and staff elements of COSVN had escaped the American ring, JUNCTION CITY had significant results. During the operation, allied forces counted more than 2,700 enemy dead while suffering 282 of their own killed. They discovered and destroyed 164 enemy base camps including some 5,000 structures and captured 850 tons of food and about a half-million pages of documents. Beyond these results, a US Army history noted, US troops had remained in War Zone C for nearly two months, forcing the enemy to respond. "Not only had the operation sharply depleted the enemy's main forces in northern III Corps, but it had forced COSVN to relocate many of its training sites and agencies farther from the population." Information from defectors and captured documents indicated that COSVN was less than pleased with the campaign's results, relieving several battalion commanders and political officers for poor performance. In response to the bloody failure of its large-scale attacks, COSVN directed its units to avoid regimental-size operations during the next six months and shift to small unit hit-and-run assaults on weaker objectives.[10]

Operations in II Corps Tactical Zone

Meanwhile, in the coastal regions of II Corps Tactical Zone (II CTZ), the US 1st Cavalry Division and the two Republic of Korea (ROK) divisions, in the early months of 1967, pursued their mission of driving enemy main force units away from population centers. In Binh Dinh Province in the northern part of the tactical zone, the 1st Cavalry Division conducted operations THAYER II and PERSHING against elements of a North Vietnamese division. These operations forced the enemy to withdraw the bulk of his main force units into the mountains. At the same time, in Operation O JAC KYO, the two South Korean divisions linked up their tactical areas of responsibility (TAORs) and took over responsibility for the entire coastal region from Phan Rang to a point forty kilometers north of Qui Nhon. Measuring about sixty kilometers from north to south and twenty-five kilometers from east to west, this area contained some 126,000 people. Following the linkup of their two divisions, the South Koreans conducted operations to destroy enemy forces, open Highway 1, and deny the area to the enemy as a source of manpower and supplies.

The US 4th Infantry Division, meanwhile, was carrying the fight to enemy main force units in the Central Plateau area of II CTZ near the Cambodian border. On 1 January, the division launched Operation SAM HOUSTON, a search and destroy and border surveillance campaign aimed at two North Vietnamese divisions believed to be in the area. During January, the American division did not encounter major enemy forces, but opposition stiffened during February and March. On 22 March, in the operation's major engagement, a US battalion fought an estimated enemy battalion near the Cambodian border. When SAM HOUSTON ended on 5 April, the 4th Division claimed 733 enemy killed, at the cost of 172 American dead and 767 wounded. As an example of the air support employed by US forces, the US Air Force flew 2,184 tactical and 213 ARC LIGHT sorties during SAM HOUSTON.[11]

Enemy Counterblows—I Corps Tactical Zone

In response to General Westmoreland's offensives, the enemy took action apparently designed to relieve the pressure on his units throughout South Vietnam by compelling the redeployment of US and FWMA forces. Not surprisingly, those actions came in I Corps Tactical Zone (I CTZ), the part of South Vietnam that lay within easy reach of North Vietnamese bases and contained the important cities of Hue and Da Nang.

Charged with defending this area, the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) had few reserves. Since the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops across the DMZ in September 1966 following defeats inflicted by the Marines in Operation HASTINGS, the northern part of the zone had been relatively quiet. Marine troop dispositions, however, remained oriented toward defense against a renewed attack from north of the Demilitarized Zone. No fewer than six of III MAF's nineteen maneuver battalions were deployed just south of the DMZ, and the Marines manned four artillery bases in the same area. As a result, Marine strength elsewhere in I CTZ was spread dangerously thin, for sizeable enemy forces possessed the ability to attack not only across the DMZ but by flanking actions from Laos to Khe Sanh or through the A Shau and Ba Long Valleys which offered them an approach to Hue. In the southern part of the corps area, Viet Cong guerrillas were a constant threat to poorly defended South Vietnamese villages and hamlets.

During January and February, the enemy began to step up the pressure. In the coastal plain, guerrilla activity increased. In North Vietnam, Laos, and the DMZ, enemy regulars built up supply points, massed rocket, mortar, and heavy artillery units, and prepared for new offensive operations in South Vietnam.[12]

In late February, large-scale combat erupted once again along the DMZ, but it was the Marines who fired the first rounds. On 22 February, President Johnson, when he approved ROLLING THUNDER 54, also authorized land artillery and naval gunfire bombardment of North Vietnamese weapons firing on friendly forces from

positions north of the demarcation line, when necessary to protect US lives and equipment. Acting under this authority, General Westmoreland, on 25 February, authorized CG, III MAF, to fire on artillery targets north of the DMZ. The purpose of the artillery fire was to augment air strikes during periods of reduced visibility, disruption of enemy lines of communication in the DMZ, and protection of long-range aerial reconnaissance by attacking suspected anti-aircraft gun positions. Beginning on 25 February and continuing for four days, Marine artillerists fired 2,171 rounds north of the demarcation line.

The North Vietnamese reacted sharply. On nine occasions during March, they attacked Marine artillery positions with rockets, mortars, and cannon. The enemy also launched a two-battalion infantry assault against these firebases, but the Marines intercepted the attack and threw it back with heavy losses. The Marines counted a total of more than 500 enemy bodies in the areas around their firebases at Camp Carroll, Cam Lo, Con Thien, and Gio Linh.[13]

Reinforcement of I CTZ

As action picked up in northern I Corps, intelligence reports began to reveal a major enemy buildup in southern North Vietnam and areas of Laos bordering on the northeast corner of South Vietnam. Marine intelligence officers estimated enemy troop strength in and around the DMZ at more than 20,000, an increase of some 3,700 men since June 1966. Of particular concern was a major buildup in the A Shau Valley corridor from the Laos border to Hue. General Westmoreland viewed these activities as preliminary to a major enemy offensive aimed at seizing the northern two provinces of South Vietnam. Separated by steep mountains from the rest of I CTZ, these provinces were difficult for MACV to supply and reinforce and were attractive targets for the North Vietnamese.

Convinced that the enemy offensive was imminent, on 7 April Westmoreland put into effect MACV's contingency plan NORTH CAROLINA. This plan provided for creation of a division-size provisional organization, Task Force OREGON, to take over the Chu Lai area of southern I CTZ, thereby relieving Marine units for employment in the threatened areas farther north. In assembling Task Force OREGON, Westmoreland took pains to minimize disturbance of operations elsewhere. He recognized, nevertheless, that there would be some lessening of the tempo of combat operations in II, III, and IV CTZs. The impact of the deployment was felt most severely in II Corps, where I Field Force Vietnam was deprived of its reserve, a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division.[14]

Within a week, Westmoreland concluded that still more reinforcement of I Corps was necessary. On 12 April, he informed Admiral Sharp that the redeployments already in motion probably would not be "enough to decisively reverse the present trend," but that further shifting of forces under his command was not feasible. He

recommended, therefore, that the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade (9th MAB), based on Okinawa and constituting part of the Pacific Command reserve, reinforce III MAF as soon as possible, and that plans be made to keep the brigade in South Vietnam at least until September.[15]

On 13 April, after consulting CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed Westmoreland's request. Specifically, the JCS recommended to Secretary McNamara that two battalion landing teams (BLTs) of the 9th MAB be positioned off the South Vietnamese coast, to be committed when and as required by General Westmoreland. The third BLT was to remain on Okinawa in a readiness status of fifteen days for embarkation at COMUSMACV's request. McNamara approved the Joint Chiefs' proposal on 15 April.[16]

The enemy attempted to launch his long-awaited offensive in northern I Corps in late April. As the Marines later reconstructed it, the enemy's immediate objective appeared to be the Khe Sanh combat base located near the western end of the Demilitarized Zone. The North Vietnamese planned first to isolate the battlefield by launching mortar attacks on the Marines' four artillery bases along the DMZ and by using demolitions to sever Route 9, the east-west road that roughly paralleled the DMZ and was Khe Sanh's only land line of communication. With the position cut off from overland assistance, the enemy would launch a diversionary attack at Lang Vei Special Forces Camp four miles west of Khe Sanh, followed by the main assault on the base.

On 27 and 28 April, the North Vietnamese carried out the fire support and diversionary phases of the plan apparently on schedule. The fighting at Khe Sanh, however, had been triggered prematurely on 24 April, when a Marine patrol encountered the enemy in strength northwest of the base. The Marines quickly airlifted three battalions into the area and assaulted the enemy, who had taken position on three hills—881, 881S, and 881N—that overlooked the main Khe Sanh position. After much hard fighting, the Marines secured the heights by 3 May and then garrisoned and fortified them. These hill positions would play a key role in the defense of Khe Sanh when the North Vietnamese launched a much larger and more determined attack there the following year.

Undeterred by their defeat at Khe Sanh, the North Vietnamese assaulted the Marine artillery base at Con Thien with two battalions on 8 May, but were again repulsed with heavy losses. Marine casualties in the Khe Sanh and Con Thien actions totaled 199 killed and 535 wounded. According to Marine reports, the enemy left more than 1,100 bodies on the two battlefields.

The enemy, meanwhile, had been continuing his artillery buildup in and north of the DMZ and had intensified his fire on friendly forces. On 5 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to conduct military operations in the DMZ south of the demarcation line. With this authority, General Westmoreland directed III MAF to enter the part of the Demilitarized Zone within South Vietnam to destroy enemy troops, equipment, and installations and to evacuate some 10,000 civilians

living in the buffer zone. The Marines, together with South Vietnamese army units, conducted four operations in the DMZ between 18 and 28 May, employing a total of five Marine and five ARVN battalions. The allies defeated dug-in enemy troops in a series of engagements. Their operations temporarily disrupted the North Vietnamese command organization in the DMZ area and resulted in the destruction of many bunker complexes and artillery positions, the capture or destruction of quantities of supplies and ammunition, and the death of more than 700 enemy troops. Allied casualties totaled 163 killed and 1,012 wounded.[17]

The DMZ Barrier

The Marines' evacuation of civilians during their DMZ operations was part of the preparation for emplacement of an anti-infiltration barrier that was to extend across the northern I Corps Tactical Zone into Laos, where it would interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail. During 1966, despite military opposition, Secretary McNamara had strongly advocated the construction of such a barrier, which he viewed as a possible substitute for ROLLING THUNDER, and considerable discussion and planning had taken place. By the end of the year, McNamara had set up an organization, the Defense Communications Planning Group (DCPG) to manage the project, which was code named PRACTICE NINE. Early in January 1967, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested that COMUSMACV and CINCPAC submit requirements plans based on the DCPG's project definition plan of 22 December 1966. The plan for a conventional ground-supported linear barrier for eastern Quang Tri Province, the northernmost province of I CTZ, was due by 10 February, while that for an air-supported barrier westward into Laos was due by 15 April.[18]

On 26 January 1967, General Westmoreland forwarded the MACV PRACTICE NINE Requirements Plan for the linear barrier to CINCPAC; a week later, it was passed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The MACV plan drew upon a plan prepared by the III Marine Amphibious Force, which would have primary responsibility for building and manning the barrier. Besides providing MACV's subordinate commands with broad planning guidance, the Requirements Plan was to provide higher headquarters with concepts and estimated requirements to support the system.[19]

As envisioned by Westmoreland, the linear strong point and obstacle system, designed to impede infiltration and detect invasion, would extend from the South China Sea near the DMZ westward to the vicinity of Dong Ha Mountain, some nineteen miles inland. The system would consist of a series of obstacles, observation posts, strong points, and base areas. The barbed wire and minefield obstacles, equipped with sensor/detector devices and searchlights, would be placed so as to deny enemy access to known infiltration routes, provide early warning of intrusion, and channel hostile movement. Eventually, the obstacles would be extended to form a solid line westward, possibly to the Laotian border. The observation posts

would simply serve to insure the surveillance of the fixed obstacles. Sited to interdict infiltrators channeled by the obstacles, the strong points, each manned by a reinforced company equipped with automatic and direct fire weapons and mortars would be heavily fortified with bunkers and trenches around the perimeters of helicopter landing pads. Each strongpoint would have the necessary communications to request and direct supporting air, ground, and naval fires. Adding depth to the line would be the base areas, occupying key terrain features and acting as centers for patrolling and fire support. The base areas would hold artillery units within range of the strong points.

COMUSMACV estimated that the linear barrier ultimately would have to be manned by a division, an armored cavalry regiment, and necessary supporting units. He assumed that maximum support would be provided by combat, combat service, and combat service support forces already in the area. Initially, an infantry brigade of 4,460 personnel plus augmentations totaling 3,231 men would be required to supplement the units already on the ground. The brigade would constitute the first increment of the division-sized force.

General Westmoreland pointed out that even if his command were reinforced by the requested units, substantial MACV forces would have to be diverted to support the barrier, thereby interfering with current operations. He also pointed out that the strong point obstacle line was but one of many anti-infiltration programs and that a proper balance should be maintained among all of them. These programs, he continued, would not stop all infiltration. They simply would make it more difficult and costly for the enemy. In that light, Westmoreland urged that the term "barrier" be dropped, since it implied an impregnable defense. In order to meet the proposed 1 November 1967 operational capability date established in the DCPG plan, immediate action was needed to provide construction funding, procure materials, and authorize negotiations with the South Vietnamese government for land acquisition and population removal.[20]

Following his review of the MACV plan, Admiral Sharp recommended to the JCS that it not be implemented within the time frame envisioned. He argued that that the obstacle system would require additional forces to construct and man it. To obtain them, troops deployed in or en route to South Vietnam would have to be diverted and it would be more difficult to maintain a balance among all anti-infiltration programs.[21]

CINCPAC's reservations may have reflected strong objections to the barrier concept that were being raised by his Marine commanders at III MAF and Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMFPAC). From the plan's inception, the Marine generals had complained that the system would tie down their troops in fixed positions and actually reduce their ability to defeat enemy infiltration through the DMZ. In December 1966, for example, Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt, CG III MAF, declared that if he had the additional forces called for by the barrier plan, "a far better job of sealing the DMZ could be accomplished without the barrier itself."

At MACV's direction, III MAF proceeded with barrier planning, but expressions of unhappiness with the project were heard at every level of the Marine chain of command.[22]

When the Joint Chiefs reviewed the MACV plan, they shared many of the Marines' concerns. The four Service Chiefs recommended against the plan's implementation. They noted that it would require more than 7,600 personnel above those currently authorized in the MACV reinforcement (Program 4) decided upon in 1966, as well as diversion of some 11,500 US and South Vietnamese soldiers from current programs. The Saigon government would have to agree to provide about 23,000 acres of land and relocate 13,000 to 18,000 civilians. The plan also required immediate authority to procure and schedule shipment of construction material for strong points and bases and additional FY 1967 funding authority for $13.5 million for specified construction projects. Another objection to the plan was that the increased anti-infiltration capability would be in northeastern South Vietnam where infiltration had been minimal.[23]

The Chairman, on the other hand, in a split paper, recommended that Secretary McNamara approve the MACV plan. Although he supported the Service Chiefs' estimate of the resources required to implement it, General Wheeler believed that the eastern DMZ area represented a potential infiltration corridor, and installation of a barrier there would be a prudent action. In addition, Wheeler noted that the level of enemy activity near the DMZ might require a large diversion of forces to that area whether or not the barrier was constructed. In any event, plans could always be changed if the situation warranted it. The Chairman therefore recommended immediate authority and funding for improvement of Route 1 and the port at Hue, a necessary requirement to implement the plan; approval in principle for the addition of 7,691 personnel to Program 4; immediate contact with the State Department regarding negotiations for the land acquisition; and authorization of procurement of fortification materials, for delivery in phase with force arrivals and logistic buildup plans.[24]

Accepting General Wheeler's recommendations, Secretary McNamara decided that preparations for execution of the barrier plan "should go forward as quickly as possible" and directed that the necessary implementing actions be taken. This was not a decision to execute the plan, but rather to continue preparations to meet the DCPG's 1 November 1967 completion date in the event that a decision to go forward was made. McNamara also requested that the Joint Chiefs develop recommendations for providing the additional forces required by the plan.[25]

To provide these additional troops without mobilizing reserve units and with minimal personnel impact on the existing force structure, the Chiefs recommended withdrawal of elements from Army divisions earmarked for NATO. Specifically, they recommended that subordinate units totaling 8,353 soldiers be taken from divisions slated to deploy to Europe within thirty days after the start of a NATO mobilization. This would enable the brigade force to reach South Vietnam in time

to meet the barrier completion date. The Army Chief of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations indicated that additional strength authority and funding totaling $296 million would be required to provide the additional forces and their equipment and restore the sustaining base. Readiness dates for these units depended upon a decision on the recommendation not later than 31 March. Any delay of the decision beyond that date would bring corresponding delays in deployment.[26]

In their memorandum to McNamara, the Service Chiefs took the opportunity to reiterate their earlier reservations about the barrier scheme. They recommended that no decision be made to increase anti-infiltration operations along the DMZ until a second MACV plan, due in April 1967, had been evaluated. General Wheeler did not concur with the Service Chiefs on this point and repeated his previous position. He did recommend that the Secretary approve the Chiefs' plan for mustering the additional forces and the required funding that they had requested. On 8 April, McNamara approved for planning purposes the deployment of forces recommended by the JCS for the linear barrier, less 531 personnel who were either considered unnecessary or would have to be provided from MACV's present resources. The Defense Secretary's decision called for an increase in US authorized strength in South Vietnam by 7,522 spaces and offshore Navy strength by 300.[27]

In the meantime, the MACV staff had been preparing the PRACTICE NINE Air Supported Anti-Infiltration Plan, which the command forwarded to CINCPAC 11 March. CINCPAC in turn forwarded it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 3 April. This plan covered the extension of the barrier westward from the end of the ground obstacle system through Quang Tri Province and across Laos. It would augment existing anti-infiltration programs through the selective use of specialized munitions, sensors, and related equipment then under development. Like the ground barrier, the air-supported system would make infiltration more difficult and costly to the enemy but would not stop it.

The anti-vehicle portion of the air supported barrier was to be operational by 1 November 1967. It would expand and improve the existing STEEL TIGER and TIGER HOUND anti-infiltration air campaigns in Laos by adding new techniques, equipment and forces. The anti-personnel portion would only enter an operational test phase by 1 November. This was because attacking personnel infiltration by air was a far more difficult problem than attacking vehicles, if not an insurmountable one. It would require massive quantities of sensors and ordnance. The goal, therefore, would be not to halt personnel movement down the Ho Chi Minh Trail but rather to restrict it, inflict casualties, disrupt established routes, force infiltrators into more difficult terrain, and demoralize porters and soldiers. This would be done by seeding areas of known infiltration with mines and deploying sensors to locate activity, detect breaches of the mined areas, determine when additional areas required seeding, and pinpoint targets for air strikes. Interdiction points and seeded areas would be shifted constantly. Completion of this system would be

slow because many of its components still had to be tested and manufactured and because the whole concept had not had an operational trial.

A key element of the system would be the Infiltration Surveillance Center (ISC), to be located at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. Within VHF/UHF radio range of airborne EC–121 monitor aircraft over Laos, the center would receive and act upon any sensor information or detonations in the minefields. It also would pass along strike requests to the Seventh Air Force. To meet the stated operational date of 1 November 1967, General Westmoreland recommended immediate action to fund the necessary construction.[28]

In their evaluation of the MACV plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with General Westmoreland that the increased anti-infiltration effort should combine intensification of existing programs with new programs of proven effectiveness. The Chiefs pointed to numerous problems in meeting the operational effectiveness date of 1 November 1967. To meet that date, all component and subsystem development then under way would have to proceed without delay. The governments of South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand would have to approve the concept and accept its associated risks to friendly forces and civilians. MACV would have to be authorized to conduct PRAIRIE FIRE ground reconnaissance operations in the PRACTICE NINE area, from bases in Thailand as well as South Vietnam. The government in Bangkok would have to agree to expansion of US airbases at Nam Phong, Ubon, and Nakhon Phanom, as well as to construction of additional Army logistics facilities at various locations in Thailand. On the US side, funding authorization and political clearances for construction and communications expansion must be obtained immediately. Overall, the JCS declared, the urgent schedule demanded by the 1 November deadline would create many risks and problems.

Manpower, equipment, and funding were also concerns. The Chiefs noted that the additional resources required for the system would include more than 5,400 personnel, 47 fixed-wing aircraft, and 24 helicopters, plus a total of $22.3 million in extra funding. More money also would be required for the PRAIRIE FIRE account administered by the Navy for an additional one-year period. The JCS declared that they were becoming increasingly concerned over the availability of funding to support PRACTICE NINE requirements.

On 17 April, in light of all these problems, the JCS recommended to the Secretary of Defense that execution of the barrier plan be delayed until approximately 1 April 1968. By that time, the capabilities of the equipment under development would have been more fully proven and the inherent risks in the program lowered. The Joint Chiefs also recommended that immediate steps be taken to obtain approvals needed for PRACTICE NINE construction and operational concepts and expansion of PRAIRIE FIRE operations; that the necessary forces be added to Program 4; and that the required funds be designated and allocated immediately.[29]

Secretary McNamara was determined to hold to the 1 November operational date and to go forward with preparations. On 22 April, he initiated with the State

Department negotiations with Laos and Thailand to obtain approvals for PRACTICE NINE basing and concurrence for expansion of PRAIRIE FIRE operations. He also took steps to determine required additional costs and to prepare resources needed to support the plan. After deleting nearly 1,800 Air Force and Army personnel spaces, McNamara approved for planning purposes the deployment of the additional forces recommended by the Joint Chiefs. The Defense Secretary rejected the opening of Nam Phong airbase and suggested that aircraft planned for deployment there be shifted to other suitable Thai fields. Program 4 was revised to incorporate the approved forces. Later, the JCS persuaded McNamara to restore the 419 Army spaces he had deleted.[30]

On 8 June, the Joint Chiefs again emphasized their reservations about the cost and timing of the project. They recommended that if the Secretary decided to execute the plan, CINCPAC and COMUSMACV be given maximum flexibility in the use of PRACTICE NINE resources. The Chairman, again dissenting from the views of his colleagues, recommended simply that COMUSMACV be authorized to employ barrier resources in accordance with his needs.[31]

On 13 June, Secretary McNamara finally expanded his earlier approvals of PRACTICE NINE plans to include authorization to employ resources earmarked for the strong point obstacle sector in executing the MACV plan of 26 January. This decision, however, came too late for the material to arrive in South Vietnam in time for construction to be completed by 1 November. Meantime, the JCS had directed deployment of certain forces associated with the barrier. In addition, with South Vietnamese government approval, US and ARVN forces were clearing land for the system. The III Marine Amphibious Force had completed its portion of the barrier planning by late June, and its infantry and engineers were heavily engaged in work on the system by July. With most of the additional forces approved for the barrier still to arrive, Marine resources were stretched between the strong point obstacle system and other missions in I Corps.[32]

General Westmoreland Requests Additional Forces

The manpower needs of the barrier were only one element in the broader question of additional troops for MACV. By the end of May, North Vietnamese efforts to invade I Corps had been repulsed, at least for the time being. But, although thwarted, enemy efforts in the north had contributed to the disruption of allied offensive operations elsewhere in South Vietnam. MACV's redeployments to reinforce positions on the DMZ had deprived commanders of troops urgently needed for other missions. Actually, even before this diversion of forces had taken place, the general offensive had bogged down. Forces available were simply not adequate to the task at hand. For major operations such as CEDAR FALLS and JUNCTION CITY, which required the massing of 25 or 30 battalions, MACV had to

take troops away from other important tasks such as providing security for populated areas and lines of communication. The result was that combat operations against enemy main forces and bases could not be sustained. MACV lacked troops, for example, to maintain a continuing presence in the Iron Triangle and War Zone C. Under the circumstances, full-scale attacks into other major enemy base areas were out of the question.[33]

Reinforcement discussions had begun in February. At that time, General Wheeler in effect invited General Westmoreland to reopen the question, claiming that President Johnson now was receptive to proposals for accelerating the military effort. The previous year, Westmoreland had accepted Program 4 strength of 470,000 men; well under the 500,000 he considered a viable "level-off" force. Perhaps the time was at hand to reach or even exceed that level.[34]

Responding to Wheeler's invitation, Westmoreland on 18 March submitted a request through Admiral Sharp for reinforcement during FY 1968 of two and one-third divisions, two river assault squadrons, four tactical fighter squadrons, and one C–130 squadron. In manpower, this reinforcement would total 80,576 personnel. These additional troops, Westmoreland explained, constituted the "minimum essential force" necessary to exploit the successes of the current offensive and retain effective control of the areas being cleared of enemy main forces. Westmoreland pointed out that he had originally asked for 555,741 personnel and 124 maneuver battalions for CY 1967. Under Program Four, however, he had received only 470,366 personnel and 87 maneuver battalions. He had not entered a reclama for his original program, the MACV commander explained, because of "adverse piaster impact and the realities of Service capabilities."[35] A subsequent reassessment, however, had "indicated clearly that the Program Four Force, although enabling us to gain the initiative, will not permit sustained operations of the scope and intensity required to avoid an unreasonably protracted war." Westmoreland was now, in effect, asking for approximately the strength level he had originally requested for CY 1967, which he had considered an acceptable "level-off" force.

While Westmoreland considered his 80,000-man request the "minimum essential force," it might well not be sufficient to end the war within a reasonable period of time. For more rapid progress, "it is entirely possible that [a need for] additional forces, over and above the immediate requirements for 2 1/3 divisions will materialize." Current MACV planning, Westmoreland declared, suggested an "optimum" reinforcement of four and two-thirds divisions, ten tactical fighter squadrons, and the full mobile riverine force, amounting to 199,017 personnel above the Program Four strength. This addition would bring the total US force in South Vietnam to 678,248. Westmoreland declared that this larger reinforcement would bring an earlier conclusion to the war. On a public relations visit to Washington in April, he told President Johnson and Secretary McNamara that with the maximum reinforcement, the war might be ended in two years, whereas with the minimum force it might go on for another three years at least. Together with

the arguments about the future of ROLLING THUNDER, Westmoreland's troop request formed the basis for another round of administration strategic debate and decision-making about Vietnam.[36]

5

The Debate over Escalation

General Westmoreland's request for additional forces reached Washington at a time when discontent with the course of the war was growing among civilian and military officials in the Johnson administration. Their unhappiness extended to the strategies governing US operations in both North and South Vietnam. In this atmosphere, Westmoreland's troop request stirred up a renewed and intensified policy debate, not only over the specific manpower request but also over the course of ROLLING THUNDER. The resulting controversy was not resolved until July and revealed deepening divisions within the administration over Vietnam.

The JCS' Views on Westmoreland's Request

The Joint Chiefs of Staff made the opening move in the policy debate. On 22 March, General Wheeler directed the Joint Staff, with the assistance of the Services, to make a thorough analysis of COMUSMACV's request. (Typical of the three-cornered relationship between the Chairman and his two Pacific commanders, Wheeler acted upon an information copy of Westmoreland's request to Admiral Sharp. CINCPAC recommended that the JCS approve Westmoreland's plan on 31 March.) The Joint Staff was to develop two separate cases, one assuming a Reserve call-up and the other assuming that Reserves would not be called. In an implementing directive issued on 25 March, the Vice Director, Joint Staff, added a new element to the study by calling for an updated "concept for the conduct of the war," if needed to validate the varied force requirements.[1]

In its 13 April report, the J–3 recommended approval not only of General Westmoreland's immediate request for reinforcements in FY 1968 but also that preparations be made to provide the optimum force. Provision of forces of this magnitude, the J–3 maintained, was necessary to "hasten the successful conclusion of the war

in Southeast Asia." At present levels, forces were inadequate to accomplish the two basic military objectives: defeat of the enemy main force units, and provision of security for successful pacification to extend the area under Saigon's control. To achieve these objectives, "significantly greater military pressure ... beyond the enemy's capability to accommodate or counter, must be imposed on the enemy in NVN and SVN in as short a time as possible."

As the only practical way to meet both minimum and optimum force goals, the J–3 recommended a Reserve call-up and involuntary extension of terms of service. Without those actions, deployment of the minimum essential force could not be completed until November 1969; the buildup of the optimum force would take until July 1972. With the recommended personnel actions, the minimum force would be in place by the end of FY 1968 (mid-1968); the optimum force could be deployed by July 1969.

Air Force planners did not concur with the J–3 report. They argued that in its present form, the proposal would "generate resistance and nonacceptance in those quarters from which acceptance is being sought." The two basic weaknesses in the J–3 report, the Air Force planners maintained, were: the inadequacy of the data resulting from the speed with which they had been assembled; and undue emphasis on justification of the optimum force, rather than the minimum essential force specifically requested by COMUSMACV and CINCPAC.[2]

When the Joint Chiefs of Staff took up the J–3 report on 14 April, General McConnell, the Air Force Chief of Staff, tabled a paper in which he challenged the basic premise that major force increases were needed. "I note with concern," he declared,

> That the paper ... recommends that we prepare to add approximately 200,000 men to our strength in South Vietnam.... Since the decision was made to expand the role of the United States in South Vietnam beyond that of advisors, our troop strength has built to a size far in excess of that which was originally considered to be necessary. There is nothing in the current request for forces or in the paper under discussion that convinces me that the addition of the forces requested will bring about the desired result.

The preferable strategy, General McConnell maintained, was to make "effective application of our superior air and sea power against North Vietnam's vulnerabilities" and thereby "cripple his capabilities to continue to support the war and ... destroy his resolution to continue." This strategy would reduce the need to match the Communists in manpower, an area in which they had the advantage. In view of the threat in I Corps, however, the Air Force Chief of Staff approved the sending of the minimum essential force and agreed to support any Reserve call-up needed to provide it. His support for this action, General McConnell emphasized, was "conditioned on the recommendation for an immediate expanded air and naval campaign against North Vietnam.... " McConnell thus linked troop reinforcements to the issue of expanding ROLLING THUNDER.[3]

The JCS accepted this linkage. On 19 April, they agreed to revise their views generally in accord with McConnell's position. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 20 April, the Joint Chiefs recommended deployment during FY 1968 of MACV's minimum essential force, plus certain other air and naval units requested by CINCPAC. The additional forces consisted of three Air Force tactical fighter squadrons to be stationed in Thailand and an eight-inch gun cruiser and five destroyers for use in naval operations in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin. For MACV, the reinforcement would include an Army division and an armored cavalry regiment, a Marine division and aircraft wing, an expanded Navy riverine force, five Air Force tactical fighter squadrons and one communications-electronics (CE) squadron, and more than 14,500 support troops of all services. Less the 7,822 spaces that the Secretary of Defense had approved on 9 April for PRACTICE NINE, the barrier, which were charged against the new reinforcement, Pacific Command and MACV would receive a total of 98,022 additional personnel.[4]

The additional forces were needed, the JCS explained, because the existing force level in South Vietnam was not sufficient to "bring that degree of pressure to bear on the enemy ... which would be beyond his ability to accommodate and which would provide the secure environment essential to sustained progress in Revolutionary Development." Primarily, the reinforcements were needed to "offset the enemy's increased posture in the vicinity of the DMZ and to improve the environment for Revolutionary Development [pacification] in I and IV CTZs."

The Joint Chiefs then addressed the question of where the additional troops and equipment were to be obtained. They pointed out that, under present military personnel policies and in the light of current world-wide commitments, it would be impossible to complete the buildup by the end of FY 1968. Accordingly, they recommended a call-up of Reserves for a minimum of 24 months and involuntary extension of terms of service for 12 months. To secure logistical support for the additional forces, the JCS recommended that authority be granted to reopen inactive military installations in the continental United States (CONUS) and to draw the necessary equipment from sources in the following priority: CONUS depot assets and programmed production not committed to higher priority requirements; operational project stocks; Reserve components not scheduled for call-up; pre-positioned equipment in Europe; non-deploying active units in the US. The JCS urged an early decision on both funding in addition to the FY 1968 budget and increases in Service end strength to support all aspects of the deployment. According to approximate calculations by the Services, the additional cost in FY 1968 for the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps would be more than $2.2 billion. The Air Force did not submit a cost figure.[5]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also explained to Secretary McNamara that both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC had indicated that there might later be a requirement for an additional two and one-third division equivalents and five more tactical fighter squadrons. They promised to provide the Secretary with an evaluation of these

additions, together with an examination of the "ultimate requirement for forces needed to achieve a satisfactory conclusion of the war."

Turning to strategy, the Chiefs made explicit the link between troop reinforcements for South Vietnam and the bombing campaign against the North. They declared that, while the added forces should "provide an increased level of effort in both SVN and NVN, action must also be taken to reduce and obstruct the enemy capability to import the material required to sustain his war effort." To justify both force increases and stepped-up operations, the JCS submitted an updated "Military Strategy for the Conduct of the War in Southeast Asia" which they recommended that the Secretary of Defense "approve in principle." This strategy, the Joint Chiefs explained, would provide for military action in pursuit of the national objective "to obtain a stable and noncommunist government in South Vietnam." The "military contribution" to attainment of this objective should consist of: 1) operations "against the VC/NVA forces in SVN while concurrently assisting the South Vietnamese government in their nation-building efforts"; 2) obstruction of the flow of men and materials from North Vietnam to the South; and 3) efforts to "obstruct and reduce imports of war sustaining materials into North Vietnam."

The "military contribution" would be complete with the attainment of the following objectives:

a. To make it as difficult and costly as possible for NVN to continue effective support of the VC and to cause NVN to cease direction of the VC insurgency.

b. To defeat the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Armed Forces in SVN and force the withdrawal of NVA forces.

c. To extend Government of South Vietnam dominion, direction, and control over South Vietnam.

d. To deter the Chinese Communists from direct intervention in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the Western Pacific and to be prepared to defeat such intervention if it occurs.

Spelling out what needed to be done to achieve the military objectives; the JCS declared that objective "a" would require an integrated air and naval campaign against military and war-sustaining target systems in all areas of North Vietnam, including intensive interdiction and mining of ports and inland and coastal waters. To achieve objective "b," ground and supporting air operations should be conducted to destroy enemy main force units, base areas, and safe havens, to deny him access to the people and food resources, and to block enemy invasion or infiltration from cross-border sanctuaries. Achievement of objective "c" would require military operations to destroy enemy guerrillas and infrastructure, open lines of communication, and protect forces engaged in pacification. Under this objective, the Chiefs included advising and training friendly military and paramilitary forces, their only reference to Saigon's military in the entire discussion. To accomplish objective "d," the United States should maintain and improve its

forces and bases in the Western Pacific and Thailand and retain its capability to employ nuclear weapons.[6]

On 19 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to broaden their study to include the forces needed to deal successfully with foreseeable contingencies worldwide. They reasoned that a Reserve call-up to provide COMUSMACV's minimum FY 1968 reinforcement would provoke popular displeasure and political controversy. Having paid this political price, it made sense to gain maximum return by requesting a call-up large enough to meet all reasonable force requirements.

The following day, 20 April, General Wheeler told the Joint Staff to begin the necessary studies; in preparing them, it should not think in terms of a total mobilization of the World War II type. Instead, the staff should plan for establishment of training and production bases capable of generating expeditiously the forces needed for expanded operations in Southeast Asia while at the same time honoring US commitments to NATO. General Wheeler listed the following as contingencies that might call for additional commitments of US forces: 1) provision of Soviet or other "volunteer" military units to North Vietnam; 2) an increase of tensions or even low-level military action between North and South Korea; 3) an increase in tensions in central Europe, perhaps centering around Berlin, to a degree that would force the United States to reinforce NATO; 4) overt military intervention by Communist China in the conflict in South Vietnam.[7]

From the outset, disagreements plagued preparation of the study. The initial version, submitted on 1 May, J–5 calculated that the total force requirements to meet the goals established by the Chairman would be 29 Army division force equivalents (DFE), 146 Air Force tactical fighter squadrons (TFS), 17 Navy attack carriers, and 5 Marine divisions and 4 Marine aircraft wings (5/4 division/wing teams). Air Force planners did not concur with these force requirements. Repeating the arguments advanced during the debate over COMUSMACV's reinforcement request, Air Force planners maintained that the tremendous costs of the proposed force increase could be avoided by removing restrictions on air and naval attacks on North Vietnam. In response, the J–5 pointed out that the Joint Chiefs, in their memorandum of 20 April, had recommended just such intensified air and naval operations. If carried out, those operations could provoke Soviet and Chinese retaliatory actions around the world, making an increase in US force levels particularly necessary. (It should be noted that in discussions with the President and Secretary of Defense, the JCS frequently reassured the civilian officials that expanded attacks on North Vietnam were unlikely to result in Communist retaliation elsewhere.) On 3 May, the Chiefs considered the J–5 report and the Air Force non-concurrence and returned them to the Joint Staff and the Service planners for revision.[8]

Submitted on 11 May, a revised report adopted a more modest set of force goals and strength levels. The desired military posture was now considered to consist of forces with the capability to: a) prepare, deploy, and sustain FY 1968 forces for COMUSMACV and PACOM; b) restore and maintain NATO forces, NATO

initial augmentation forces, and pre-positioned stocks; c) provide a contingency/initiative force of three DFE and ten TFS for use in any emergency, but primarily in Southeast Asia; d) maintain a ready force of one DFE and three TFS for minor contingencies. Under existing personnel policies, the contingency force could not contain any men who had returned from Vietnam within 25 months if it were to be immediately available for deployment. Under this condition, the desired force posture would require 25 and two-thirds DFEs, 120 Air Force TFS, and 5/4 Marine division-wing teams. To attain this force objective, the government would have to call up five Army and one Marine Reserve divisions. The revised paper also called for a relaxation of restrictions on air and naval operations against North Vietnam. It did not, however, specify what restrictions should be removed or what operations should be conducted.

These changes did not meet all the Air Force objections to the original report. It again entered a non-concurrence, but did not, however, rule out any increase in forces. Instead, it maintained that at present, a buildup sufficient to carry out the JSOP 69–76 strategy was justified.[9] However, if the Southeast Asia conflict became "an unduly protracted war of attrition due to continuation of constraints," then some additions to the JSOP levels might be required. Force levels acceptable to the Air Force were 21 and two-thirds DFE, 105 TFS, 16 attack carriers, and 5/4 Marine division/wings.

Objecting to the returnee-free element of the "contingency/initiative force," the Army pointed out that the requirement was unreasonable because any contingency for which the force would be needed would be so grave as to justify waiving current tour policies.[10]

At a meeting on 12 May, the JCS adopted the Army view and dropped their requirement that the "contingency/initiative force" be free of recent returnees from Southeast Asia. As a result, the required Army force level fell from 25 and two-thirds to 22 and two-thirds DFEs. In response to this concession, the Air Force Chief of Staff withdrew his non-concurrence on 19 May. He agreed to force levels of 22 and two-thirds DFE and 120 TFS for the Army and Air Force. General McConnell continued to maintain that the Navy should have only 16 attack carriers rather than the 17 advocated by the other members of the JCS.

Rather than argue over this one ship, the Joint Chiefs agreed to forward split views. On 20 May, they presented a memorandum containing their views to the Secretary of Defense. In addition to the recommended force levels, they asked for a selective Reserve call-up and extension of tours of duty for twelve months, but did not specify the size of the call-up. They did, however, recommend provision of forces in the four categories proposed in the J–5 report: FY 1968 forces for PACOM and MACV; augmentation forces for NATO; a "contingency/initiative force" primarily for use in Southeast Asia; and a ready force for minor contingencies. The JCS told Mr. McNamara that the Services' potential to equip these forces was fairly high, but that under present procedures, the Army would not achieve the required

materiel posture until 1970 and the Air Force would fall short until 1971. The Chiefs accordingly recommended the delegation of increased authority to the Services for accelerated procurement of equipment and supplies.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also pointed up their growing concern about America's worldwide military posture. They declared that they had "reservations concerning the ability of the United States [under present policies] to: 1) prosecute the war in Southeast Asia decisively; 2) respond to likely contingencies stemming from the war in Southeast Asia; and 3) meet other world-wide military commitments and contingencies." In Southeast Asia, incremental and restrained application of US power had "inhibited the effective exploitation of the superiority of US military forces and allowed the enemy to accommodate to the military measures taken." As a result, North Vietnam now was fielding in South Vietnam 68 North Vietnamese and 85 Viet Cong infantry battalions and had massed at least three, and probably four, regular divisions near the DMZ. The North Vietnamese were becoming increasingly aggressive, and their supply lines, both for Soviet bloc imports and from the North into the South, remained open.

As the war in Southeast Asia dragged on and absorbed an increasing amount of US military capability, the Joint Chiefs warned, Communist aggression elsewhere would become more probable. A North Vietnamese advance to the Mekong River in Laos, a flare-up in Korea, increased activity by Communist insurgents in Thailand, pressure against Berlin, or subversion in North Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America were among possible threats. With its present military posture, the United States could not respond adequately to most of these contingencies. In March of FY 1968, the immediate combat-ready strategic reserve would consist only of one and two-thirds Army divisions, two Marine division/wing teams, Navy forces not forward-deployed, and five Air Force tactical fighter squadrons—all with little or no sustaining capability.

Turning to the measures needed to bring the war in Southeast Asia to a successful conclusion, the JCS recommended relaxation of the restrictions and restraints governing operations against North Vietnam. They requested authority to strike 23 additional targets: 8 ports and port approaches, 5 airfields, 1 railroad/highway bridge, and 9 military complexes. They also recommended changes in ROLLING THUNDER operating rules to: delete the 10 nautical mile (nm) radius prohibited area around Hanoi; reduce the Hanoi restricted circle from 30 to 10 nm; reduce the Haiphong restricted area from 10 to 4 nm; and expand the special coastal armed reconnaissance area in North Vietnam.[11]

In a separate memorandum to McNamara on 20 May, the Joint Chiefs elaborated on the need for intensified interdiction in North Vietnam. They pointed out that the North Vietnamese had increased imports from 800,000 metric tons in 1964 to more than 1,365,000 metric tons in 1966. In addition, they cited the real danger that the Soviet Union might introduce new advanced weapons into the country, such as improved antiaircraft and surface-to-air missiles, guided missile

patrol boats, surface-to-surface missiles, and a variety of artillery and direct fire weapons. The Soviets could ship these in by rail across China, by air, or by sea. To date, the major volume of military supplies had entered by sea through the port of Haiphong. That port, along with Hanoi, comprised the principal logistic base area in North Vietnam.

To impede this flow of war materials, the Joint Chiefs insisted, the Hanoi/Haiphong base area should be neutralized, either by direct attack or, preferably, by cutting its lines of communication, thus minimizing civilian casualties. Essential to such interdiction would be the denial of the Haiphong port to shipping. The JCS proposed to accomplish this by "shouldering out" foreign vessels by a series of air attacks starting at the periphery of the port area and gradually moving closer to the center. Mining of the harbor and its approaches would follow these attacks. At the same time, US forces should launch intensive attacks on the road, rail, air and remaining sea routes into North Vietnam, so that no part of the enemy's line of communication system would be able to function freely. Particularly important to the success of such a campaign would be interdiction of the northeast railroad to China, the ports of Cam Pha and Hon Gai, and the eight major operational airfields, only three of which were currently authorized for attack.

The Joint Chiefs acknowledged that Russian ships would be endangered by bombing the ports, but they did not expect that an "active confrontation" with the Soviet Union would result. They believed that the Soviets would limit their reaction to diplomatic protests and possibly suspension of current diplomatic negotiations, such as the ones on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the proposed freeze on antiballistic missile and intercontinental ballistic missile deployment.

In conclusion, the JCS recommended to Secretary McNamara that "as a matter of urgency" the program they had outlined be authorized. Attacks should begin soon in order to take advantage of the favorable May–September weather season. The Chiefs requested that Mr. McNamara bring their views to the attention of the President.[12]

Free World Countries as Sources of Additional Forces

In their review of force levels, the Joint Staff considered but rejected third countries as sources of significant numbers of additional troops. General Wheeler presented this conclusion to Secretary McNamara on 24 May. The "present world political climate," he explained, made additional allied forces difficult to obtain, and such forces as were being offered would, in most cases, "supplement but not substitute" for US force deployments.[13]

At this time, only three firm offers of additional troops were on the table. In December 1966, Australia had offered a light bomber squadron, a guided-missile destroyer, and a small reinforcement to its ground forces already in South Vietnam.

New Zealand, on 7 March, had offered an additional rifle company. On 30 December 1966, Thailand had expressed willingness to send a regimental combat team (RCT). The Australian and New Zealand offers resulted from governmental and public support for active participation in the Vietnamese war, and in Australia's case from that country's strategic interest in Southeast Asia. The Thai offer stemmed from that government's realization that its country might be the next target of Communist people's revolutionary war and reflected a policy of meeting the threat while it was still at a distance from Thailand.[14]

The Australian and New Zealand forces presented no major diplomatic or administrative problems. Neither government expected more in return for its contingent than normal logistic support from US sources. The Thais, on the other hand, wanted support for their RCT over and above what the US was already providing to Bangkok's forces under the Military Assistance Program. Under agreements similar to those for the South Korean forces in South Vietnam, the Department of Defense authorized Service funding for equipment and facilities and for overseas allowances for the Thai unit. US and Thai officers in Bangkok worked out the size and composition of the Thai force, which received final approval from MACV at a conference in Saigon on 15 March. As finally agreed, the 2,207-man RCT would consist of four rifle companies, a field artillery battery, and supporting elements.[15]

The Debate Is Joined—Counterproposals by OSD

Westmoreland's reinforcement request and the Joint Chiefs' proposals for a major Reserve call-up and an escalation of ROLLING THUNDER were immediately challenged by civilian officials in the Defense and State Departments. The civilians viewed with dismay the domestic and international repercussions of the military's proposals. Claiming that at the existing level of effort, the US had prevented a North Vietnamese victory and was making steady, if slow, military progress in South Vietnam, they questioned the need for a huge new force increase. Indeed such an increase, by requiring a politically divisive mobilization of Reserves, would intensify domestic US opposition to the war, making the entire Southeast Asia effort more difficult to sustain. They viewed the air campaign against North Vietnam's ports, favored by the JCS, as certain to be indecisive and likely to bring on a direct clash with the Soviets and/or the Chinese, causing the war to go completely out of control. To stabilize the war and the US home front, the civilians generally favored a leveling off of US troop strength in South Vietnam and no expansion and possibly a reduction of bombing in the North. They also advocated a renewed emphasis on improving South Vietnamese military capabilities, especially in pacification.[16]

Secretary of Defense McNamara was the principal spokesman for the opposition to the military's program. In a draft memorandum to the President dated 19

May, McNamara outlined what he saw as two alternative courses of action. Course A—the JCS approach—called for provision of the entire 200,000-man reinforcement of MACV, coupled with expanded US operations outside South Vietnam, notably in the air campaign against North Vietnam. Course B envisioned a MACV reinforcement of no more than 30,000 men (nine maneuver battalions or one division equivalent) above Program Four, no expansion of ground operations outside South Vietnam, and concentration of ROLLING THUNDER attacks in the southern part of North Vietnam. McNamara recommended that the administration choose Course B.

In discussing reinforcement of MACV, McNamara began by suggesting that the United States reduce its objective in Vietnam from maintaining an independent noncommunist South Vietnam to ensuring the people of South Vietnam had the ability to "determine their own future." He stated further that in Vietnam, the United States was in "a military situation that cannot be changed materially by expanding our military effort" and that the "politico-pacification situation" would improve "but not fast." Hence Hanoi "will not capitulate soon." Under these circumstances, the US should pursue both the big-unit and the pacification campaigns but avoid using large numbers of American troops in "grass-roots pacification work"—a task best done by the South Vietnamese. Through these operations, the US should try to lay the groundwork for a compromise peace involving "a role in the South for members of the VC."

McNamara argued that the large reinforcement and Reserve call-up of Course A were not necessary for pursuit of the objectives he had defined. Indeed, mobilization on this scale would intensify political divisions within the United States and lead to "irresistible domestic pressure" for further expansion of the war outside South Vietnam. Operationally, an increase in American troop numbers would not produce a corresponding increase in enemy losses because the North Vietnamese to a great extent could control the tempo of combat. Far from weakening Hanoi's will to continue the war, a large US mobilization would encourage the enemy to persevere in the belief that the Americans could not sustain that level of effort for very long. Course B, on the other hand, would provide sufficient forces to hold the line and gradually advance in South Vietnam while avoiding the risks and costs of Course A. Course B would give the United States the wherewithal to outlast the enemy in a prolonged period of fighting and negotiating.

On the future of ROLLING THUNDER, McNamara reiterated General Wheeler's earlier statement that all the "major infiltration targets" in the Hanoi-Haiphong area except the port had been destroyed. Striking the port, as the Joint Chiefs proposed in Course A, would significantly increase the danger of a clash with the Soviets and the Chinese while still not breaking Hanoi's will or preventing North Vietnam from sending the minimum support needed by its forces in the South. At the same time, raids in northern North Vietnam would continue to take a heavy toll of American aircraft and crews. Accordingly, McNamara recommended Course B, a concentration of ROLLING THUNDER strikes on infiltration targets in the narrow part of

North Vietnam below 20 degrees N. McNamara estimated that such a shift of effort would reduce US loss rates by more than 50 percent while still making infiltration difficult and costly for the enemy and assisting General Westmoreland's forces in the South. Cessation of attacks on Hanoi and Haiphong might help revive the diplomatic dialogue with North Vietnam, but this should be considered a by-product of the change, not the primary purpose. "The military side of the shift is sound," McNamara asserted, "whether or not the diplomatic spill-over is successful."

The Defense Secretary concluded his draft with an eloquent plea for a halt to escalation. "The war in Vietnam," he wrote, "is acquiring a momentum of its own that must be stopped. Dramatic increases in US troop deployments, in attacks on the North, or in ground actions in Laos and Cambodia are not necessary and are not the answer. The enemy can absorb them or counter them, bogging us down further and risking even more serious escalation of the war." He continued:

> Course A could lead to a major national disaster; it would not win the Vietnam war, but only submerge it in a larger one. Course B likewise will not win the...war in a military sense in a short time; it does avoid the larger war, however, and it is part of a sound military-political/pacification-diplomatic package that gets things moving toward a successful outcome in a few years. More than that cannot be expected....
>
> We recommend Course B because it has the combined advantages of being a lever toward negotiations and toward ending the war on satisfactory terms, of helping our general position with the Soviets, of improving our image in the eyes of international opinion, of reducing the danger of confrontation with China and with the Soviet Union, and of reducing US losses.[17]

The Joint Chiefs Reply to McNamara

Secretary McNamara's arguments did not convince the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Opportunities for the Chiefs to comment on the Defense Secretary's views came almost immediately. On 20 May, McNamara asked the JCS, the Secretaries of the Air Force and Navy, and the Director of Central Intelligence to analyze alternative programs for the bombing of North Vietnam: 1) concentrate on lines of communication in the panhandle area roughly south of 20 degrees N; 2) terminate bombing of fixed targets not directly associated with lines of communication in the northeast around Hanoi and Haiphong while expanding armed reconnaissance strikes on all lines except those within an eight-mile radii of the two cities.[18]

While the Joint Chiefs pondered this request, Secretary McNamara apparently discussed his draft Presidential memorandum (DPM) informally with President Johnson. Johnson reacted unfavorably. On 22 May, McNamara asked the Chiefs for their views on the draft DPM. Their reaction, delivered on 1 June, was even more unfavorable than the President's and more detailed. To begin with, the JCS stated

that their views had been misrepresented in the DPM's Course A. "The combination of force levels, deployments, and military courses of action do not accurately reflect the positions or recommendations of COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, or the Joint Chiefs of Staff." Their actual views were contained in their memoranda of 20 April and 20 May.

Addressing Mr. McNamara's preferred Course B, the Chiefs found its prescriptions for the war in both South and North Vietnam to be deficient. The MACV force structure envisioned in Course B, they declared, would not permit an early end to the war on acceptable terms, would provide little capability for military initiatives, would downgrade the Revolutionary Development program, and would result in abandoning the Mekong Delta to the Viet Cong. For the campaign against North Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs asserted, Course B was inadequate because it was based on a fallacious "funnel" theory that all supplies flowing from the north to the south must pass through the narrow portion of North Vietnam south of 20 degrees North. In fact, the communists supplied their forces in South Vietnam from all sides. Restriction of ROLLING THUNDER attacks to the area south of 20 degrees North thus would not permit effective interdiction. It would relieve North Vietnam of military pressure; it would be seen as a sign of American weakness; and it would strengthen the resolve of the enemy leaders to continue the war.

The JCS also disagreed with the Secretary's proposed redefinition in the DPM of US objectives. To limit US objectives to guaranteeing the right of self-determination of the Republic of Vietnam would be inconsistent with current US policy as expressed in National Security Action Memoranda and numerous public statements. In addition, the proposal failed "to appreciate the full implications for the Free World of failure to achieve a successful resolution of the conflict in Southeast Asia." Moreover, it would "undermine and no longer provide complete rationale for our presence in South Vietnam," and might render untenable the positions of the more than thirty-five nations supporting the Republic of Vietnam.

In summary, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that:

> a. The DPM NOT be sent.
>
> b. The US national objective as expressed in NSAM 288 be maintained, and the national policy and objectives for Vietnam as publicly stated by US officials be reaffirmed.
>
> c. The military objective, concept, and strategy for the conduct of the war as stated in JCSM-218-67 [JCS views of 20 April on COMUSMACV's "minimum essential force"] be approved by the Secretary of Defense.[19]

Continuing the exposition of their views on military strategy, on 2 June the Joint Chiefs forwarded to Mr. McNamara their reply to his 20 May request for an analysis of two alternate approaches to air operations against North Vietnam. After examining the Secretary's two alternatives and a third one of their own, the JCS concluded that the strategy they had recommended in their two memoranda of

20 May represented "the most effective way to successfully prosecute the air and naval campaign against North Vietnam."

The Joint Chiefs judged McNamara's Alternative I, which would in effect restrict bombing to the area south of 20 degrees North, to be undesirable because it 1) would not appreciably reduce the flow of men and materiel to the south, 2) would reduce the pressure on the North Vietnamese economy and logistic system, 3) would not appreciably reduce US losses, and 4) would be judged as evidence of weakening US resolve to press on with the war. In the JCS view, McNamara's Alternative II—attacks on airfields and the railroad lines to China in the northeast quadrant of North Vietnam but not the ports—would still allow the enemy to meet his import requirements by sea. Extending Alternative II to include bombing the ports would reduce the level of enemy imports but would still be inadequate because it did not exert military pressure simultaneously on North Vietnamese military and industrial installations.

To McNamara's two alternatives, the Joint Chiefs of Staff added their own Alternative III, which was different from their proposals of 20 May. This plan called for attacks everywhere in North Vietnam except within eight nautical miles of the center of Hanoi and two nautical miles of the center of Haiphong. Mining deep-water approaches to ports north of 20 degrees North or in waters contiguous to commercial wharves would be prohibited. (This provision would prevent mining of Haiphong.) Alternative III, the Joint Chiefs concluded, would allow the desired coordinated air campaign, but it would not accomplish the essential task of restricting North Vietnam's imports. Comparing the three alternatives, the JCS rated them in the following order: 1) the JCS plan of 20 May; 2) Alternative II, including ports; 3) Alternative III; 4) the status quo; 5) Alternative II, excluding ports; 6) Alternative I.[20]

Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown and Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitze issued their own responses to McNamara's request for evaluation of the two alternatives. Secretary Brown agreed with the Joint Chiefs on many of their specific points but reached a different conclusion. He concurred with the JCS adverse evaluation of Alternative I and Alternative II without attacks on ports. He also agreed with their views on the military desirability of closing the ports, but he rejected such a move because of the political risks involved. Brown concluded that a continuation of the present program, modified to permit striking lines of communications within eight nautical miles of Hanoi and Haiphong and adding a few more targets, such as the Red River bridge at Hanoi, represented the optimum course.[21]

In his reply on 2 June, Secretary of the Navy Nitze differed from both Mr. Brown and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Nitze concluded that Alternative I was preferable to both versions of Alternative II. Whether including or excluding bombing (but not mining) the ports, the latter alternative would be prohibitively expensive in numbers of aircraft that would be lost in relation to its military returns. Alternative I, on the other hand, would result in a substantially smaller loss of aircraft and would "leave the enemy with fewer options for maintaining supply flow to SVN

than does the concentration of bombing in areas farther removed from the area of supply consumption."[22]

The Debate Continues: The Revised DPM of 12 June

On 12 June, with all these views in hand, Secretary McNamara presented a new DPM to the President. This document, which was limited to the issue of military actions against North Vietnam, described three alternatives: (A) intensified attacks on the Hanoi-Haiphong logistic base, recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff; (B) concentration on infiltration routes south of 20 degrees North, favored by McNamara, Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance, and Secretary Nitze; and (C) extension of the present program, advocated by Secretary Brown.

In defending his continued support for Alternative B, McNamara analyzed the three courses in terms of the objectives of the operations against North Vietnam: 1) to raise the morale of the South Vietnamese and US troops fighting in South Vietnam; 2) to add to the pressure on Hanoi to end the war; and 3) to reduce the amount and increase the cost of infiltration from North Vietnam to the south. Measuring Alternative A by these three criteria, McNamara stated that, although ROLLING THUNDER had raised spirits in the south, it did not follow that a significant escalation of bombing would further improve morale. With respect to increasing pressure on Hanoi, McNamara believed that the North Vietnamese had "written off" all assets and lives that might be destroyed by US military actions short of occupation or annihilation. So far as interdiction was concerned, the Defense Secretary claimed that the enemy in South Vietnam required only 25 tons of supplies per day from the north, less than .2 percent of North Vietnam's import capability of 14,000 tons per day and .5 percent of the approximately 5,300 tons per day actually imported. Hence, closing Haiphong would have little effect. Alternative C, McNamara contended, neither put enough pressure on Hanoi to make it settle the war nor put a "meaningful ceiling" on the flow of men and materiel to the south while at the same time costing the US heavily in planes and pilots.

In summary, "neither Alternative A nor any other combination of actions against the North, short of destruction of the regime or occupation of North Vietnamese territory will...reduce the flow of men and materiel below the relatively small amount needed by enemy forces to continue the war in the South." Even if all these arguments proved wrong, the danger of Soviet or Chinese counteractions and the adverse effect on US and world opinion rendered Alternative A unacceptable.

Turning to Alternative B, McNamara conceded that it "probably would *not* effectively stop, or even substantially reduce," infiltration, and that it "might cause serious psychological problems among the men, officers, and commanders on our side." Alternative B would, however, be popular in the United States and around the world. It would also result in fewer aircraft and pilot losses, assuming no shift

of air defenses by the enemy. McNamara admitted that whether or not such a shift would occur was "not clear." Sliding past this obvious weakness in his argument, McNamara declared that Alternative B was based on recognition that "the outcome of the war hinges on what happens in the South, that neither military defeat nor military victory is in the cards there no matter which alternative is chosen against the North." The Secretary's favored alternative was therefore "designed to improve the negotiating environment by combining continued progress in the South...with a restrained program against the North."[23]

On 16 June, the Chairman was hastily called to the White House to brief President Johnson on the bombing of North Vietnam. General Wheeler used this occasion to rebut McNamara's DPMs. He spoke from a talking paper prepared by the Joint Staff that forcefully supported the pattern of operations recommended by the JCS on 20 May. These operations, according to the paper, were the most effective way to prosecute the air and naval campaign against North Vietnam and could possibly be decisive in their effects. The operations would bring increasing pressure to bear on the enemy by: depriving him of critical sanctuary areas for governmental, industrial, and military support activities; creating popular unrest by forcing diversion of resources from civilian to military uses; forcing allocation of manpower to reconstruction and dispersal programs; and raising the cost of support from Communist China and the Soviet Union. The recommended operations, the Joint Staff claimed, would create a level of interdiction that, if not decisive, could, when combined with action in South Vietnam, cause the enemy to "recalculate his profit and loss." Whether or not interdiction could reduce North Vietnam's imports to critical levels could not be determined from the insufficient and inaccurate date available. However, strenuous North Vietnamese re-supply efforts during the Tet truce suggested that Hanoi's supply capabilities were not greatly in excess of requirements.

Responding directly to points in the DPM of 12 June, the Joint Staff insisted that military pressure could reduce North Vietnamese will to continue the war: "Anyone who says that 'pain only increases the will to fight' can only speak from ignorance of the battlefield." By way of proof of the bombing's effect, the Joint Staff cited a French report that the air raids were causing a deterioration of morale in Hanoi so serious as to constitute a definite breakdown in public order. It also cited an interview with a North Vietnamese prisoner who stated that the people were beginning to doubt seriously the Hanoi regime's claims of inevitable victory. The paper, however, contained no evidence that Hanoi's leaders had any such doubts, and their reaction presumably was the one that really counted.

Finally, the paper challenged McNamara's argument that the JCS program raised an unacceptable danger of a larger war. Citing a Central Intelligence Agency evaluation, the Joint Staff maintained that there was little possibility of Soviet retaliation outside Vietnam in response to the operations proposed by the Joint Chiefs. If the Soviets did, in fact, apply such pressures, the staff suggested, then Secretary Brown's refinement of the present bombing program could be adopted. In conclu-

sion, the Joint Staff declared that McNamara's proposal to concentrate the bombing in southern North Vietnam was totally lacking in military or political merit.[24]

The exchanges of May and June between the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff drew the lines of the escalation debate and shaped the alternatives confronting President Johnson. Throughout these discussions, one alternative was conspicuous by its absence: the deployment of major allied ground forces into southern Laos to attack and possibly sever the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the supply line connecting the communists' "Great Front Line" in South Vietnam from their "Great Rear Area" in the north. Such action would have made nearly impossible the movement of large numbers of North Vietnamese troops and substantial tonnages of supplies into the south while avoiding the hazards of further escalation against North Vietnam. Indeed, Secretary McNamara had initiated construction of an air-supported barrier in the region, and MACV had made plans for incursions of up to multi-division size. General Westmoreland saw such operations as a potential role for the "corps contingency force" mentioned in his reinforcement request. Yet logical as it seemed, this strategy was a bureaucratic orphan with no sponsor and powerful enemies. The US embassy in Vientiane adamantly opposed all but the smallest and most covert ground action in Laos, fearing the collapse of what remained of Laotian neutrality. In his DPMs, Secretary McNamara rejected any widening of the ground war. CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs preferred air and naval action against North Vietnam to a plunge into Asian jungles. Thus, what may have been the most productive available course of action was far in the background as the new round of presidential decisions approached.[25]

McNamara Visits Saigon

Before resolving the debate within his administration over force levels and operations against North Vietnam, which had dragged on since 18 March, President Johnson early in July dispatched Secretary McNamara to Saigon. Accompanied by General Wheeler and Under Secretary of State Nicholas DeB. Katzenbach, McNamara was to confer with the PACOM and MACV commanders, collect the latest information from the war zone, and make recommendations for presidential decisions.

By the time the Defense Secretary and his companions left for Saigon, the outlines of a compromise on MACV's reinforcements were emerging. By mid-June, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland had recognized that a Reserve call-up was not likely, and without it the services could not provide the optimum force. Preparing for McNamara's visit, the two commanders agreed to present briefings arguing that the larger reinforcement would produce the most progress toward US objectives while the minimum force would permit progress also, but more slowly. At the same time, however, they would avoid "too gloomy" an evaluation of the minimum force because it was the one they were likely to receive.[26]

At Westmoreland's direction, the MACV staff worked up a plan for an even more minimal minimum force than the one requested on 18 March. This plan proposed an addition of sixteen maneuver battalions and various supporting units to the forces already authorized for MACV under Program 4 at a total personnel cost of 42,000 spaces, about half of those called for in the original minimum reinforcement. This had been achieved by a rigorous pruning of existing MACV organizations to eliminate unnecessary spaces and by counting the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade as part of the permanent MACV forces but not counting its personnel spaces against the MACV total. This unit, which was the PACOM reserve, was operating in Vietnam but was still carried as part of the PACOM rather than the MACV force structure. When added to the forces already in Vietnam or authorized for movement under Program 4, these proposals would bring MACV's total strength to 525,000—about the size of the "level off force" that Westmoreland had declared would be sufficient the year before.[27]

At roughly the same time in Washington, Dr. Alain Enthoven, head of the Defense Department Systems Analysis Office, had his staff make a detailed examination of military capability to provide more troops for Vietnam. His staff concluded that the services, without extending tours of duty, mobilizing the Reserves, or diverting units earmarked for NATO, could provide the equivalent of three and two-thirds divisions for MACV by 31 December 1968—more than Westmoreland's original requested minimum reinforcement. Secretary McNamara took this study with him when he left for Saigon on 5 July for a definitive review of both the reinforcement question and ROLLING THUNDER.[28]

During their stay in Saigon, from 7 to 9 July, McNamara, Wheeler, and Katzenbach heard detailed briefings from Sharp, Westmoreland, and their staffs. The briefers advocated expansion of ROLLING THUNDER and reviewed the effects of the optimum and minimum essential reinforcement packages. Briefing on the reinforcements, the MACV J–3 projected the impact of different American troop strengths on enemy casualties and other statistical measurements of the war's progress. He concluded that with the smaller reinforcement, the "war of attrition" would be a "long drawn out process" that would "postpone the time when US forces could redeploy from South Vietnam."

Nevertheless, General Westmoreland was willing to settle for the smaller force. After dinner on the final day of McNamara's visit, the MACV commander and the Secretary agreed upon a troop increase of less than 50,000 and a final force level of 525,000. To fit the maximum number of additional combat troops into this reinforcement, the two men decided to replace as many as 14,400 military personnel in support units with civilian contractors.[29]

The issue of bombing North Vietnam proved much more contentious. The visitors heard briefings on the attacks on the North, given by the commanders responsible for conducting them: Admiral Sharp; Lieutenant General William Momyer, USAF, Commanding General, Seventh Air Force (the MACV Air Force component

command); and Vice Admiral John Hyland, Commander, Seventh Fleet. In presentations carefully orchestrated in advance by Admiral Sharp, all the briefers recommended strongly that air operations not only be continued but be expanded. The enemy was now beginning to feel the full effects of the air campaign and was being hurt, they contended. The United States should intensify the pressure during the next few months of good weather to bring about a change in the attitude of the enemy. General Momyer, in a briefing that subsequently assumed particular importance, impressively marshaled data to show how Seventh Air Force had successfully reduced losses from enemy air defenses while seriously disrupting traffic on the important northeast railroad from Hanoi to China. The briefings, especially Admiral Sharp's, angered McNamara, who had hoped for some military support for his cutback proposals. At the end of the sessions, McNamara pointedly congratulated General Westmoreland on MACV's presentations while ignoring Sharp.[30]

The Presidential Decisions

The disagreement over ROLLING THUNDER was reflected in the delegation's report to the President on their findings. Upon returning to Washington, Secretary McNamara, General Wheeler, and Under Secretary Katzenbach were called to the White House on 12 July to brief President Johnson. Also present at the meeting were Secretary of State Rusk, Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, General Taylor, and members of the White House staff. McNamara reported that all the field commanders favored expansion of the bombing of North Vietnam, but reiterated his view that ROLLING THUNDER, even if expanded, would have little effect on the war in South Vietnam. When called upon, General Wheeler made a strong statement in favor of expanded bombing, pointing out the damage inflicted on lines of communication, damage McNamara believed was overstated. Wheeler recommended to the President that he approve a ROLLING THUNDER program that, if it did not attack the ports, at least would permit attacks everywhere else in North Vietnam except in populated areas. Specifically, the Chairman wanted authority to strike targets in the ten and four nautical mile Hanoi and Haiphong prohibited zones. The meeting ended without a presidential decision. Because he had recommended an action different from the one formally recommended by the JCS in their memoranda of 20 May, General Wheeler asked for and received approval from the other Chiefs for the position he had taken.

The next day, President Johnson discussed the force buildup with his advisers, including General Westmoreland, whom the President had called home for this purpose. At this meeting, Secretary McNamara supported the reinforcement package that he and Westmoreland had agreed upon in Saigon. In response to a question from the President, the MACV commander said the proposal was acceptable to him. Going further, the general declared that he was "delighted with the outcome of the deliberations." The additional men would give him a "formidable force" with

which progress in Vietnam could be accelerated once the troops were deployed and placed. President Johnson then gave his approval of the plan, except that three of the five tactical fighter squadrons recommended were not to be deployed but readied for deployment if needed.[31]

On 14 July, Secretary McNamara requested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff submit a troop list for the approved reinforcement, specifying deployment dates where possible. In subsequent discussions with Dr. Enthoven, Joint Staff representatives learned that the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade and the three TFS to be maintained ready for deployment were to be included in the 525,000 ceiling. On the basis of this guidance, the Joint Chiefs developed a troop list that, after necessary service adjustments, resulted in a total MACV strength of 537,545. To remain within the ceiling of 525,000, the JCS planned to substitute civilian contract labor for military construction personnel, using as a basis figures supplied by MACV. Major ground combat units on the troop list were the 101st Airborne Division(-), the 11th Light Infantry Brigade, and three additional infantry battalions and other reinforcements for the 196th and 198th Brigades, units that were already in Vietnam. All these units and two TFS were to be in South Vietnam by May 1968, as were substantial numbers of support personnel.[32]

On 20 July, the Joint Chiefs submitted their list to Secretary McNamara, and stated that they did not concur in the inclusion of the 9th MAB and the non-deployed TFS (now reduced from three to two) in the personnel ceiling for Vietnam. The Marine unit, they pointed out, was still the PACOM reserve and was subject to movement to other areas of the Pacific Command. The two Air Force units should not be included in the personnel ceiling for Vietnam until deployed. The Chiefs also noted that, while the forces on the troop list would "contribute significantly to the prosecution of the war," they fell short of the numbers the JCS had recommended in their memorandum of 20 April. Their views on worldwide US military commitments, in the memorandum of 20 May, also remained valid.[33]

On 10 August, Secretary McNamara approved for "planning" the JCS recommendations. He ruled, however, that the 9th MAB and the two tactical fighter squadrons should be counted under the 525,000 ceiling. Now designated Program 5 by McNamara, the total approved force levels for South Vietnam were:

	Army	*Navys*	*Air Force*	*Marine Corps*	*Total*
Program 4 FY68	323,735	30,039	56,148	74,550	484,472
Added Forces	33,297	4,234	2,242	7,523	47,296
Civilianization	-5,414	-812	-542	-	6,768
	351,618	33,461	57,848	82,073	525,000

Source: (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "FY 68 Force Requirements for SVN (Program Number 5)," 10 Aug 67, att to JCS 2472/115-2, 11 Aug 67, JMF 911/374 (12 Jul 67).

On 15 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a refined troop list to the Secretary. While the ceiling of 525,000 remained unchanged, the JCS raised the Service force levels, compensating for the change by increasing the spaces to be civilianized to 12,525. McNamara approved the revised troop list on 5 October.[34]

While final discussions on ground reinforcements were in progress, President Johnson made new decisions about operations against North Vietnam. On 20 July, he approved ROLLING THUNDER 57, which was, in effect, Air Force Secretary Brown's "continuation of the present level of operations with certain targets added in the Hanoi-Haiphong area." RT 57 contained sixteen new fixed targets in the northeast quadrant and granted authority to conduct armed reconnaissance on selected rail lines, highways, and waterways inside the thirty nautical mile Hanoi restricted zone but not within the ten nm prohibited zone. At the same time, however, President Johnson kept off-limits targets within the ten-mile Hanoi prohibited zone, the four-mile Haiphong prohibited zone, and the China buffer zone. He specifically disapproved any attack on Hanoi's important Doumer Bridge across the Red River, as well as strikes on the major Phuc Yen MIG base some fifteen miles northwest of Hanoi.

While not a total victory for the JCS and CINCPAC points of view, President Johnson's decision represented a rejection of Secretary McNamara's proposal for scaling back the attacks on North Vietnam. General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that the "decisive factor in persuading the President to continue bombing north of 20 [degrees] and to authorize the... extension of operating authority was his feeling that in recent weeks the bombing had achieved significant results and with relatively little noise level." Wheeler had made the Saigon briefings available to the President. He told Sharp that "the Saigon briefings (texts of which [the President] has seen) were invaluable.... I am told he read Spike Momyer's briefing word for word." In fact, Johnson read portions of General Momyer's briefing to his cabinet.[35]

President Johnson's July and August decisions set the limits within which the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders would conduct military operations in the months ahead. General Westmoreland faced the task of continuing the battle in South Vietnam with forces some 15 percent larger than those he had reported to be inadequate the previous March. Admiral Sharp and his air commanders now enjoyed wider latitude in carrying the war to North Vietnam than they had possessed before, but they still had not received all they asked for and thought essential to victory. The Joint Chiefs, having been refused the forces to rebuild strategic reserves and contingency forces, could only hope there would be no need for additional US troops outside Southeast Asia.

During the summer of 1967, as he had throughout the escalation of the war, President Johnson attempted to steer a middle course between those members of his administration who favored leveling off or reducing the military effort in Southeast Asia and proponents of mobilization and expanded military operations.

Johnson's compromises satisfied none of the contending parties, including himself. For Johnson, the summer months were a time of growing anguish over the war that was eroding his "Great Society" and alienating his domestic constituency. The urban riots that summer heightened the President's anxiety, as did a significant decline of his job approval ratings in public opinion polls. Secretary McNamara had become disillusioned and emotionally worn down by a war in which he no longer believed. The Joint Chiefs remained frustrated with what they perceived as a war of military half measures that was strategically bleeding the nation. Their growing anger at McNamara gave rise to later reports that the Joint Chiefs came close to a mass resignation, but surviving Chiefs denied that they and their colleagues ever seriously contemplated that course of action. They were soon to have a forum for public expression of their dissent, however, as a Congressional committee entered the debate over the direction of ROLLING THUNDER.[36]

6

Rolling Thunder at It's Zenith: Operations against North Vietnam, July 1967–January 1968

During the months following President Johnson's approval of ROLLING THUNDER 57, the campaign against the key northeast quadrant of North Vietnam reached its highest level, both in the number of sorties flown and in the number of targets authorized for attack. In spite of certain continuing restrictions on operations, US aircraft made a concerted effort to cut off the flow of war supporting materials entering North Vietnam from abroad through the ports and the railroads from China—the segments of the enemy supply lines considered most significant by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC. This expansion of ROLLING THUNDER took place even as the conflict between Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs over bombing North Vietnam remained unresolved and received a public airing before a Senate subcommittee.

The Original ROLLING THUNDER 57 Package

On 20 July, President Johnson had approved a ROLLING THUNDER 57 package that included 16 new fixed targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong area, and gave authority to conduct armed reconnaissance on selected rail lines, highways, and waterways inside the thirty-nautical mile Hanoi restricted zone, though not within the ten-nautical mile prohibited area. Of the 16 new targets, 11 were in the military support system, four were in the transportation system, and one was in the air defense system. All had been taken from a list of 129 priority targets developed by CINCPAC. Realizing that many targets they considered important were not on JCS

target lists, CINCPAC planners had assembled and forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff a comprehensive ROLLING THUNDER list, containing targets concentrated in Route Package VI. The Joint Chiefs merged this list with their own as a basis for their ROLLING THUNDER proposals.[1]

Once again, political considerations inhibited this expanded ROLLING THUNDER program. The new list did not include Phuc Yen Airfield—which the Chiefs had again recommended be hit—because of "tentative and tenuous indications from a couple of North Vietnamese ambassadors" that advisers from other communist countries were there. Even the authorized strikes were to be conducted in such a way as to avoid the appearance of escalation. No more than three fixed targets were to be hit in any one day, and armed reconnaissance missions were not to be concentrated in the thirty-nautical mile Hanoi restricted zone. Instead, they were to be distributed throughout RP VI in roughly the same pattern as that of the preceding few weeks. In other respects, the general guidelines in ROLLING THUNDER 57 were the same as the ones in the preceding program.[2]

The Senate Takes a Hand: The Stennis Hearings

These continuing political restrictions concerned Senator John Stennis (D, Mississippi), Chairman of the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the US Senate Armed Services Committee. Stennis and his subcommittee colleagues had long believed that US airpower had been applied in Vietnam in a gradual and limited manner that rendered the effort ineffective.[3] Without bolder use of airpower over North Vietnam, most subcommittee members were convinced, committing more US ground forces in South Vietnam would produce only a stalemate with higher American casualties. Especially disturbing to the subcommittee were reports of McNamara's May proposal to cut back ROLLING THUNDER. Hoping to forestall such action and to press the administration for a more vigorous campaign, Senator Stennis announced in June his intention to hold closed hearings on the conduct of the air war. (Although the hearings were closed, sanitized versions of most of the statements and testimony were released to the public.) Held between 9 and 29 August 1967, the subcommittee hearings became the arena for a direct, albeit muffled, confrontation between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the PACOM commanders and Secretary McNamara over ROLLING THUNDER.[4]

Admiral Sharp, who had traveled to Washington, led the military testimony. He told the subcommittee that the air campaign against North Vietnam had developed too slowly, allowing the enemy to expand his air defenses and prepare substitutes for bridges, oil depots, and other targets as they were knocked out. Nevertheless, Sharp asserted, ROLLING THUNDER now had reached a point where it was inflicting significant damage on Hanoi's economy and war effort. The bombing had reduced the flow of men and materiel to the south and had forced the North

Vietnamese to divert large resources of manpower and armament to home defense and repair. The enemy, Sharp concluded, was "suffering painful military, economic, and psychological strains." Now was the time to increase the pressure further, by attacking Haiphong and other seaports. In response to friendly questions from the senators, Sharp declared that any reduction of US bombing in the North would allow the enemy to send more troops and supplies to the South, causing heavier American and South Vietnamese casualties, and "just prolong[ing] the war."[5]

Following Admiral Sharp on the witness stand. General Wheeler stated that the bombing campaign against North Vietnam was "going well." US aircraft were inflicting an increasing amount of damage on the enemy while their own loss rate showed a "marked decline." Wheeler emphasized that ROLLING THUNDER was an "integral and indispensable" part of the overall US strategy in Southeast Asia, constituting the offensive element of the campaign while ground operations in South Vietnam (also essential) constituted the defensive element. Repeating Admiral Sharp's points, the Chairman declared that during the past year the air campaign had compelled North Vietnam to divert large quantities of manpower and resources to maintain lines of communication and to man extensive air and coastal defenses and in addition had resulted in the "steady destruction" of the North's "physical infrastructure" and "deterioration of the national economy." The result, Wheeler said, was a reduction in the enemy's capacity to reinforce his effort in the South.[6]

In response to Senators' questions, Wheeler declared that a reduction or cessation of ROLLING THUNDER would free more North Vietnamese resources for the war in South Vietnam, causing increased US casualties and probably a requirement for still more American troops to maintain the allies' position. Asked specifically about the proposal to limit bombing in North Vietnam to the area south of 20 degrees North latitude, Wheeler stated that the JCS had discussed such a plan but did not name McNamara as its author. He attributed it instead to "a half-dozen different areas rather than individuals." The Chairman stated that the Joint Chiefs had "concluded unanimously that the concept was erroneous" and "rejected it as being militarily unsound." A "substantial target system" remained or was being rebuilt in the northeast quadrant, therefore, the US would gain "no advantage" by concentrating its air attacks farther south. Wheeler added, "In my judgment the proposal is dead." On the question of attempting to close the port of Haiphong by bombing or mining, the Chairman stated that he personally favored the idea but acknowledged that political considerations had to be taken into account and indicated the issue was still under discussion within the administration. Throughout his testimony, General Wheeler took a moderate tone. He defended the current level of bombing and suggested that more might be better. At the same time, he did not go beyond President Johnson's position and avoided any open criticism of the Secretary of Defense.[7]

The other members of the JCS—General Harold K. Johnson, USA; Admiral Thomas D. Moorer (who had replaced Admiral McDonald as Chief of Naval Operations on 1 August); General John P. McConnell, USAF; and General Wallace M.

Greene, USMC—all reiterated Wheeler's main points. They insisted that ROLLING THUNDER was hurting the enemy and should be continued and expanded, not reduced. All asserted that less bombing in North Vietnam likely would mean more Americans killed and wounded in South Vietnam. General Johnson in particular emphasized the mutually reinforcing relationship between the campaigns in the north and the south. In an indirect criticism of McNamara's cost-effectiveness approach to strategy, the Army Chief of Staff deplored "a tendency in the press and in all of the discussions to try to put elements of the war into little compartments and to treat them in isolation from the whole." He continued: "War is still largely an art and not a science, and it is the interaction of all of the elements that will ultimately lead us to the achievement of our objectives in the south."[8]

On 25 August, Secretary McNamara testified before the subcommittee. In what friendly observers considered a masterful performance, the Defense Secretary argued against any expansion of ROLLING THUNDER and at least by implication suggested that the campaign could be reduced without damage to the war effort in South Vietnam. At present, McNamara said, the bombing offensive was achieving its three basic objectives: to "reduce the flow and increase the cost" of infiltration of men and supplies from North to South Vietnam; to raise the morale of the South Vietnamese people; and "to make clear to the North Vietnamese leadership that so long as they continued their aggression against the South they would have to pay a price in the North." "Weighed against its stated objectives," ROLLING THUNDER had been successful, but further expansion of the campaign could not achieve any more than these limited goals.

With regard to infiltration, McNamara contended that no increase in bombing, whether of fixed targets, rail and truck traffic, or the ports, could prevent the North Vietnamese from moving into South Vietnam enough men and supplies to maintain the existing level of combat. This was so because the capacity of the North's lines of communication was many times larger than the supply tonnage needed in the South. McNamara suggested that infiltration was restricted more by the limited capacity of the enemy in South Vietnam to absorb men and materiel than by damage inflicted in the North. He argued that bombing or mining Haiphong and other ports would not stop North Vietnam's importation of war supplies; the enemy would simply switch to unloading ships by lighter elsewhere along his 400 miles of coast.

As to the enemy's will, McNamara stated that he had seen "no evidence . . . that would lead me to believe that a less selective bombing campaign would change the resolve of the North Vietnamese leaders or deprive them of the support of the North Vietnamese people." The people were accustomed to discipline and a low standard of living. The leaders' "regard for the comfort and even the lives of the people they control" was too low for a higher level of attack to drive them to submission. McNamara concluded that "the course of conflict on the ground in the south," not the scale of air attack on the North, "appears to be the determining factor in North Vietnam's willingness to continue."[9]

In his testimony, Secretary McNamara tried to minimize the disagreements between himself and the Joint Chiefs. He declared, for example, that of 359 fixed targets in North Vietnam that the JCS had recommended be attacked, 302 (85 percent) had been approved for strike. Hence, McNamara's differences with the Chiefs came down to only 57 targets, most of minor military importance and not worth the loss of American pilots and aircraft, or involving excessive danger of a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union or China. The Defense Secretary also minimized the seriousness of his proposal to limit most ROLLING THUNDER attacks to the southernmost portion of North Vietnam. He suggested that it should not be considered a proposal at all, merely one of three alternative bombing strategies that he had asked the JCS to examine, the other two being a continuation of the existing campaign and expansion of ROLLING THUNDER to "different objectives and different target systems" such as bombing the ports and mining coastal waters.[10]

Although he attempted to soft pedal his differences with the JCS before the subcommittee, McNamara privately viewed himself as waging a critical battle against what he later called "hawks in both parties—fully supported by the Joint Chiefs" who were pressing for a "widening of the war." He confided to former Secretary of State Dean Acheson that his testimony before the subcommittee was "the truth, but not the whole truth." At the time of the hearings, Acheson wrote to a friend, McNamara was acting as "a loyal lieutenant putting the best face on a poor situation. The fact is that the bombing of the North started as a morale builder for the South when things were very bad there. We have now run out of targets but the Republican hawks keep calling for more which produces useless casualties and encourages some Air Force fire-eaters to urge population bombing. LBJ has not [Harry S. Truman's] courage to say no to political pressures."[11]

During what he subsequently called "one of the most stressful episodes of my life," McNamara faced generally hostile questions from subcommittee members. Senators hammered on why targets were only being authorized now that the Joint Chiefs had been recommending for the previous two years. Such gradualism, they insisted, had vitiated the effectiveness of the bombing and indicated a lack of confidence by McNamara in his senior military advisers. McNamara responded that he and the President did have confidence in the Joint Chiefs. "If we didn't have confidence..., they wouldn't be Chiefs." Nevertheless, the civilian officials had to take other than "narrow military factors" into account in targeting decisions. His protestations could not disguise the fact that McNamara throughout his testimony challenged and attempted to refute the military judgment of the JCS and CINCPAC on point after point related to the air campaign.[12]

In its report, issued on 31 August, the subcommittee unequivocally and predictably rejected McNamara's views. The Senators identified direct disagreements between the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on such issues as the impact of ROLLING THUNDER in reducing US casualties in South Vietnam, the importance of the targets still not authorized for attack, and the feasibility and

desirability of closing or neutralizing the port of Haiphong. In each case, the subcommittee endorsed the unanimous opinion of the "military experts" in favor of heavier bombing. The subcommittee dismissed proposals to curtail or end ROLLING THUNDER as unlikely to lead to meaningful peace negotiations and certain to increase US and allied losses in South Vietnam.

Since 1965, according to the subcommittee, "civilian authority" consistently had "overruled the unanimous recommendations of military commanders and the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a systematic, timely, and hard-hitting integrated air campaign" against North Vietnam. Instead, the civilians had "shackled" American airpower to a "controlled, restricted, and graduated buildup of bombing pressure which discounted the professional judgment of our best military experts and substituted civilian judgment in the details of target selection and the timing of strikes." This approach had failed to end the war. Now the United States must make "the hard decision to do whatever is necessary, take the risks that have to be taken, and apply the force that is required to see the job through." Specifically, this course of action required "closing the Port of Haiphong, isolating it from the rest of the country, striking all meaningful targets with military significance, and increasing the interdiction of the lines of communication from Red China." "It is high time," the subcommittee concluded, "to allow the military voice to be heard in connection with the tactical details of military operations."[13]

The Stennis hearings had a significant impact on the Johnson administration's internal tug-of-war over bombing policy. Distressed by the airing of McNamara's disagreement with the Joint Chiefs, the President insisted publicly that, while there were differences of opinion among his advisers, no "deep division" existed. On bombing strategy, Johnson continued to steer a middle course between McNamara and the military, but the President began to lean more toward the latter's position. Although he held back from attacking the port of Haiphong, during and after the hearings, the President authorized strikes against a number of significant new targets in the northeast quadrant.

Most important, in the aftermath of the hearings, President Johnson began to lose confidence in Secretary McNamara's advice on the war. Coupled with his earlier advocacy of de-escalation, the Defense Secretary's negative evaluation before the subcommittee of ROLLING THUNDER's effectiveness and future prospects convinced the President that his trusted adviser lacked heart for the struggle. Johnson began searching for a way to replace McNamara—a painful process since the President still admired McNamara and was grateful for the Secretary's continued public loyalty to administration policy. At the same time, Johnson increasingly took General Wheeler into his confidence. The Chairman suffered a severe heart attack less than a week after the hearings. When Wheeler offered to resign because of his health problems, Johnson, who had heart troubles of his own, declined the offer and assured the general that his advice was highly valued. When Wheeler returned to work, the President made him a regular member of his policy-making Tuesday

lunch group, previously the Chairman had been only an occasional participant. In sum, the balance of influence on ROLLING THUNDER issues appeared to be shifting in favor of the military and congressional advocates of a more vigorous campaign. The shift, however, was neither permanent nor decisive.[14]

New Targets and a Peace Initiative

During August, in an attempt to reduce the impact of the Stennis hearings, President Johnson added twelve targets in the Hanoi area to the ROLLING THUNDER 57 list. They included the Hanoi thermal power plant, the Doumer rail/highway bridge, and a second major Hanoi rail/highway bridge. All three were struck and wrecked by the end of the month.[15]

From the standpoint of proponents of increased bombing of North Vietnam, this step forward was followed immediately by a step back. On 19 August, President Johnson ordered a suspension of air strikes within the ten-nautical mile Hanoi prohibited area, to begin on 24 August and run through 4 September. At the time, this action was explained as an effort to preclude charges of escalation. In fact, the suspension was in support of another administration attempt to open secret negotiations with Hanoi. Codenamed PENNSYLVANIA, this initiative had started in July. According to McNamara, who played a major role in it, PENNSYLVANIA was "the most intense diplomatic initiative with Hanoi" that the administration had yet undertaken.[16]

The PENNSYLVANIA initiative originated in a contact in Paris between Dr. Henry A. Kissinger of Harvard University and two French citizens, Herbert Marcovich and Raymond Aubrac, the latter a long-time friend of Ho Chi Minh. The Frenchmen offered to help the US establish secret direct diplomatic communication with North Vietnam. At McNamara's urging, President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk reluctantly agreed to pursue the lead, with McNamara managing the Washington end and Kissinger acting as channel to Marcovich and Aubrac. By early August, the contact had developed to the point where Kissinger requested instructions as to what US position Marcovich and Aubrac should transmit to Hanoi. President Johnson then approved a new statement of the US view of the relationship between a suspension of bombing in the North and the opening of peace negotiations. Drafted by McNamara, the instructions declared that the United States "is willing to stop the aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam if this will lead promptly to productive discussions between representatives of the US and the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] looking toward a resolution of the issues between them." Previously the US had asked for some reciprocal action from North Vietnam in response to a bombing halt, the new instruction declared only that the United States "would assume that, while discussions proceed . . . , the DRV would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation." The US was

prepared to negotiate "either openly or secretly" and was "ready to have immediate private contact with the DRV to explore the above approach or any suggestions the DRV might wish to propose in the same direction."[17]

To create a favorable environment for the French emissaries' visit to Hanoi to transmit the US offer, Johnson ordered the 24 August–4 September suspension of air strikes within the Hanoi prohibited area. The effect was reduced, however, by a surge in US bombing immediately prior to the suspension. When the order was given on 19 August, Admiral Sharp considered that it came at an unfortunate time, right on the heels of a stretch of bad weather that had caused a backlog of authorized targets not yet struck. CINCPAC feared that the suspension would give the impression of a de-escalation of pressure against Hanoi—its actual purpose, although no one had explained this to Sharp. The admiral recommended that, if it was not possible to relax the restriction, he be authorized to strike targets in the Haiphong area and Phuc Yen Airfield, to convince Hanoi that the United States was not "vacillating." The President did not approve the proposed new targets but allowed the Air Force and Navy to attack already authorized targets when the skies cleared. As a result, on 20 August and for the next two days, heavy bombing occurred near Hanoi, Haiphong, and the Chinese border. In response, the North Vietnamese cancelled Marcovich's and Aubrac's planned visit to Hanoi, ostensibly because the air raids threatened the envoys' safety. As McNamara later observed, "Once again, we had failed miserably to coordinate our diplomatic and military actions."[18]

Indirect exchanges through the PENNSYLVANIA channel continued through mid-October, to no particular effect. On 29 September, in an effort to keep the contact alive, President Johnson made public the US position adopted in early August in a speech at San Antonio, Texas. From then on, the position was known as the "San Antonio Formula." North Vietnam rejected the offer as still carrying conditions and publicly reiterated its demand for a permanent and unconditional bombing halt before talks could take place. The PENNSYLVANIA exchanges petered out, leaving only a softened US position on the relationship between a bombing cessation and the opening of negotiations.[19]

Strikes in the Buffer Zone

Even as PENNSYLVANIA ran its course, ROLLING THUNDER operations continued and expanded outside the Hanoi restricted zone. One major area of expansion was the buffer zone along North Vietnam's border with China. Ten of the sixteen targets authorized by President Johnson on 9 August lay within this band of territory. CINCPAC had requested that these targets be struck to more completely shut off rail traffic between China and North Vietnam over the line running northeast from Hanoi. During May, June, and July, ROLLING THUNDER forces had concentrated on this vital artery and reduced the movement of military supplies over

the line. Nevertheless, substantial amounts still reached Hanoi. Because the buffer zone was inviolate, the stretch of line subject to attack was limited. The enemy took advantage of this situation by holding trains in the buffer zone during the day and moving them forward under cover of darkness or inclement weather.[20]

During June, CINCPAC had requested that buffer zone targets be added to the list of installations to be struck, and late in the month he had appealed unsuccessfully for authority to conduct specific strikes. During the early part of July, Admiral Sharp refined his concept for attacking buffer zone targets. He briefed Secretary McNamara in Saigon on the concept, which now included twenty-four priority targets in the buffer zone. The Secretary requested General Wheeler to analyze these targets, but before the analysis could be completed, CINCPAC proposed yet another new plan for buffer zone operations. Submitted to the Chairman on 29 July, this plan called for an initial strike to cut the railroad line at a point about nineteen miles south of the Chinese border, followed by strikes at installations and rolling stock north of the cut up to a point within six miles of the border. Great care would be taken to insure accuracy and avoid civilian casualties.[21]

General Wheeler replied to Admiral Sharp the same day. The Chairman stated that he had tentatively selected 13 of the 24 targets from the CINCPAC list to recommend to the Secretary of Defense. Before making these recommendations, however, Wheeler requested further views from Sharp on the targeting concept. Specifically, Wheeler questioned the value of bridges as targets since they were difficult to hit. Instead, he favored destroying railroad yards to force the enemy to concentrate his supplies north of the Chinese border.[22]

Replying on 3 August, Admiral Sharp agreed that all the targets proposed by the Chairman, with two exceptions, currently appeared to be worth striking. He agreed, also, on the value of hitting rolling stock and supplies, but stressed the importance of subsequent attacks on bridges as a means of bottling up rolling stock, thereby making it more vulnerable to attack. Along with these views, Sharp submitted an expanded list of targets in the buffer zone. The Joint Staff cut this list to ten, and President Johnson approved them on 9 August.[23]

As the air campaign against the buffer zone got under way, the approved targets included four railroad bridges, five railroad yards and sidings, and the Port Wallut Naval Base. ROLLING THUNDER forces were also authorized to attack rolling stock along tracks to the south of the Lang Son Railroad/Highway Bridge, which was located just below the North Vietnam-China border. Pilots were to destroy locomotives, rail cars, and supplies, but they were cautioned not to cross the Chinese border or take undue risk in the hazardous airspace contiguous to the targets. The President authorized maximum use of the WALLEYE guided bomb against the bridges. Strikes were to be spaced out to avoid charges of escalation, presumably in deference to the PENNSYLVANIA initiative. Gradually expanding the campaign, President Johnson by 5 September had authorized nine additional targets in the buffer zone, including eight bridges and one railroad siding.[24]

In authorizing one target on 30 August, the President cautioned against intrusions into Communist China's air space. US aircraft had violated the space in two separate incidents earlier in the month, prompting Admiral Sharp to remind his subordinate commanders that the authority to strike buffer zone targets had been granted in part "as a result of our assurance that we can go where we are supposed to go and hit what we are supposed to hit." Sharp was concerned because the violations not only increased the danger to American pilots and planes but also might result in the cancellation of buffer zone targets and in denial of the pending CINCPAC request to strike additional key targets. "The excellent progress we have made thus far in obtaining increased strike authorizations and outstanding results obtained thus far, must not be jeopardized," Admiral Sharp declared.[25]

Operations against the Ports

While attacks against the buffer zone targets reduced the flow of war materiel into North Vietnam somewhat, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were convinced that supply movement through the port of Haiphong must be curtailed if the campaign to restrict imports was ever to be fully effective. On 20 May, the JCS had proposed a "shouldering out" concept to reduce the volume of war materials arriving through the Haiphong port. This plan called for striking targets around the periphery of the city and gradually moving inward toward the center of the main dock area. But by August, the target elements had not yet been approved. During the Stennis hearings, McNamara and the Joint Chiefs sharply disagreed about whether to strike Haiphong and about how much effect on the war such attacks would have.[26]

In the meantime, the Air Force Chief of Staff, General McConnell, developed an alternative plan for isolating Haiphong. This plan would "place an in-depth concentrated interdiction ring around the Port of Haiphong to deny the enemy use of his lines of communication from the port and port area to the interior." The ring would be doughnut-shaped, including the area beyond a one and one-half mile radius from the center of Haiphong outward to a radius of eight miles. The densely populated inner circle contained only three targets that General McConnell considered significant. Most of the essential targets—bridges, ferries, vulnerable road and railroad segments, waterways, and trans-shipment points—would be within the outer doughnut area. Strikes on these targets would interdict all the current major lines of communication from the port to the maximum degree possible. At the same time, by avoiding attacks on the dock area itself, the concept would eliminate danger to foreign shipping.[27]

General Wheeler agreed that McConnell's plan would make it possible to "apply a considerable constriction to the exits from the port area." But to bring about the actual isolation of the port would require the removal of the thirty-nautical mile restricted zone around Hanoi and the ten-nautical mile restricted zone

around Haiphong. In effect, this would permit unrestrained attacks everywhere in North Vietnam except in the prohibited zones around Hanoi and Haiphong and in the China border buffer zone. The Chairman asked CINCPAC for his views on the Air Force plan.[28]

On 3 August, Admiral Sharp replied that for the previous six weeks he had been conducting strikes aimed at isolating Hanoi and Haiphong from each other and from the rest of North Vietnam, generally along the lines of the Air Force plan. General McConnell's concept was sound, CINCPAC said, and it would pile up cargo in the Haiphong area. To be fully effective, however, the plan should be expanded to include many more targets, including 13 in the four-mile Haiphong prohibited circle. In order to implement the plan while the weather was still good, Admiral Sharp requested immediate authority to strike the targets in the Haiphong prohibited zone and to conduct armed reconnaissance missions in the ten-mile restricted zone. On 6 August, he requested further removal of bombing restraints: authority to strike 19 targets in the Hanoi restricted zone and 10 targets in the Haiphong restricted zone; the elimination of both restricted zones; and the reduction of the prohibited areas to a two-mile radius around Hanoi and a small rectangle around the center of Haiphong. Meanwhile, on 5 August, Admiral Sharp facilitated bombing in the Haiphong area by removing his own limits on strikes within the ten-mile restricted zone.[29]

President Johnson did not grant these sweeping authorities to bomb in the restricted and prohibited zones. However, on 30 August and 5 September, he authorized strikes on a total of eight specific targets within the Haiphong rings. Throughout September, ROLLING THUNDER forces hit these targets heavily. By the 27th of that month, US aircraft had flown 177 sorties against six of the eight targets authorized in the Haiphong area under ROLLING THUNDER 57. As of 13 October, all eight of the targets had been struck at least once. According to a DIA analysis, near the end of September the lines of communication serving Haiphong could clear 4,300 short tons per day as compared with 9,700 the previous May. The North Vietnamese were now forced to stockpile supplies and to transport them to Hanoi mainly by inland waterways. Faster movement of supplies out of Haiphong would depend upon North Vietnamese ability to restore the Haiphong and Kien An highway bridges. The fact that 4,300 tons per day were still getting through tended to support Secretary McNamara's contention during the Stennis hearings that increased bombing would not prevent the North Vietnamese from bringing in the supplies they needed to keep the war going.[30]

Further expanding the campaign against North Vietnam's seaports, President Johnson on 9 August authorized air strikes against the minor ports of Cam Pha and Hon Gai. They were to be bombed only when ships were at least 2,000 yards from the docks. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had been opposed to attacking the two minor ports at this time. The JCS felt that action against them should be deferred until North Vietnam, as a result of attacks against the Haiphong port, began using Cam

Pha and Hon Gai for imports and coastal traffic. ROLLING THUNDER pilots struck Cam Pha port with thirty-one sorties on 10 September, inflicting severe damage. CINCPAC, however, believed the restrictions there were too stringent, since North Vietnam could easily keep a ship alongside the docks at all times, thus preventing strikes. Such was the case for about two weeks in mid-September, when a Soviet vessel was in Cam Pha. Admiral Sharp wanted authority to attack, with proper caution, a coal plant and a railroad yard at Cam Pha, in spite of the presence of foreign shipping. The Joint Chiefs, however, were concentrating their efforts on securing more important authority, notably a relaxation of the PENNSYLVANIA-related suspension on previously approved targets around Hanoi and permission to strike the MIG base at Phuc Yen. As a result, removal of restrictions at Cam Pha was relegated to a lesser priority.[31]

Countering the MIG Threat

On 23 August, Admiral Sharp renewed his request to General Wheeler for authority to bomb the MIG base at Phuc Yen airfield. Recent engagements, he declared, had made it "apparent that the enemy has decided to use these aircraft again to counter our strikes." As of that date, no US plane had been shot down by a MIG since May. The next day, however, two planes fell victim to enemy interceptors, and on many raids MIG attacks forced US aircraft to jettison their bomb loads during combat maneuvers against the Communist jets. In response to these losses, the Chairman supported Sharp's request and urged its approval upon the Secretary of Defense. As he had before, Secretary McNamara objected. He argued that the United States would lose more aircraft attacking Phuc Yen than it would destroy, and that the repeated strikes needed to keep the field closed would result in more US losses than would occur if the MIGs continued to operate from the base and could be engaged in the air.[32]

CINCPAC answered McNamara's objections by claiming that well-timed raids could surprise the enemy planes on the ground and destroy many of them before they were airborne. The initial attack would have to be followed up with other strikes, but these would be merely periodic attacks of harassment. Admiral Sharp believed that the MIGs could be forced to operate from Chinese bases, where they would be less effective in disrupting American bombing missions. As for the risk that charges of escalation might result, CINCPAC felt that this was a danger no matter which North Vietnamese targets the United States picked for strikes.[33]

MIG activity increased during September, as did US military pressure on the Johnson administration to authorize bombing of Phuc Yen. On the 16th, MIGs downed another US plane. By that time, the number of MIG 21s at Phuc Yen had increased from six to eleven, and their pilots' performance indicated the effects of increasing experience. These facts prompted CINCPAC, on 20 September, to

renew his appeal to strike Phuc Yen and Bac Mai airfields. The following day, General Wheeler urged Secretary McNamara to approve Admiral Sharp's request. After several MIG engagements on 25 September, the President finally authorized strikes and re-strikes against Phuc Yen. Two raids were scheduled for 28 September. Before they were launched, however, President Johnson cancelled the authority because the Prime Minister of Rumania, whom the State Department considered a potential peace go-between, was then in Hanoi. On 4 October, General Wheeler made another unsuccessful appeal for authority to strike the MIG base.[34]

The MIGs, meanwhile, continued to impede US air operations over North Vietnam. During September, MIG attacks forced 56 American planes to jettison over 107 tons of bombs. Between 29 September and 10 October, three US aircraft were lost in ten engagements with a total of 32 MIG sorties. Finally, on 23 October, President Johnson authorized attacks on Phuc Yen. The following day, US pilots flew 64 sorties against the MIG field and followed up with smaller efforts on the two succeeding days. They destroyed three MIGs, damaged three more, damaged the control tower, and cratered the runway, rendering it unserviceable.[35]

ROLLING THUNDER Unleashed

Although MIG attacks and other elements of the North Vietnamese air defense system impeded the air campaign in Route Package VI, President Johnson's suspension of strikes on targets within the ten-nautical mile Hanoi prohibited zone was an even greater handicap to effective air operations. On 1 September, the President had extended the suspension, originally set for the period 24 August through 4 September, indefinitely in support of the PENNSYLVANIA peace initiative. Alarmed at the prospect of an indefinite suspension at a time when the days of good flying weather were rapidly dwindling, CINCPAC on 20 September urgently recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the suspension be lifted. The following day, General Wheeler, with the support of the other Joint Chiefs, urged Secretary McNamara to approve Admiral Sharp's recommendation. In addition, the Chairman asked McNamara to authorize attacks on fifteen specific targets within the Hanoi prohibited zone. McNamara rejected both proposals.[36]

During October, as the failure of PENNSYLVANIA became evident, bombing restraints crumbled. On 4 October, General Wheeler again appealed without success to Secretary McNamara for a cancellation of the suspension around Hanoi and authority to strike 25 targets around Hanoi and Haiphong. Two days later, however, the President approved seven new targets in the Haiphong area. Losing no time, US pilots hit all seven targets at least once by 14 October and attacked most of them several times after that date. Another target was authorized on 17 October and bombed five days later. On 23 October, the same day that he authorized the attack on Phuc Yen, President Johnson lifted the Hanoi suspension. He authorized strikes

on the Hanoi thermal power plant (a one-time-only attack using the WALLEYE guided bomb), the two key Hanoi bridges, and nine other targets within the Hanoi prohibited area, including five that had not previously been struck.[37]

Admiral Sharp moved immediately to execute the new attacks. On 25 October, he gave the Doumer Railroad/Highway Bridge the highest strike priority. Named for an early 20th Century French president, the Doumer Bridge was the main choke point through which all rail traffic from China to Hanoi and points south had to pass. Followed by the seeding of the river with mines at the crossing point to disrupt ferry, barge, and boat traffic, destruction of this bridge hopefully would create lucrative targets as supplies backed up behind the resulting bottleneck. It took only three days for ROLLING THUNDER pilots to hit the bridges and the power plant. However, most of the other targets authorized on 23 October were not struck until November. Some were not bombed at all during 1967.[38]

Continuing the momentum, on 8 November President Johnson authorized 17 more new targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. The targets included air defense control facilities at Bac Mai Airfield near Hanoi, 3 Hanoi and 3 Haiphong shipyards, restrikes of 4 railroad yards, and 6 other new targets—1 railroad yard, 2 industrial plants, and 3 petroleum, oils and lubricants (POL) installations. General Wheeler suggested to Admiral Sharp that the targets be struck in a measured and deliberate manner so as to minimize the "noise level" and to curtail current talk among representatives of friendly nations about the recently increased intensity of air operations around the North Vietnamese capital and principal port. The "noise level" rose, however, notably when stray ordnance from the Bac Mai raid killed an Indian sergeant attached to the International Control Commission office in downtown Hanoi.[39]

Also on 8 November, Secretary McNamara added an important new weapon to the arsenal being employed in the operations to isolate Haiphong. On that date, the Defense secretary declared the MK–36 Destructor mine to be "just another weapon" rather than a mine and authorized its use against all permissible ROLLING THUNDER targets, including those in the prohibited zones. The MK–36 had been developed at CINCPAC's request for use in blocking inland waterways. When it had become operational in April, under the authorizations then in effect, it had been considered a mine and could be used only in waters south of 20 degrees North latitude.[40]

With these expanded grants of authority, ROLLING THUNDER achieved its highest level of intensity, and the North Vietnamese responded with an equally intense air defense effort. Not since the previous July had American pilots been given such freedom, and never had they had more critical targets to hit, particularly in RP VI. In terms of high-value targets struck, the last part of October and the first half of November marked the most productive period in ROLLING THUNDER history. The enemy responded by concentrating half of all his antiaircraft artillery and missile units and all his air force interceptor regiments to defend Hanoi and its

surrounding region. This "curtain of fire" took its toll of the attackers. Between 23 October and 20 November, the United States lost forty-eight aircraft in strikes over North Vietnam. Thirty-nine were shot down over Route Package VI, clear evidence that the enemy believed the targets under attack around Hanoi and Haiphong were of such value as to call for a maximum defense effort.[41]

ROLLING THUNDER Subsides

Beginning in November, the pace of the bombing operations against North Vietnam gradually slackened. A combination of seasonal bad weather and Presidential restrictions led to a scaling down of attacks on ROLLING THUNDER targets. Bad weather had the most adverse impact. During every year of ROLLING THUNDER, the number of monthly sorties declined from a high rate in the summer months to a low one during the northeast monsoon of the winter months. During clear weather, US aircraft flew as many missions as were allowed against the northern industrial area of North Vietnam, Route Package VI, where high-value targets requiring precision and accuracy in bombing were located. When monsoon-season cloud cover obscured the more lucrative targets and low ceilings made evasion of surface-to-air missiles more difficult, ROLLING THUNDER pilots concentrated on targets closer to South Vietnam in RPs I through IV. The 1967–1968 monsoon season followed this pattern. Indeed, according to an Air Force historian, during that period "American airmen had to deal with the worst bombing weather over North Vietnam that they had encountered" thus far in the war.[42]

Owing to the bad weather, both the number of sorties flown against Route Package VI and the percentage they represented of the total of ROLLING THUNDER sorties declined dramatically during the last months of 1967 and the first three months of 1968. In August 1967, for example, RP VI absorbed 25 percent of the 11,744 sorties flown against the north, or nearly 3,000 sorties. By December, the proportion had fallen to 14 percent (806 sorties) of a total of 5,758 sorties.[43]

Presidential decisions compounded the monsoon's effect. On 3 January 1968, in connection with the annual New Year's truce, President Johnson ordered a suspension of all air strikes within five miles of the center of Hanoi. The prohibition was to be in effect for 72 hours, but the President extended it for an additional 72 hours on 6 January and indefinitely on the 9th. An additional restriction came on 16 January as the result of an incident involving a Soviet ship in Haiphong harbor. On 4 January, while seeding one of the approaches to Haiphong with MK–36 weapons, a US plane through a map error inadvertently released its load too soon, narrowly missing the Soviet vessel. The incident led General Wheeler to anticipate the establishment of a five-mile prohibited zone around Haiphong similar to the one in effect around Hanoi. The Chairman warned CINCPAC that such a restriction might soon be forthcoming. He requested Admiral Sharp to instruct

his operational commanders to execute strikes in the port area only when the weather permitted accurate navigation and target identification, and to employ only small numbers of planes close in to Haiphong.[44]

In reply, CINCPAC protested against this possible new restriction. He declared that an additional prohibited area would negate "our reasonably successful efforts" to isolate Haiphong. His operational commanders, Admiral Sharp said, had just begun to receive enough MK–36 weapons to accomplish this objective, and it was not satisfactory to start seeding five miles from the city. Earlier, CINCPAC had planned to seed the Red River near Hanoi, but those plans had been aborted by the imposition of the five-mile prohibited circle around the capital. The enemy then had been free to repair the damaged bridges and to cross the river in boats. During a time when the weather limited ROLLING THUNDER opportunities, CINCPAC felt it was even more important "that we do not have added restrictions." He concluded,

> We seem determined to ease the pressure on the enemy at a time when our long bombing campaign is having a telling effect. The history of ROLLING THUNDER has been that we always follow a period of telling effectiveness with periods when we put restrictions on that give the enemy a chance to recuperate. This, I submit, is a costly and inefficient way to use our tremendous air power and contributes to lengthening the war.[45]

Although he did not know it at the time, Admiral Sharp had pronounced what would turn out to be an epitaph for ROLLING THUNDER. CINCPAC's views on the subject notwithstanding, President Johnson on 16 January directed the establishment of a five-mile prohibited area around Haiphong. In compensation, he also approved six more targets for the authorized list, but by the end of January none of them had been struck because of bad weather. ROLLING THUNDER had passed its peak. Within two weeks of Johnson's decision on Haiphong, dramatic events in South Vietnam would set the administration on a course toward ending the bombing of North Vietnam altogether.[46]

ROLLING THUNDER Pro and Con

At the end of March 1968, Admiral Sharp made an assessment of the results of the bombing of officially approved ROLLING THUNDER targets. According to this assessment, 331 out of the 372 authorized targets had been struck and 245 of them had been destroyed or rendered unusable. Analysis showed that of all jet-capable airfields in North Vietnam only Gia Lam, Hanoi's principal civil airport, remained undamaged at the end of March. American bombs had destroyed an estimated 65 percent of North Vietnam's electric power generating capacity, although that percentage had been higher before the rebuilding the enemy had done during the monsoon. Of the 125 military complexes on the target list, 117 had been

attacked and 106 were unusable or inactive. North Vietnam had lost an estimated 65 percent of its fixed POL storage capacity. About 50 percent of the listed transportation targets had been abandoned or rendered unserviceable, although the enemy, using bypass bridges and ferries, had managed to keep traffic moving on major lines of communication. The two key rail lines from China into North Vietnam were considered closed for the entire first three months of 1968, forcing the enemy to shuttle cargo around the many breaks in the tracks. Twenty-two percent of the targeted industries were inoperable.[47]

Assuming that Admiral Sharp's damage assessments were accurate, the question remains: how effectively had ROLLING THUNDER achieved its objectives? As Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler had stated during the Stennis hearings, those objectives were three in number: to reduce and/or make more costly the infiltration of men and materiel from North to South Vietnam; to raise the morale of the South Vietnamese; and to force the North Vietnamese leaders pay a price for continued aggression against South Vietnam. There was a general consensus among American officials that the attacks against North Vietnam had raised spirits in the South, but opinion on the other two points was deeply divided at the time and remains so today. During the war, officials lacked the kind of intelligence information that would allow definitive tabulation of the effects of operations against the North. Anecdotal contemporary observations by western journalists and neutral officials in North Vietnam drew contradictory conclusions. The same was true of a number of US government attempts at analysis of ROLLING THUNDER operations. Not surprisingly, the results of the government studies tended to parallel the policy positions of the individuals and agencies that initiated them.[48]

Among the most skeptical was the JASON study prepared by the Institute for Defense Analyses at Secretary McNamara's request; its authors concluded that the bombing had produced "no measurable effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations in the South." Furthermore, "no bombing campaign can reduce the flow of military supplies to the South" nor "significantly raise the cost of maintaining the flow of men and material." In reaching these conclusions, however, the authors neglected to investigate what might result from coordinated interdiction of all import routes into North Vietnam, which was of course the major target of ROLLING THUNDER as conceived by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC. The JASON authors also insisted that the bombing had not "discernibly weakened the determination of North Vietnamese leaders to continue to direct and support the insurgency in the South," although they admitted that "deficiencies in data and methodology do not allow a thorough discussion" of the question. Subsequent events would prove the JASON analysts right on this point.[49]

At the opposite extreme, an Air Force study group, with representation from the other Services, the JCS, and the Defense Intelligence Agency, concluded that the air campaign had destroyed or damaged a significant portion of the enemy's industrial capability and had caused the diversion of much North Vietnamese

manpower to air defense and repair of bomb damage. As a result, the enemy's capability to expand his military force in South Vietnam was drastically curtailed. Had there been no bombing, the Air Force study group estimated, North Vietnam would have been able to train and infiltrate sufficient forces to bring enemy numbers in South Vietnam to a total of 600,000 by mid-1967.[50]

SEA CABIN, a military study group established by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and consisting of representatives of the Joint Staff, DIA, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs), reached a similar conclusion. This group concluded that the air and naval campaigns against North Vietnam had inflicted heavy damage on that country and had "limited the DRV's capability to undertake sustained large scale military operations" in South Vietnam. "A cessation of the bombing program," the group concluded, "would make it possible for the DRV to regenerate its military and economic posture and substantially increase the flow of personnel and supplies" from North to South Vietnam.[51]

After reviewing the SEA CABIN study, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took a more cautious view. They informed the Secretary of Defense on 31 January 1968 that "the bombing of the North continues to impose heavy and accumulating pressure on North Vietnam that is contributing significantly to the achievement of US military objectives in South Vietnam." They did not, however, attempt to predict the results that might be expected if the bombing were halted.[52]

The various analyses by the JASON group, the Joint Chiefs, and the military study groups were of ROLLING THUNDER as it had actually been conducted. From the outset in 1965, however, the JCS and the military establishment had been opposed to the inhibited and gradual application of air power decided upon by political authorities. No doubt the results would have been different had the military view prevailed, but the nature and degree of difference—not to mention the possibility of provoking a wider war—are all but impossible to measure and remain matters of conjecture.

7

Military Operations in South Vietnam, June 1967–January 1968

Westmoreland's Summer Plans

In the months immediately following Secretary McNamara's approval of Program 5, General Westmoreland pressed ahead with combat operations designed to attain the objectives of the Combined Campaign Plan. He informed Admiral Sharp early in June that he intended to take advantage of the good weather in northern South Vietnam to wage a major offensive in I Corps Tactical Zone throughout the summer. At the same time, he would prepare to move into the central highlands of II CTZ if the enemy presented a favorable target by massing troops. In III and IV CTZs, Westmoreland planned to adjust to the southern monsoon weather and dispersed enemy forces by conducting offensives on a limited scale to keep the Communists off balance. He would not launch a major operation in those two zones until fall unless an opportunity arose to destroy sizeable hostile forces.

The enemy, General Westmoreland reported, was also planning a "main effort" to start in June or July and was concentrating his big units in the same areas where the allies intended to make their principal effort. According to his calculations, the North Vietnamese had massed up to three divisions in the DMZ and the equivalent of two more divisions in the northern provinces of I Corps capable of mounting a coordinated offensive. Elements of two other enemy divisions were located in southern I CTZ. In II CTZ, elements of five regiments, positioned along the Cambodian border, were to tie down friendly forces by attacking isolated Special Forces camps. In III CTZ, two North Vietnamese and Viet Cong divisions constituted a similar threat to Special Forces camps in the northwest and central parts of the

zone. The US and South Vietnamese troops, Westmoreland declared, were disposed in an "optimum posture to meet the anticipated enemy threats." They were "massed against the enemy major threats" and were "employing economy of force measures" in other areas.[1]

Summer Operations in III and IV CTZs

In the III Corps Tactical Zone, COMUSMACV set as immediate objectives the disruption and defeat of enemy attacks, harassment and destruction of enemy main force units, maintenance of continuous pressure on Viet Cong regional and local forces, neutralization of Communist base areas, and defeat of enemy efforts to sabotage the national elections. To this end, between May and December, the troops of the US II Field Force and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) III Corps conducted a total of 11 operations that resulted in the killing of 50 or more enemy soldiers. Of these 11 operations, the US 1st, 9th, and 25th Infantry Divisions and the 199th Light Infantry Brigade conducted 9 and ARVN units conducted 2. Two of these operations were of division size; the remainder involved brigade-size forces.

In most of these operations, allied troops attempted to engage enemy military units and disrupt their base areas. One operation, FAIRFAX, staged in the province immediately surrounding Saigon, concentrated on the village and hamlet guerrillas and insurgent shadow governments. In this operation, the 199th Light Infantry Brigade was paired in combined activities with a South Vietnamese ranger group. Their objective was to counter Viet Cong efforts to re-establish influence in the villages and hamlets bordering the capital. Working together, American and Vietnamese soldiers carried out night ambush patrols, cordons and searches of hamlets and villages, small-unit search-and-destroy actions, and waterway traffic control activities. The allies improved security in the operational area, and the American brigade devoted much attention to training the local Regional and Popular Forces. Nevertheless, the hard core of VC guerrillas and clandestine political organizations survived.[2]

In conjunction with combat operations, II Field Force used Rome plows to clear large jungle tracts. Under the code name PAUL BUNYAN, specially equipped combat engineer teams had cleared 75,000 acres of trees and brush by the end of September. In the base areas, they uncovered and destroyed bunkers and tunnels. Of the acreage targeted, 30,000 acres bordered key lines of communication, and another 30,000 were in base areas, notably the Ho Bo Woods and the Filhol Plantation west of Saigon. According to General Westmoreland, land-clearing operations reduced the effectiveness of VC ambushes and tax collections on the roads and inhibited but did not totally prevent enemy reoccupation and use of base areas from which allied combat forces had driven him.[3]

General Westmoreland reported substantial progress in III CTZ during the summer months. He told Admiral Sharp that July had been a "month of heartening progress

both in terms of our success in attaining planned objectives and the enemy's failure to attain his planned objectives." A month later, he detected an improvement in overall security. He noted increasing evidence that enemy main force units were "avoiding significant contact" and were suffering a decline in morale. Reporting on operations during September, Westmoreland declared that the enemy had "failed to achieve a single significant victory" and was apparently continuing his policy of avoiding contact with major forces. The overall picture, however, was mixed. Although allied military forces had harried the enemy and driven him away from the villages, pacification in III Corps showed little sign of improvement. The VC guerrillas and political infrastructure remained active even when their main force was quiescent. In much of the countryside, the government ruled by day but the Viet Cong ruled at night.[4]

In IV Corps Tactical Zone, which comprised the heavily populated Mekong Delta, destruction of enemy forces and bases continued to be the primary objective of allied combat operations. In this zone, most of the allied ground forces were South Vietnamese. The summer, however, saw the first major entry of US combat units into the Delta. On 4 June, the Mobile Riverine Force, consisting of US Navy Task Force 117 and a brigade of the US 9th Infantry Division, went into action against the Viet Cong along the numerous rivers and canals of the area. Supported by various ARVN and Vietnamese Marine Corps units, the Mobile Riverine Force launched Operation CORONADO, a search-and-destroy campaign that, under successive designations, continued for the rest of the year. The force made frequent contacts with enemy units, the two largest being fights with battalion-size elements on 19 June and 29 July. It reported an enemy-friendly kill ratio of fifteen to one but suffered a high non-combat casualty rate from operations in the swampy terrain. Reporting on conditions in IV CTZ as of the end of September, COMUSMACV claimed that "the enemy situation ... continues to deteriorate.... Continued GVN [Government of Vietnam] pressure, particularly against Viet Cong main force units and base areas, has affected ... [the enemy's] ability to significantly deter the pacification effort and interdict lines of communication."[5]

Summer Operations in II CTZ

In II Corps Tactical Zone, the I Field Force, with its South Korean and South Vietnamese allies, continued efforts to destroy enemy main forces or drive them away from the populated coastal regions and to block incursions from the Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia. In the northern part of the coastal zone, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) spent the summer pursuing and fighting enemy main force units. Vigorous offensive actions led to frequent small contacts, but the major North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units avoided major engagements. In the southern coastal region, elements of two Republic of Korea divisions similarly maintained pressure on the one VC and five North Vietnamese Army (NVA) battalions in their

zone. In Westmoreland's estimation, these operations reduced a "major threat posed by main force elements." However, local force units and terrorists remained active in the coastal plain.[6]

In September, the enemy shifted his method of operation and pushed major forces down from the mountains toward Tuy Hoa and Phu Yen, apparently to seize the rice harvest. US, ROK, and ARVN forces vigorously counterattacked, preserving most of the harvest for the government, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy forces, and driving them back into the mountains.[7]

While the battle for the coastal plain went on, the US 4th Infantry Division and 173rd Airborne Brigade, supported by three ARVN battalions, continued to block the Cambodian border. The enemy made no effort to cross the border in major force during the summer months. In numerous small-unit engagements, the allies inflicted heavy casualties on their opponents. Reporting on operations as of the end of September, COMUSMACV termed military progress in II CTZ "modest but steady."[8]

Hard Fighting in I CTZ

The most severe fighting during the last half of 1967 occurred in I Corps Tactical Zone. During the summer months, General Westmoreland concentrated major offensive efforts there. As summer gave way to fall, the North Vietnamese launched increasingly heavy infantry and artillery attacks on Marine positions just south of the DMZ. These attacks forced postponement of work on the barrier system and caused the Joint Chiefs of Staff to devote unusually close attention to the tactical situation in northern I Corps.

During the summer, Marines and soldiers of the III MAF, Task Force OREGON, the ARVN, and ROK Marine Corps engaged in almost continuous heavy fighting. Along the DMZ, the 3rd Marine Division conducted operations characterized by artillery exchanges and small unit engagements. In a major action on 8 July, Marines routed an enemy force from a bunker complex within four kilometers of their base at Con Thien. Despite the continuous combat activity, the North Vietnamese during July and August did not attempt the major assault that COMUSMACV had anticipated. Guerrilla and terrorist attacks, however, remained at a high level.

In the southern provinces of I CTZ, the 1st Marine Division and Task Force OREGON engaged in search-and-destroy operations. When they encountered the enemy, they invariably achieved favorable casualty ratios and drove the opposing forces from the field. Drawing replacements and supplies from bases in Laos, the Communists invariably came back to fight again. They continued to score successes in interdicting lines of communications, launching rocket and mortar attacks, and assaulting isolated Vietnamese installations. By early September, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main forces seemed to be preparing to open a two-pronged offensive, threatening both the DMZ and southern I Corps.[9]

The attack along the Demilitarized Zone began with a greatly intensified North Vietnamese bombardment of Con Thien, not only by rockets and mortars but also by heavy artillery pieces concealed in caves in and just north of the DMZ. Con Thien, situated two miles south of the zone and fourteen miles from the coast, blocked a key enemy infiltration route into the south. Its loss could open the way for a major invasion by 35,000 North Vietnamese troops massed in the area. At the very least, loss of Con Thien would block construction of the anti-infiltration barrier system. More important would be the psychological impact of a major North Vietnamese military victory over US forces—a goal that still eluded the enemy more than two years after American troops entered combat on a large scale.

The bombardment of Con Thien reached its peak during the week of 19–27 September, when more than 3,000 mortar, rocket, and artillery rounds fell on the beleaguered US position. To counter this attack, General Westmoreland unleashed the massed firepower of B–52 ARC LIGHT strikes, artillery, tactical air, and naval gunfire—one of the heaviest concentrations of fire in support of a single division in the history of warfare. This deluge of fire, combined with an active defense by Marine ground units and adverse weather conditions, apparently dissuaded the enemy from mounting a major infantry attack. By the end of September, the hostile fire had substantially decreased. US casualties at Con Thien, however, had been heavy. During the period 1–24 September, North Vietnamese shelling exacted a toll of 196 killed and 1,917 wounded from US forces defending the DMZ.[10]

Concerned over the losses, President Johnson on 21 September asked the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., for his views of the situation. This was an unusual step, since General Greene, as a Service chief, was not in the operational chain of command. The Commandant, however, kept close watch over the activities of his Marines in Vietnam; and both he and the commanding general of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, in Honolulu frequently commented on operational issues as well as those of Service management.

On 22 September, General Greene described the situation in northern I CTZ as one in which the Marines "faced . . . increasing harassment of our fixed installations and units in the DMZ area by artillery, rocket and mortar fire" compounded by the heavy monsoon rains which severely impeded air support and overland movement. The Marines were "not supinely enduring," the Commandant reassured the President. They were actively countering by air, artillery, and infantry patrol actions, all of which were taking a toll in enemy casualties. Nevertheless, Greene declared that the situation was "not to our liking." He suggested that it might be improved by attacking northward to drive the enemy from positions on the DMZ, increasing forces on the DMZ and continuing present operations, or by withdrawing fixed defenses southward and conducting a mobile defense along the DMZ. (The latter was the course preferred by the III MAF and FMFPAC commanders.) All these courses of action, Greene concluded were "under active consideration by the Theater Commander and his operational subordinates."[11]

Although he had assured President Johnson that the Marines on the DMZ were giving a good account of themselves, General Greene was disturbed by the situation there. Together with the rest of the Marine Corps leadership, he had opposed Secretary McNamara's DMZ barrier project, fearing that it would lead to the circumstances that now existed. On 24 September, he addressed a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressing his concerns. Greene stated that he considered the casualty level being experienced by the Marines along the DMZ to be "too high, considering the operational benefits received." The main problem, as he saw it, was that the American forces were at a disadvantage in confronting an enemy who was becoming increasingly skillful in employing artillery. Butted up against the DMZ, the allies were unable to get behind the enemy to cut off his supplies or overrun his batteries.

As possible remedies for this situation, the Commandant listed four alternative courses of action: the three he had described for President Johnson plus a proposal to increase air and naval gunfire bombardment north of the demarcation line. At present, Greene's "preferred course of action" was a combination of two of the four he had listed: namely, to continue current operations along the DMZ with more forces, and to increase air and naval gunfire north of the demarcation line. To implement these courses of action would require reinforcement of northern I CTZ by at least two regiments, and improvement of target acquisition north of the demarcation line. Once targets were acquired, MACV should commit its entire ARC LIGHT capability, "several thousand" tactical air sorties, and maximum naval gunfire against them, using the complete range of conventional weapons. General Greene recommended that the Joint Staff prepare for the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) consideration a memorandum to CINCPAC expressing "the concern of the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding the situation along the DMZ [and] their views on possible courses of action" and requesting "the development of appropriate plans and recommendations to improve the situation."[12]

On 25 September, the Joint Chiefs referred General Greene's memorandum to the Joint Staff. Rather than wait for a report, however, they decided to make an immediate request to Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland for their views on the situation. In a message dispatched the same day, the JCS requested "any observations which you would care to offer regarding measures under way or planned which offer promise in relieving this situation.... In particular, are there any areas in which additional assistance and/or authorities beyond those now in hand would materially assist you?"[13]

Replying on 27 September, Westmoreland declared that he, too, was concerned over the situation on the DMZ because of the high casualties his troops were suffering and because of the ineffectiveness of efforts to suppress the enemy's artillery. He also feared that the DMZ situation would be viewed out of perspective. He pointed out that the American casualties for September, while high, were not out of line with losses incurred in the area on other occasions. During July and August 1966, for instance, units fighting the enemy in Quang Tri Province had suffered

monthly casualties respectively of 125 killed and 488 wounded, and 115 killed and 448 wounded.

The fundamental difficulty on the DMZ, Westmoreland explained, was that the posture of friendly forces there was defensive and, around Con Thien, relatively static. If the allies launched offensive operations in the DMZ south of the Ben Hai River (the actual border between North and South Vietnam), the attacking troops would take heavy losses from enemy artillery north of the river. A full-scale combined attack on these enemy positions from the sea and across the DMZ was out of the question until May or June because of the weather; and if the weather were favorable, MACV had no authority to invade even the southernmost part of North Vietnam. Limited raids should not be ruled out, however. The commanders of III MAF and the Seventh Air Force were preparing plans for such operations.

Under current circumstances, Westmoreland considered it unwise to increase the forces north of Route 9, the east-west road that paralleled the DMZ to the south. He had, however, taken several other steps. COMUSMACV had allowed III MAF to stop construction of the anti-infiltration barrier and use resources earmarked for it to harden combat bases and strong points north of and along Route 9. He had started emergency construction of an airstrip and logistical base near Quang Tri City, out of range of the enemy guns across the Ben Hai River. He had persuaded the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff to contribute two airborne battalions to the forces constructing and manning the strong points below the DMZ. Westmoreland had directed Lieutenant General Robert E. Cushman, USMC, CG of III MAF, to conduct operations between the Hai Van Pass and Hue to take pressure off friendly forces from the rear and protect the critical supply route from Da Nang to the north; and he had accelerated port development near Hue as a fall back position if ports farther north became unusable.

To permit a shift of III MAF forces north should the need arise, General Westmoreland had directed General Cushman to assign full responsibility for the three provinces of southern I CTZ to the Americal Division (as Task Force OREGON was redesignated on 22 September). Westmoreland reported also that he had directed the commander of I Field Force to be prepared to move units into southern I Corps to assist the Americal Division if necessary.

Turning to the areas in which he needed assistance from higher authorities, General Westmoreland made a number of requests. He asked for an immediate surge in B–52 sorties to the maximum sustainable rate, with a goal of 1,200 strikes per month as soon as possible. He asked the JCS to investigate the feasibility of employing 2,000-pound bombs in B–52s and to make a liberal allocation of MK–36 weapons for use in the DMZ as soon as technical problems were solved. The MACV commander requested an increase in the number of naval gunfire ships in the DMZ area, and he wanted flash and sound locator units as soon as possible. Westmoreland urged acceleration of the deployment of US units authorized under Program 5. For the RVNAF, he wanted more rapid issue

of M–16 rifles to the ARVN and Defense Department approval of force increases he had recommended to Secretary McNamara in July. Finally, Westmoreland asked for intensified research and development of methods to locate concealed artillery pieces.[14]

Even as these messages and memoranda were being written, action was already under way that would ease the situation not only in the DMZ but also throughout South Vietnam. On 22 September, Secretary McNamara approved Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor's request to move ahead the deployment of the headquarters and one brigade of the 101st Airborne Division from February 1968 to December 1967.[15]

On 28 September, Westmoreland explained to Admiral Sharp the changes in his operational plans and force deployments that would result from the accelerated movement of the 101st Airborne Division and the heavy enemy pressure on the DMZ. During the fall and winter, he had planned to relieve the 1st Cavalry in Binh Dinh Province of II CTZ, where it had been clearing enemy main force units out of the coastal plain, and commit it to successive countrywide offensives against key Communist base areas. He also had intended to reinforce I CTZ to the extent possible without unduly retarding operations elsewhere, to move additional elements of the 9th Infantry Division to the delta, and to reinforce III CTZ early in December with the 1st Cavalry for a major effort to drive the enemy away from populated areas. The pressure on the DMZ made the latter move impracticable. The 1st Cavalry Division now would deploy to I Corps while the 101st Airborne Division would replace it in II CTZ. This meant that the air cavalry, instead of conducting a series of offensive operations, would be tied down in defense in the north for the next several months. Westmoreland noted in conclusion that early arrival of all the major combat units authorized under Program 5—the 11th Infantry Brigade and the remainder of the 101st Airborne Division—would facilitate the conduct of planned operations. On 1 October, Admiral Sharp informed the Joint Chiefs that he concurred in General Westmoreland's assessments and reinforcement requests.[16]

A major casualty of the DMZ fighting was the land portion of Secretary McNamara's anti-infiltration barrier in eastern South Vietnam, now known as the Strongpoint/Obstacle System (SPOS). The original deadline for completion of the entire system, including the air-supported sensor barrier in Laos, had been 1 November 1967. However, as North Vietnamese artillery, rocket, and mortar fire intensified in the DMZ area, work on the SPOS became increasingly dangerous. Adding to the difficulties, heavy monsoon rains impeded the flow of materials to the forward sites, delayed construction, and hence increased the period of troop exposure. If work on the SPOS continued, unacceptable casualties were likely to result. Lieutenant General Cushman estimated early in September that if he adhered to the established construction schedule, he would have at least 450 men killed and more than 3,000 wounded by 1 November.

In the face of these facts, General Westmoreland ordered a temporary halt to construction so that the Marines could concentrate on strengthening their existing

strong points and combat bases in northern Quang Tri Province. On 16 September, he recommended to CINCPAC that work on the SPOS be delayed indefinitely until the weather and the enemy situation permitted construction to be resumed. Admiral Sharp informed the JCS on 18 September that he concurred in Westmoreland's recommendation and declared that there had been too much emphasis on the 1 November completion date. These recommendations, along with technical and logistical difficulties, led the Joint Chiefs to conclude on 19 September that the completion date for the entire system—in Laos as well as South Vietnam—should be pushed back thirty days. The Air Force Chief of Staff, as acting Chairman while General Wheeler was hospitalized with his heart attack, informed the Secretary of Defense of the JCS views on 22 September. McNamara agreed to the construction postponement in I Corps. He deferred the completion dates for the anti-vehicle and anti-personnel systems in Laos respectively to 1 December 1967 and 1 January 1968. The anti-vehicle system went into operation on schedule, but the anti-personnel system in Laos and the Strongpoint/Obstacle System in South Vietnam remained incomplete through the spring of 1968.[17]

Actions to Strengthen MACV

Authorities in Washington acted at once on General Westmoreland's requests. The Department of the Army took under consideration the accelerated deployment of the 11th Infantry Brigade and the remainder of the 101st Airborne Division. After a restudy of the problems involved, Secretary Resor recommended to Secretary McNamara that both units be deployed by air to South Vietnam during December. On 21 October, the Defense Secretary approved the early movement of the 101st Airborne Division elements and on 6 November the early movement of the 11th Infantry Brigade.[18]

Westmoreland's request for an increase in ARC LIGHT to 1,200 sorties per month received equally speedy consideration. On 4 October, General McConnell informed the JCS that Secretary McNamara had asked the Air Force for an assessment of its capability to attain the desired rate. The Air Force assessment concluded that the service could begin a surge in sorties immediately and reach the 1,200 level by the end of December. This could be done without a major relocation of forces or an unacceptable degradation of general war strategic capability. However, an increase in MK–82 and MK–117 bomb production would be required. On the basis of this assessment, McConnell reported to the Joint Chiefs, Secretary McNamara had recommended to President Johnson an immediate surge in ARC LIGHT sorties to 1,200 per month, a level that could be reached by January or February.[19]

General McConnell recommended that the JCS review his memorandum and make their own comments to McNamara. The Chiefs did so. On 14 October, they

forwarded to Secretary McNamara a memorandum recommending the continuation of the existing 800 sorties per month but with forces capable of a rapid increase to 1,200 sorties if required. This "surge" capability was to be attained by stationing an additional 9 B–52s on Guam, earmarking an additional 19 to begin movement to Guam on 72 hours' notice, constructing the necessary base facilities for them at Guam and U Tapao, and pre-positioning support equipment at both bases. An increase in bomb production also would be required. In addition, the Joint Chiefs recommended an increase in the number of B–52s permanently stationed at U Tapao from 15 to 30. The JCS justified this as an economy measure, calculated to save $3.5 million per month by eliminating the long flights from Guam and launching all ARC LIGHT sorties from U Tapao. On 10 November, Secretary McNamara approved the JCS concept for providing a surge to 1,200 sorties and the proposal to base additional B–52s at U Tapao. However, he reduced the number at the Thai base from 30 to 25.[20]

On 2 October, in another move to provide more effective fire support to American forces near the DMZ, the JCS, acting on a request from CINCPAC, recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he delegate to them, for further delegation to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, authority to approve ARC LIGHT strikes in southern North Vietnam up to 17 degrees North latitude. Secretary McNamara approved the recommendation on 28 November.[21]

The Department of Defense took action on Westmoreland's other requests. Two destroyers and a cruiser were diverted from other assignments to augment naval gunfire operations in the DMZ, and a target acquisition battery was ordered to South Vietnam, to arrive about 15 October. Research and development on the technical and operational problems of the MK–36 Destructor continued, and CINCPAC planned additional use of the weapons. Research in target acquisition of concealed artillery pieces had been under way for some time and was continuing, but no new types of equipment were expected to be operational before August 1969.[22]

Enemy Pressure on the Cambodian Border

The artillery duels around Con Thien had hardly subsided when enemy forces massing on the Cambodian border in II CTZ presented a threat of invasion from that quarter. During October, General Westmoreland reported, there were ominous signs of an enemy buildup in that area. The buildup reached critical proportions in November. On 2 November, COMUSMACV estimated that four North Vietnamese regiments—a total of some 9,000 men—were massed astride the border for an offensive in Kontum Province. The enemy's immediate objective, as revealed later by a captured document, was to annihilate a major US unit and draw US troops away from the coastal areas, exposing the pacification forces there to attack.

Unknown to the allies at the time, this operation also was one of the preliminaries to a nationwide offensive for which the enemy was then preparing.[23]

To forestall the threatened attack, General Westmoreland rapidly moved five additional US battalions—two from the 1st Cavalry Division and three from the 173rd Airborne Brigade—into the area and launched preemptive attacks around the town of Dak To. The Americans, working with ARVN units, collided with North Vietnamese dug in on jungle-clad heights, and a series of vicious firefights followed. After repeated assaults, the allies seized the key heights and drove most of the enemy back across the Cambodian border. Casualties on both sides were heavy: US, 289 killed; ARVN, 73 killed; enemy, 1,222 killed. From the enemy's standpoint, the operation had drawn US troops away from the coastal areas; but this success was only temporary as most of the Americans quickly redeployed once the fighting ended.[24]

Operations in the other corps tactical zones continued, meanwhile, at much their previous pace during the rest of the year. In I Corps, the Marines carried on search-and-destroy missions in the northern part of the zone. Fighting during these operations consisted largely of small-unit engagements. In southern I Corps, the Americal Division pursued the 2nd NVA Division, inflicted heavy casualties upon it, and prevented it from interfering with the rice harvest. In III Corps, search-and-destroy operations continued, as did the combined pacification effort, Operation FAIRFAX, around Saigon. The CORONADO riverine operations continued in IV CTZ.[25]

Attacking the Ho Chi Minh Trail

The communist insurgency in South Vietnam required continuous fresh injections of men and materiel from North Vietnam to sustain itself and expand. At the beginning of 1967, US intelligence agencies estimated that manpower infiltration from North to South Vietnam was running at a rate of about 3,000 per month. These troops, and a growing volume of weapons and supplies, flowed through eastern Laos along a network of roads and trails known to Americans as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Initially a pathway for foot, bicycle, and animal traffic, by 1967 the trail had become a truck route for most of its length, operated and defended by tens of thousands of North Vietnamese. Curtailment of this flow of men and supplies became a major objective of US strategy. ROLLING THUNDER had as one of its purposes the interdiction of traffic through North Vietnam toward the south. Secretary McNamara's barrier was intended to hinder movement on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, supplementing air and reconnaissance programs already in operation.[26]

The US was waging two air interdiction campaigns in Laos, codenamed STEEL TIGER and TIGER HOUND. During 1967, STEEL TIGER was marked by a relaxation of previous restraints on strikes near populated areas in Laos. Early in the year, authorities refined the STEEL TIGER operating guidelines and created four zones within the Laotian panhandle. Zone I, adjacent to the South Vietnamese

border, was designated as a "TIGER HOUND Special Operating Area," in which US aircraft could conduct armed reconnaissance against all roads, paths, tracks, and rivers and could strike all enemy activity. In Zone II, just to the west and north of Zone I, STEEL TIGER armed reconnaissance was permitted day or night against targets of opportunity located within 200 yards of a trail or road useable by motor vehicles. Other targets in this zone could be struck only under certain special circumstances. In Zone III, still further west and north, all strikes had to be under positive direction by a forward air controller (FAC) or be radar controlled. Zone IV, including most of the western half of the panhandle, was a STEEL TIGER controlled zone in which all strikes, besides being guided by a FAC, required approval of the US Ambassador to Laos. During the year, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps aircraft flew an average of 3,219 attack sorties per month in the STEEL TIGER and TIGER HOUND areas.[27]

Closely allied to the air interdiction programs throughout 1967 was Operation SHINING BRASS. Under this program, small teams of indigenous irregulars led by US Army Special Forces personnel conducted cross-border forays from South Vietnam into Laos. Their activities, which were not acknowledged publicly, included reconnaissance operations to confirm targets for air strikes and small raids on enemy positions and facilities. On 25 February, the Joint Chiefs expanded the SHINING BRASS operating zone to include a larger expanse of eastern Laos. SHINING BRASS was renamed PRAIRIE FIRE effective 1 March.[28]

On 22 May 1967, the JCS initiated a program of clandestine ground reconnaissance in eastern Cambodia codenamed DANIEL BOONE. The decision to conduct these operations was based on the recommendations of a joint State-Defense-CIA Study Group for Cambodia, which had been set up to consider what to do about the enemy's extensive base network in South Vietnam's nominally neutral neighbor. Established on 21 December 1966, the Study Group examined among other alternatives a JCS recommendation that US forces in South Vietnam be permitted to pursue enemy forces with which they were engaged into Cambodia. Early in May 1967, the Study Group recommended that the administration take a primarily political approach to the problem, emphasizing diplomatic efforts to persuade the Cambodian government to demand departure of the North Vietnamese. The Study Group rejected the Joint Chiefs' "hot pursuit" proposal on grounds that such action might jeopardize the diplomatic initiative or extend hostilities into Cambodia. To obtain intelligence of enemy activities in Cambodia for use in support of diplomacy or military operations, the Study Group did recommend the initiation of clandestine cross-border incursions, for reconnaissance only. The State and Defense Departments approved the Study Group recommendations on 9 and 17 May, as did President Johnson. On the 22d, the JCS directed CINCPAC to initiate DANIEL BOONE, under which a limited number of Special Forces led teams crossed the border each month.[29]

Rounding Out Free World Military Assistance Forces

During the last half of 1967 and the early months of 1968, reinforcements arrived to round out the contingents of America's Asian and Pacific allies in Vietnam, known collectively as Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF). By September 1967, all the Australian, New Zealand, and Thai troops offered by their respective governments during the previous winter had arrived in the country. During July, the South Koreans expanded their contingent by about 3,000 men—a marine battalion, miscellaneous small army units, and additional personnel to cover patients in hospitals.

During July, Mr. Clark Clifford and General Maxwell Taylor visited the Asia-Pacific region carrying requests from President Johnson for still more allied troops. On 16 October, the New Zealand government announced it would deploy an additional infantry company (150–170 men) to South Vietnam. The next day, the Australian government declared its intention to reinforce its brigade-size task force in the country by 1,700 men comprising an infantry battalion and a tank squadron. Subsequently, the Australians added a helicopter unit and a small naval aviation contingent to bring the total of additional personnel to 1,978. The New Zealanders and the Australian infantry battalion arrived in South Vietnam in mid-December. The remaining Australian units did not deploy until February and March 1968. At the end of 1967, 60,531 FWMAF troops were operating alongside the Americans and South Vietnamese—47,802 Koreans, 6,715 Australians, 2,205 Thais, 2,020 Filipinos, 522 New Zealanders, 31 Nationalist Chinese, and 13 Spaniards.[30]

Completing the Logistical Base

Allied military operations in South Vietnam depended upon a strong logistics base. Created almost from scratch after the US decision to commit combat troops in 1965, this base had been largely completed by the end of 1966. At that date, it included five deep-water ports and eight jet-capable airfields with a combined freight handling capacity of 870,000 short tons per month, cantonments, a modern communications system, and efficient systems for storage and distribution of supplies. However, the condition of the port of Saigon and the roads comprising the ground lines of communication was still far from satisfactory. Improvement of these facilities became major logistics tasks for 1967. In addition, the Program 5 force increases, the heavy combat operations along the DMZ, and the construction of the anti-infiltration barrier posed major logistics problems. Both theater logisticians and the authorities in Washington worked during 1967 to resolve these issues, as well as to refine the logistics system and improve its efficiency by transferring certain functions from the Agency for International Development (AID) to

the Department of Defense and by expanding the Army's common supply system to replace the Navy system that supported units operating in I CTZ.

Allied forces had considerable success during 1967 in securing and opening highways considered essential for military operations. MACV defined "secure" as meaning "controlled by RVN/US/FWMAF during daylight hours. Isolated incidents may occur." The term "open" denoted "used by RVN/US/FWMAF employing thorough security measures. Frequent incidents may occur." At the beginning of the year, COMUSMACV classified only 500 miles, or about 30 percent, of the militarily essential roads as "secure" and 76 percent as "open." By the end of the year, these figures had increased to 60 percent "secure" and 98 percent "open."[31]

Congestion in the port of Saigon was a major logistics problem. As the year began, military operations at leased piers were proceeding with reasonable efficiency, but the commercial port was jammed with ships and barges waiting to be unloaded. By late spring, new construction and improved management had ended excessive congestion in the commercial port. Completion of facilities in the military Newport permitted the release of leased berths to civilian use, and training and guidance by MACV and AID had improved the Saigon government's Port Authority to the point where it could move cargo expeditiously. By the end of June, the average ship turnaround time had dropped from eighty-nine to seven days.[32]

In view of the substantial improvement in port operations, the Joint Chiefs concluded that it was no longer necessary for MACV to continue handling AID Central Purchasing Authority cargoes. These cargoes consisted of goods consigned to the South Vietnamese government for use in the counterinsurgency program. General Westmoreland had agreed to handle them in 1966 in order to ease the commercial freight backlog. On 19 August, the JCS recommended to Secretary McNamara that he seek State Department and Agency for International Development agreement to transfer responsibility for these cargoes to an appropriate US or South Vietnamese agency. The concerned agencies agreed to this change and on 29 August instructed their officials in Saigon to draft a plan for the turnover. In December, the agencies in Saigon completed a plan to transfer the responsibility from MACV to AID; but the implementation date was still under negotiation at the end of 1967.[33]

In northern I Corps Tactical Zone, the need for port facilities increased as the result of heavy fighting along the DMZ and the demands of the anti-infiltration system. Lacking deep-draft harbors in the region, MACV doubled the number of landing craft ramps around Hue during the year. During 1967, the cargo handling capacities of port facilities in the two northernmost provinces increased from 540 to 5,500 short tons per day.[34]

Support of the additional forces authorized under Program 5 proved to be an easy task, an indication of the soundness with which MACV's logistic system had been planned and built. Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland determined that existing port facilities could accommodate the movement of the reinforcements,

but that additional troop housing and cantonments would have to be constructed. At the recommendation of the JCS, the Defense Department included the necessary funds for this in the FY 1969 Military Construction Program. The cost was $168.9 million, a 10 percent increase in the amount appropriated for military construction in South Vietnam.[35]

On 30 November 1966, Secretary McNamara initiated a significant refinement of the logistic system in South Vietnam. At that time, he shifted responsibility for certain specific services from AID to the Department of Defense (DOD). This action imposed additional responsibilities on the military logistic system. According to CINCPAC, the transfer generated a need for an additional 5,858 military personnel spaces, $37 million in construction funds, and an increase of 2 billion piasters in the amount of this currency available for military spending. In addition, authority had to be delegated within the Department of Defense for management of the newly acquired functions. On 26 February 1967, General Westmoreland recommended to Admiral Sharp that he be given authority for program approval and direction in South Vietnam, but that funding and fiscal accounting be a Service responsibility. CINCPAC approved the recommendation, but a joint AID/DOD committee in Washington rejected it in late March. Final decision was delegated to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Rejecting the committee's action, the JCS on 11 April delegated to CINCPAC "program directive and review authority." CINCPAC, in turn, delegated the authority to COMUSMACV.[36]

The effort to establish a single supply system to provide common-user items to all units in South Vietnam did not meet with success. On 12 December 1966, Secretary McNamara had directed the establishment of such a system to replace the dual system then in effect. Under the existing arrangement, US Army, Vietnam (USARV) and US Naval Forces, Vietnam (NAVFORV) operated parallel systems, the former supplying all units in II, III, and IV CTZs and the latter performing the same function in I CTZ. Secretary McNamara tasked the Department of the Army to prepare a detailed plan and made clear that approval would depend on the establishment of the necessary control mechanism in the theater. On 8 February, the Department of the Army submitted a plan to the Secretary of Defense providing for deployment of an Inventory Control Center to South Vietnam to act as the control mechanism. On 9 May, after consulting the other Service departments, the Department of the Army submitted a detailed plan for the phased implementation of a single common supply system. McNamara, however, was not satisfied. On 21 July, he informed the Service Secretaries that he was withholding approval of the Army plan pending presentation of more definitive requirement data, establishment of the necessary Army supply capability in South Vietnam, and resolution of certain inter-service disagreements. At the end of 1967, the single common supply system remained in the planning stage.[37]

The Situation at the End of 1967

During 1967, South Vietnamese, FWMAF, and US forces had suffered casualties totaling 23,199 killed in action and 93,791 wounded. According to allied estimates, the enemy during the year had lost more than 88,000 killed. What had been the strategic effect of this bloodletting?[38]

The US commanders in the theater viewed 1967 as a year of military progress in the war. In a typical assessment, Admiral Sharp, summing up operations for the year, reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that there was a "definite shift in the military situation favorable to us." He declared that a "significant increase in the strengths and capabilities of allied forces" had facilitated expansion of combat operations to an extent that denied the enemy "the capability to conduct significant operations in the populated areas." Allied ground forces, closely supported by tactical air and ARC LIGHT strikes, had increasingly neutralized enemy base areas, located and destroyed his supplies, and pushed his large units into sparsely populated regions where food was scarce. Most of the enemy main force had been driven to positions near the borders where they took advantage of Laotian and Cambodian sanctuaries for protection and re-supply. Sharp claimed also that steady progress had been made in destroying communist local forces and political infrastructure. As a result, the proportion of the population and area of South Vietnam under enemy control had slowly but steadily declined.

In spite of these favorable trends, Admiral Sharp cautioned, the enemy was not defeated. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had "demonstrated a willingness to accept the situation as it exists and continues to attack, harass, and terrorize in many areas . . . ." Enemy artillery, rockets, and mortars had shown a marked increase in both quantity and caliber, and he had shown increasing skill in employing these weapons. Even more disturbing, Sharp reported was evidence of "recent large unit deployments from North Vietnam which indicate that the enemy may be seeking a spectacular win in South Vietnam in the near future." However, CINCPAC continued, these enemy capabilities were not overpowering. Through "careful exploitation of the enemy's vulnerability and application of our superior fire power and mobility," he concluded, "we should expect our gains of 1967 in South Vietnam to be increased many fold in 1968."[39]

8

Pacification and Nation Building—1967

During 1967, the US and the Saigon government made some progress in pacification and nation building. Of particular significance was the replacement of the military regime by an elected constitutional government, a major political objective of the United States. Encouraging progress also occurred in other areas. The rate of inflation in South Vietnam was reduced by more than half, a new organization promised greater energy in the pacification program, and the size of the RVNAF increased and it improved in quality.

From Military Directorate to Constitutional Government

On 31 October 1967, General Nguyen Van Thieu was inaugurated as the first president under a new democratic constitution. While it involved few real changes in the top government leadership, this event marked an important milestone in the political development of South Vietnam. The military regime of Thieu and Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky had attained a degree of stability, but it lacked both legitimacy and a broad popular base. For these reasons, the United States had encouraged the Saigon government to take the steps that led finally to the adoption of a constitution and elections for local and national offices.

The process of political evolution began in September 1966 with the election of a Constituent Assembly to draft a constitution. However, the Leadership Council for the Nation, the military-dominated, 19-member body that actually ruled South Vietnam, refused to confer sole responsibility for this important task on the newly elected Assembly. In December, by decree, the Leadership Council assumed the authority to amend any constitution drafted by the Constituent Assembly. After

remonstrances from Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, the Leadership Council partially abandoned this position. It informally agreed to discuss any changes in the draft constitution that the military considered necessary with the Constituent Assembly. However, as drafting proceeded, the Leadership Council's views prevailed on most significant points of disagreement, and the Council would retain governmental authority until the new president was inaugurated.[1]

After much discussion and wrangling with the Leadership Council, the Constituent Assembly approved a draft constitution on 18 March 1967. The Leadership Council accepted it the following day. The constitution called for a strong executive authority tempered by the powers of a two-house National Assembly. The executive branch would consist of a president and vice-president elected on the same ticket and a prime minister chosen by the winning presidential candidate. The National Assembly would be made up of an upper house composed of 30 to 60 senators chosen at large, and a lower house of 100 to 200 representatives chosen from constituencies no larger than provinces. Once elected, the National Assembly would choose the Supreme Court. Voters in villages and hamlets, as well as in provinces, cities, and the capital, would elect their local officials.

As soon as the Leadership Council had accepted the constitution, Thieu and Ky, with other top Vietnamese officials, left Saigon to attend a conference with President Johnson and other US officials on Guam. At this conference (19–21 March 1967), the South Vietnamese delegation outlined the new constitution to their American sponsors and received their blessing. In Saigon, the Leadership Council secured support for the draft from the Armed Forces Council, the principal political voice of the RVNAF. Chief of State Thieu officially promulgated the constitution on 1 April 1967.

The local elections began on 2 April and continued through June. According to the election laws drawn up by the Constituent Assembly, village chiefs were elected by the village councils from among their own members. Hamlet chiefs were elected directly. Reflecting the insecure status of the countryside, elections took place in only 984 out of an estimated 2,500 villages and in 4,476 out of approximately 13,000 hamlets. The Viet Cong opposed these elections with threats, assassinations of candidates, and harassment of voters. Nevertheless, about 77 percent of the people registered cast ballots.[2]

Meanwhile, the presidential election campaign had gotten under way. General Thieu, the Chief of State, and Air Vice Marshal Ky, the Premier, were the chief presidential contenders, causing the RVNAF military leadership to split into pro-Thieu and pro-Ky factions. The US Department of State expressed deep concern about this division among the military, upon whose unity the success of the war and indeed the survival of South Vietnam depended. After lengthy negotiations, anxiously watched over by Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, who had replaced Ambassador Lodge in May, 1967, and General Westmoreland, at a meeting of the Leadership Council on 28–30 June, Ky withdrew his candidacy and agreed to run for vice president on Thieu's ticket.[3]

Civilian candidates also entered the race. Considered the leading contender among them was Tran Van Huong, who had been premier in a short-lived civilian government in 1964. Truong Dinh Dzu, a wealthy Saigon lawyer and a leading opponent of the government, ran on a platform calling for a peaceful settlement of the war. Phan Khac Suu, chairman of the Constituent Assembly and Chief of State in the abortive regime of 1964, stood for president. Another prominent candidate was General Duong Van ("Big") Minh, who had led the overthrow of the Diem regime in 1963, only to be overthrown himself in 1964 and forced into exile.[4]

The United States did not openly endorse a candidate and pledged not to interfere in the elections. Yet the administration considered it important that civilians participate in the government, but with minimum reduction in the anticommunist strength the military provided. From the administration's standpoint, the ideal Saigon regime would combine both military and civilian elements and also include representation for the Buddhists and "Southerners" (native South Vietnamese anticommunists as opposed to northern-born leaders like Nguyen Cao Ky). On 8 February, the State Department informed the US Ambassador that a Huong-Ky ticket would be a satisfactory civilian-military combination. Huong, however, refused to run with Ky, and the administration in the end had no choice but to be impartial while hoping for a Thieu-Ky victory.[5]

By 30 June, the deadline for submitting nominations, a total of eighteen presidential slates had been presented to the Constituent Assembly, which possessed the power to determine their eligibility to go on the ballot. The Assembly disqualified seven slates, including that of "Big" Minh. The South Vietnamese government took care that the election campaign proceeded "freely and fairly." It lifted press censorship and gave all the candidates money to campaign, free transportation, and free time on government radio and television. The Defense Minister stated publicly that the armed forces would not support a candidate, and the Minister of Rural Development (RD), in charge of pacification, indicated that no RD workers would engage in political campaigning. Generals Ky and Thieu told the province and district leaders that they should not pressure the people to vote for any particular candidate.[6]

The presidential election took place on 3 September 1967. Of the registered voters—all South Vietnamese men and women who were over the age of 18 as of 31 December 1966—83 percent went to the polls. The Thieu-Ky ticket won, as expected, but with only 34.8 percent of the vote, less than anticipated. Trong Dinh Dzu, the peace candidate, came in second with 17.2 percent. Phan Khac Suu received 10.8 percent, Tran Van Huong 10 percent, and the other seven candidates divided the remaining 37.2 percent. Elections for the 60-seat upper house of the National Assembly also were held on 3 September, and its inaugural session convened on 9 October. The campaign for seats in the lower house, which had begun on 6 October, culminated in the election of 137 members on 22 October. US civilian

observers invited by the Saigon government to scrutinize the voting pronounced the elections "reasonably free and honest."[7]

The formalities of installing the newly elected government went quickly. On 30 October, the Leadership Council was dissolved. The following day, President Thieu and Vice-President Ky were inaugurated, the lower house installed, and the Constituent Assembly disbanded. President Thieu announced the appointment of Nguyen Van Loc, the former Chairman of the Leadership Council, as Premier. A southern-born Buddhist lawyer, Loc's appointment partially satisfied the US desire for a more broadly representative Saigon administration. On 9 November, the new Premier announced the installation of his cabinet.

The newly installed government displayed early evidence of seriousness of purpose and determination to direct the full energies of the South Vietnamese people to the task of winning the war. On 25 October, even before their formal inauguration, Thieu and Ky promulgated a new sweeping Mobilization Decree that provided for conscription of all men between the ages of 18 and 45 for military service, the mobilization of technicians of all types up to the age of 45, and the recall of some veterans to the colors. After its inauguration, the new administration issued a "National Policy" statement, laying out a comprehensive long-range program of economic, social, and political reform. The program called specifically for action in such chronically neglected areas as land reform. However impressive the rhetoric, results would depend on military and civilian institutions that remained seriously flawed by corruption and weak leadership at every level. Whether performance would match promises was an unanswered question, especially since the answer would be heavily influenced by the actions of a well-organized, determined enemy.[8]

Electoral and constitutional maneuvering notwithstanding, much remained the same in South Vietnamese politics. Although civilians, Buddhists, and Catholics were all now represented in the Saigon regime, the military still predominated at every level of government and administration and familiar officials were still in power. Nevertheless, the elections of 1967 were an important step toward the US goal of developing stable, democratic government in South Vietnam. The Saigon government had been transformed from a military directorate into an elected regime with at least formal constitutional legitimacy and something like a popular base.

Efforts to Control Inflation

Inflation, which had threatened to reach runaway proportions in 1966, continued in 1967. The largest contributing factor was massive US spending, principally by MACV, that the small and relatively undeveloped South Vietnamese economy could not absorb. Recognizing the problem, the US Mission had instituted anti-inflation measures late in 1966 that paid substantial dividends during 1967. By the end of that year, inflation was at least coming under control.

The US Mission developed four primary measures to fight inflation and secured South Vietnamese cooperation in their implementation. The four measures were: 1) massive importation of goods; 2) an increase of South Vietnam's domestic production; 3) broader and more efficient tax collection by Saigon; and 4) imposition by Secretary McNamara of piaster spending ceilings on US agencies and personnel in South Vietnam.

The imposition of spending restraints was by far the most effective measure, and much of the credit for success in holding down piaster expenditures belonged to COMUSMACV. General Westmoreland devised a program that kept MACV's piaster spending well below the ceiling set for the command by the Secretary of Defense. His program concentrated on three categories of expenditures: 1) maintenance and operation, 2) construction, and 3) personal spending by US troops. To curb expenditures in the first two categories, Westmoreland imposed austere standards of design on new construction, reduced the number of leased buildings in urban areas, and limited the purchase of local commodities to nine items. To reduce troop spending, Westmoreland increased on-post recreational facilities, expanded the Rest and Recuperation (R&R) program, started new savings programs, and improved Post Exchange (PX) stocks. (The latter efforts were marred by significant corruption and racketeering in the PXs and in the officers' and enlisted men's club system.) He also took steps to encourage personnel to increase their pay allotments, to save their money, and to spend only Military Payment Certificates.[9]

The other anti-inflation programs met with less success. Massive importation of consumer goods, financed jointly by the United States and South Vietnamese governments, proved successful from an economic standpoint. The imported goods met increased consumer demands for items that South Vietnam could not produce domestically because of full employment in war-related industries and the war's disruption of the economy. There was an undesirable side effect, however. The program gave a few individuals who were making a minimal contribution to the war effort an affluent standard of living that stood in sharp contrast to the condition of numerous impoverished war victims. Efforts to increase Saigon government tax collections produced only a slight increase, not enough to have a significant effect on inflation. Political wrangling prevented a general reform of the tax system, and the government's revenue agencies suffered from the inefficiency and corruption that plagued the South Vietnamese bureaucracy. Efforts to encourage domestic production, while containing promise for the future, produced no immediately significant results.[10]

Despite their uneven pattern of success, the overall effect of the US Mission's four primary measures was beneficial to the South Vietnamese economy. The runaway inflation that had threatened the country in the spring of 1966 was checked. The unemployment rate fell and the standard of living improved. Most significantly,

during 1967 prices in South Vietnam rose only 30 percent compared to the 70 percent inflation rate of the previous year.

A New Pacification Organization

In May 1967, President Johnson resolved the long-standing issue of how to manage US advice and assistance to South Vietnam's pacification (Revolutionary Development (RD)) campaign. As the war expanded, MACV and the various civilian components of the US Mission each had worked on elements of pacification, but with only the loosest coordination of their policies and operations. Secretary of Defense McNamara, General Westmoreland, and other administration officials strongly advocated designating COMUSMACV the US "single manager" for all pacification support, but the State Department and other civilian agencies opposed this approach, fearing excessive militarization of the effort.

In late 1966, as a half measure, the President unified the civilian elements of pacification under a US Mission Office of Civil Operations while leaving the military component under MACV. Johnson gave this system 90 days to show substantial progress and indicated that in the absence of progress he intended to place the entire program under the Military Assistance Command. He waited longer than 90 days but, finally on 9 May, dissatisfied with the limited progress being made, President Johnson directed that US programs for pacification and Revolutionary Development be integrated under a "single manager" system in order to provide "added thrust forward in this critical field." Because the resources committed to pacification were primarily military, the President assigned this responsibility to General Westmoreland under the overall authority of Ambassador Bunker, head of the US country team. (As a military commander of combat forces, Westmoreland technically was equal to and independent of Bunker, but in practice he deferred to the Ambassador on all higher policy issues.)

The President named Robert W. Komer, formerly a White House special assistant for pacification, Deputy COMUSMACV for Pacification and Revolutionary Development with the rank of Ambassador. Under a plan worked out by Komer and General Westmoreland, MACV united the US Mission Office of Civil Operations and MACV's RD Support Directorate into a single joint staff section, the office of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) headed by a civilian Assistant Chief of Staff for CORDS. In a unique arrangement, all civilian and military personnel working in pacification support at every level of US military command and South Vietnamese provincial and local administration were integrated into one organization and chain of command under the forceful and energetic Komer.[11]

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed in the importance of Revolutionary Development in the war effort and supported assignment of management

of pacification solely to COMUSMACV. Throughout the administration discussions of the issue, he kept Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland apprised of the course of events in Washington. In the autumn of 1966, General Wheeler had urged Westmoreland to organize MACV's RD Support Directorate to unify the command's pacification effort. The purpose of the new organization, Wheeler told Westmoreland, was "first, to plug in a pacification channel between the Embassy and your headquarters; and, second, to permit a transfer of authority and direction of the whole operation to you at some future time." Wheeler also took steps to ensure that the Joint Staff kept pace with the expansion of RD activities in the field; on 14 April 1967, he placed his Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) in charge of Revolutionary Development and added a Revolutionary Development Division to the SACSA staff.[12]

With his organization established, Ambassador Komer moved to unify the numerous and diverse subprograms supporting pacification under more effective control and supervision. He did this through a program called TAKEOFF, which did not initiate any new subprograms but brought the existing ones under centralized management. Under TAKEOFF, each subprogram—Chieu Hoi, the RD cadre, increasing RVNAF support for pacification, and eradication of the Viet Cong infrastructure—had its own field adviser and staff.[13]

Because the elimination of the VC infrastructure (VCI) in the villages and hamlets was the key element of the pacification program, Ambassador Komer gave it primary attention. As a first step, he instituted an "Infrastructure Intelligence and Exploitation Program" (ICEX) which provided for the systematic accumulation of intelligence by US and South Vietnamese agencies to identify individual VCI members, whom the South Vietnamese National Police then were to arrest. However, the South Vietnamese initially showed little interest or energy in pursuing this sort of information and the performance of ICEX was disappointing. Later in 1967, the Saigon government took a more positive approach and began providing the required intelligence. In December, at American urging, the government established anti-VCI coordinating committees at all administrative levels along with District Intelligence and Operations Coordinating Centers to accumulate information and identify VCI targets. Codenamed PHOENIX, this broadened program eventually became an effective attack on the VCI, but it generated much political controversy in the US.[14]

TAKEOFF attempted to give new impetus to some other subprograms as well. Under TAKEOFF, the RD cadre program nearly reached its established goal of sending 590 teams into the field during 1967, falling short by 35 teams. The South Vietnamese armed forces expanded their support of pacification, improving the training of units and increasing the number of ARVN battalions assigned to clearing and securing missions. During 1967, 93 percent of all ARVN battalions completed a special RD training course, and the number of battalions actually assigned to pacification support increased from 38 to 53. On the other hand, the Chieu Hoi program,

the government's effort to attract VC defectors, fell far short of its assigned goal of 95,000 ralliers during the year. Only 27,000 Viet Cong came over to the government in 1967. Captured documents and other sources, however, indicated that Viet Cong desertion rates in fact were much higher than the Chieu Hoi figures alone would indicate. Many VC soldiers simply left the ranks without turning themselves into the government.[15]

All the pacification subprograms had one common goal—to increase the rural population under effective control of the Saigon government. To measure success in reaching this goal, the US Mission in January 1967 put into operation the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), an elaborate set of statistical measurements of various pacification indicators. According to HES reports, the allies made modest gains in population control during 1967. The number of people in hamlets rated "secure" by HES standards increased from 7,033,700 to 8,455,400 during the year. The population in "contested" hamlets dropped from 2,765,900 to 2,476,300. Population in hamlets rated as VC controlled declined from 3,011,200 to 2,748,500. Evaluating the year's results, Ambassador Komer reported: "In sum, much has been accomplished, but much remains to be done. Nonetheless, the greater resources, greater experience and improved organization generated during 1967 provide a solid base from which to achieve greater results in 1968."[16]

Improving the RVNAF

Since the earliest days of United States involvement in South Vietnam, the expansion and improvement of the Republic of Vietnam's armed forces had been a key element of American policy. With the commitment of US combat forces in 1965, advice and assistance to the RVNAF had taken second place in resource allocation and command attention to the American troop buildup and combat operations. Nevertheless, the administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff persisted in their concern with RVNAF improvement, and MACV continued its endeavors to enhance South Vietnamese military strength and capability. During 1966 and 1967, MACV focused on enlarging South Vietnam's ground forces and engaging them in support of pacification. Late in 1967, as US troop commitments approached the limit that could be sustained without a reserve call-up, the Johnson administration put renewed emphasis on strengthening the RVNAF and on turning over to it more of the burden of combat.[17]

Plans for FY 1967 had called for a RVNAF force level of 633,645 personnel, half in the regular army, navy, air force, and marine corps and half in the Regional and Popular Forces (RF and PF), the two territorial components. However, because of a shortage of manpower and the inflation problem, MACV in April 1967 temporarily reduced this target to 622,153, with the PF absorbing the entire cut.[18]

General Westmoreland quickly reversed this reduction. On 26 April 1967, apparently judging that the inflation problem was no longer so dangerous, COMUSMACV recommended a force level of 678,728 for FY 1968; three months later, he raised the recommended strength to 685,739. His purpose, he declared, was to establish "realistic force levels which will satisfy projected operational requirements ..., especially in support of RD," and at the same time "be attainable and maintainable within the constraints of manpower availability, leadership potential, and inflationary considerations." Westmoreland based his judgment that South Vietnam could support this increase on a new, higher estimate of the country's population, now calculated to be 16.5 million, and on the assumption that the Saigon government would reduce the draft age and extend the tours of personnel on active duty. The US Mission and CINCPAC approved the recommendation.

All but a few hundred of the 63,586-man increase in the RVNAF were earmarked for the ground forces—14,966 to the ARVN and 47,839 to the RF and PF. The increase would require an addition of 2,243 US advisers, who already were included in the Program Five reinforcement plan. The higher force levels would also add piaster expenditures of 4.7 million to 1968 costs. In US dollars, the one-time cost of the expansion would be $10.2 million and the recurring cost $47.5 million, all to be borne by the US Army. The necessary equipment would have to come from the US Army, adversely affecting its forces, and would cause other problems as well. Nevertheless, minimum equipment was available in 1967 for 53,000 of the 63,586 increases.[19]

Reviewing Westmoreland's proposal, the Joint Chiefs concluded that the FY 1968 buildup would serve the US national interest by increasing the capability of South Vietnam's forces to accomplish mutual objectives. They believed that the increase would enable the RVNAF to shoulder a greater share of the burden in South Vietnam—an objective in which the administration was becoming very interested. The JCS recommended that the Secretary of Defense approve the proposed FY 1968 RVNAF force level, the funds to support it, and continued authority for CINCPAC to adjust forces within the overall approved level. They were concerned, however, about the inflationary impact of the force expansion and suggested to General Westmoreland that some funds be diverted from creating more units to such areas as higher troop salaries and improved dependent housing. In response, Westmoreland insisted that all the proposed force increases were militarily necessary. Secretary McNamara approved the MACV plan on 7 October.[20]

Besides promoting enlargement of the RVNAF, COMUSMACV tried to improve its armament. He placed special emphasis on replacing the ARVN's World War II era M–1 rifles with the new M–16 carried by American troops so that the South Vietnamese could match the infantry firepower of communist soldiers armed with the AK–47 assault rifle. In early 1966, General Westmoreland had requested 115,436 M–16s for distribution to the RVNAF. Because of production limitations and priority given to US requirements, the JCS approved the allocation of only 9,731 rifles at

that time. Delivery of this allotment was completed on 31 May 1967. On 28 August, Westmoreland asked for the remaining 105,705 weapons plus an additional 3,005. He requested that 5,000 rifles be diverted immediately from current stocks and the remainder from future production. On 4 October, Secretary McNamara approved immediate delivery of 5,000 M–16s from US Army depot stocks for issue to selected RVNAF units. He also directed the Joint Materiel Priorities and Allocations Board to recommend future allocations. On 12 October, the Board recommended and on 24 October McNamara approved a delivery schedule that would put the remaining 103,710 rifles requested by COMUSMACV in the hands of the RVNAF by the end of the first quarter of FY 1969—30 September 1968. Until then, much of the ARVN would continue to go into battle outgunned.[21]

While Westmoreland worked on the equipment issue in Saigon, Secretary McNamara in Washington took steps to bring greater flexibility and responsiveness to the procedures by which US support was furnished. In April 1966, the Secretary of Defense had transferred responsibility for providing support from the Military Assistance Program to the Military Service Departments. On 13 January 1967, he directed each Service to budget for sustenance for its South Vietnamese counterpart. Implementation of this directive was delayed, however, by an inter-service dispute over supply of items common to two or more RVNAF services. On 4 May, the Services finally agreed that for FY 1968 the Army would fund "Operation and Maintenance common item support" to all the RVNAF, but that effective with FY 1969, each Service would budget at departmental level for all the needs of its South Vietnamese counterpart.[22]

In addition to enhancing RVNAF numbers and equipment, General Westmoreland tried to improve its overall quality and competence. This effort had several facets. During 1967, many South Vietnamese units participated in operations with US forces, in hopes that they would benefit from observing and practicing US military techniques in the field. As noted previously, MACV attempted to engage the ARVN more extensively in pacification support. In connection with this effort, US advisers trained ARVN units in patrolling, intelligence gathering, and night operations. MACV worked hard to improve the quality of the RVNAF officer corps by improved schooling, stress on leadership principles, and encouragement of more rapid promotion of able commanders.[23]

These efforts brought about relative improvement in many areas, but as 1967 ended, the RVNAF still suffered from the chronic weaknesses that had plagued it since the late 1950s. Its combat and logistical performance was uneven; training left much to be desired; and it suffered from a crippling drain of manpower through desertion. MACV's campaign to engage the ARVN in territorial security initially produced only meager results. Many regular army leaders did not understand the mission and considered it demeaning, and disputes over control of the troops on pacification duty between division commanders and province chiefs hindered operations. The majority of the battalions committed to the RD campaign did little

more than defend static positions. Most of these deficiencies stemmed from poor leadership by a corrupt and politicized officer corps. Since the officers, for all practical purposes, were the government, MACV's ability to improve the quality of Saigon's military command was limited. In too many aspects—equipment, troop motivation, and leadership—the RVNAF still was not equal to its North Vietnamese and Viet Cong opponents.[24]

During the last months of 1967, the question of RVNAF improvement took on increased urgency in the Johnson administration. The Program Five reinforcement had brought the US troop commitment to about the maximum that could be supported without a major reserve mobilization—an action the President considered politically out of the question, especially given growing domestic opposition to the war. If more troops were needed, and if American casualties and costs were to be stabilized or reduced, the South Vietnamese would have to assume more of the load. Typical of the growing Washington consensus, in June the State Department Policy Planning Council, in a review of Vietnam strategy, recommended that "responsibility for the conduct of the war... be progressively turned over to the GVN as it develops the requisite competence... on a priority basis." In November, General Wheeler informed General Westmoreland that "high interest" existed in Washington in modernization of the RVNAF and in ways to make it "bear visibly a greater share of the load of combat operations." With additional American reinforcements in doubt, Wheeler declared, RVNAF improvement was "one of the few remaining areas in which... significant increases in effectiveness and capabilities are possible."[25]

Westmoreland responded at once to these indications of a US policy shift. He provided Wheeler with a rough MACV plan for rapid improvement of Saigon's forces so that they could take over the entire security burden in the event of a ceasefire or a mutual US and North Vietnamese troop withdrawal. At one of his periodic commanders' conferences, Westmoreland told his generals that building up the RVNAF was now a "co-equal" objective with "grinding down the enemy" so that Saigon's forces "will be able to carry more and more of... the load and at some future date allow us to reduce our effort here." On 21 November, in a speech at the National Press Club in Washington, the MACV commander made public the new emphasis. He declared that "It is conceivable to me that within two years or less, it will be possible for us to phase down our level of commitment and turn more of the burden of the war over to the Vietnamese Armed Forces, who are improving and who, I believe, will be prepared to assume this greater burden." During questioning by reporters, he indicated that US troop withdrawals would be "token" at first but that "we're preparing our plans to make it progressive." As of the end of 1967, what later would be called "Vietnamization" existed only in plans and speeches, but it was evident that advice and support to the RVNAF, which had been pushed into the background during the US buildup, was going to move to the front of the stage.[26]

A Claim of Progress

On 17 November 1967, in an address before the National Press Club, Ambassador Bunker summed up progress in nation building as "steady but not spectacular." The development of representative institutions and the beginnings of a vigorous political life in South Vietnam, in his view, were "encouraging." Other hopeful signs were the halt to runaway inflation, the extension of Saigon government control over the population, and the increasing military effectiveness of the RVNAF. In Ambassador Bunker's opinion, these developments, in combination with the military successes achieved by allied forces, had placed victory beyond the enemy's reach. The attempt by North Vietnam and the Viet Cong "to impose a solution by force," he said, "has run into a stone wall." This appraisal, along with the optimistic assessments of military progress by Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, put the officials in direct charge of US civil and military operations in the field on record as believing that US objectives in Vietnam could and would be achieved. However, their claims failed to convince a number of key participants in and observers of the war, including the leadership of North Vietnam and a growing bloc of Americans within and outside the government.[27]

9

Domestic Dissent and Policy Debate

Although progress in the theater of operations seemed apparent to senior officials in Saigon, it was less visible to many Americans, in the government and among the general public. During 1967, a growing number of congressmen and leaders of professions and the press ceased to believe that victory was possible in South Vietnam and began to speak in favor of some form of compromise to end the war. With increasing frequency, the word "stalemate" was heard in public discourse. To leaders of the Johnson administration, there seemed a real danger that the enemy's strategy—waging a prolonged war of attrition—would succeed, causing the American people to tire of the costly, inconclusive contest and force their government to withdraw or to accept terms favorable to the enemy. In addition, many members of the administration had come to share popular pessimism about the war's lack of progress. Concerned about the human, economic, and social costs of the war, they began searching for an alternative, less expensive, course of action.

Public Opinion Turns against the War

Public discontent manifested itself in several forms. As in 1966, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, served as a sounding board for intellectual, moral, and emotional dissatisfaction with the war. On 21 January 1967, Chairman J. William Fulbright (D, AR) presented his comprehensive peace plan. He declared that Washington and Saigon should propose ceasefire talks with the National Liberation Front and Hanoi. The United States should cease bombing North Vietnam, send no further reinforcements to South Vietnam, reduce military activity to a level compatible with safety of its forces, and promise an eventual US withdrawal. Following

agreement with the other side on plans for a ceasefire and self-determination in South Vietnam, the US should convene an international conference of "all interested parties" to guarantee the settlement. If no settlement proved possible, the US should consolidate its forces within fortified areas. Witnesses before the committee, including former ambassador to Japan Edwin O. Reischauer and retired Lieutenant General James M. Gavin, USA, supported Fulbright's call for de-escalation and compromise. Senator Robert F. Kennedy aligned himself with the advocates of a bombing suspension.[1]

As 1967 wore on, President Johnson and his advisors became increasingly concerned with what they considered to be overwhelmingly negative news media coverage of the war. Newspapers and television reported story after story questioning the effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER, declaring the war in South Vietnam a stalemate, describing the corruption and inefficiency of the Saigon government, and portraying the ARVN as inept and at times cowardly. Much of this negative coverage of the South Vietnamese reflected the comments of US military men and civilians in the field. MACV directed reporters to positive developments but with only limited success. If the news stories were increasingly critical in tone, so were the editorial pages. During the year, major US metropolitan newspapers that previously had supported the war began to distance themselves from the administration and its policies.[2]

Although a minority of the American people, the anti-war movement grew steadily more strident and expanded beyond the radical left to include a broad range of citizens. The movement drew in influential persons, among them Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the black civil rights leader; Dr. Benjamin Spock, the child-rearing expert; and a growing contingent of business and academic leaders. Campus and street demonstrations became larger and more frequent, featuring acts of civil disobedience and occasional violence. Activists put matches to their draft cards and blockaded military induction centers. On 21 October, 50,000 demonstrators converged on the Pentagon to "confront the war-makers." During the summer of 1967, the anti-war agitation coincided in time with violent racial riots in many Northern and Midwestern cities, notably Newark and Detroit. The latter disturbance required intervention by federal troops to assist the municipal police and Michigan National Guard. Although the riots differed in causes and participants from the anti-war demonstrations, together these eruptions created a sense that American society was beginning to fall apart, with Vietnam one of the factors causing the disintegration.[3]

Most Americans neither marched for peace nor rioted in the streets. Nevertheless, public opinion polls during 1967 showed a gradual decline in popular support for the war. In April, a Gallup poll found that, although supporters of US policy toward Vietnam outnumbered opponents by 49 percent to 38 percent, twice as many Democrats disapproved of the Vietnam policy of their party's president as had twelve months before. A Gallup poll released on 30

July reported that 52 percent of those queried now disapproved of President Johnson's conduct of the war, while only one-third approved of it. A Harris poll in late August found that only 37 percent of its respondents were willing to continue military action in order to achieve a negotiated settlement. Conversely, 34 percent desired to disengage as rapidly as possible. Although a portion of those critical of the president's policy favored a more vigorous military effort along the lines advocated by the Stennis Committee, the unfavorable trend in public opinion was clearly evident. Retrospectively, analysts concluded that most public alienation from the war resulted from the steady increase in American casualties combined with an absence of visible progress toward victory. One scholar comparing opinion polls from the Korean and Vietnam wars found that public support dropped by 15 percentage points whenever total American casualties increased by a factor of ten.[4]

Privately, members of the administration shared the public's doubts about the rightness and sustainability of the government's course. After traveling to South Vietnam in late October to represent the United States at President Thieu's inauguration, Vice President Hubert Humphrey confided to a close friend who accompanied him, "I think we're in real trouble. America is throwing lives and money down a corrupt rat hole." The Vice President was convinced, he later recalled, that "the American people would not stand for this involvement much longer."[5]

By midsummer, President Johnson and his advisors had become deeply worried over the erosion of popular support for their Vietnam policy. Reflecting this unease, on 1 August General Wheeler informed General Westmoreland: "We are becoming increasingly concerned with news media and Congressional attitudes regarding the progress of the war... which characterize the war as being a 'stalemate.'" A month later, the Chairman told the MACV commander that there was "deep concern here in Washington because of the eroding support for our war effort. Much attention is being given at high governmental levels to this situation and possible measures to overcome it." President Johnson launched a campaign to rebut critics and restore public confidence in his Vietnam policy.[6]

The San Antonio Speech

Speaking before the National Legislative Conference in San Antonio on 29 September, the President opened the campaign with a candid statement of the basic rationale for US engagement in Southeast Asia, a sober description of the difficulties to be overcome, and an appeal to the American people to stay the course. He stressed that all the United States had done in South Vietnam was for its "own security," that the purpose of its action there was to halt an aggression that threatened "not only the immediate victim" but also the United States

and "the peace and security of the entire world of which we in America are a very vital part." This, said Johnson, was the position Congress had taken in the Tonkin Gulf Resolution of 7 August 1964, passed by a vote of 504 to 2, authorizing the President "to take all steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom." It was also, he pointed out, the position taken by his two predecessors, President Eisenhower and President Kennedy, and by a number of Asian and Pacific national leaders. He could not say with certainty, President Johnson continued, that a "Communist conquest of South Vietnam would be followed by a Communist conquest of Southeast Asia," or that Communist domination of Southeast Asia would "bring a third world war much closer to terrible reality." Nevertheless, "all that we have learned in this tragic century strongly suggests that it would be so" and he was "not prepared to gamble on the chance that it is not so." He was convinced that "by seeing this struggle through now we are greatly reducing the chances of a much larger war—perhaps a nuclear war."

The President then tried to counter the assertions of his critics. Rejecting claims that the war was a stalemate, he said that substantial progress was being made both in political development and on the battlefield. On 1 November, an elected government would be installed in Saigon. Since the US commitment of major forces in 1965, friendly forces had driven the enemy from many of his South Vietnamese bases, had reduced the proportion of the population under communist control to well under 20 percent, and had gained secure control over 65 percent of the people. In an effort to alleviate American war-weariness, the President cautioned that, despite this progress, a long hard struggle lay ahead. Asserting that the North Vietnamese believed that Americans would not persevere in a long, inconclusive war, the President asked, "Are the North Vietnamese right about us?" "I think not," he declared. "I think it is a common failing of totalitarian regimes that they cannot really understand...the strength and perseverance of America."

Answering the critics who were demanding immediate negotiations, President Johnson declared, "I am ready to talk with Ho Chi Minh, and other chiefs of state concerned, tomorrow." He insisted that "Our desire to negotiate peace—through the United Nations or out—has been made very clear to Hanoi—directly and many times through third parties." Johnson publicly repeated the conditions for halting the bombing of North Vietnam that he had enunciated during the PENNSYLVANIA initiative. Known as the "San Antonio Formula," it stated:

> The United States is willing to stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam when this will lead promptly to productive discussions. We, of course, assume that while discussions proceed, North Vietnam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation.[7]

Although it still called upon Hanoi to reciprocate a suspension of the bombing, the San Antonio Formula gave the impression of being (and was) the least demanding US proposal to date. Whereas President Johnson earlier had called upon the North Vietnamese to halt infiltration into South Vietnam in return for a bombing cessation and a cessation of the US force buildup in South Vietnam, the San Antonio Formula asked for nothing but a prompt opening of talks. Hanoi, however, as the unproductive end of PENNSYLVANIA indicated, was not impressed by this concession. On 3 October, the North Vietnamese Communist party newspaper, *Nhan Dan*, publicly rejected President Johnson's offer, calling it a "faked desire for peace," and flatly refused to reciprocate in any way for a halt in the bombing.[8]

Continuing the Search for Peace

Despite North Vietnam's rejection of his San Antonio Formula, President Johnson persisted in his efforts to convince audiences at home and abroad of his sincere desire for negotiations. On 11 November, in a speech delivered at sea on board the carrier USS *Enterprise*, he announced his willingness to meet the leaders of Hanoi on board a "neutral ship on a neutral sea" if it would speed progress toward a settlement. Two days later, Hanoi rejected the offer out of hand.[9]

North Vietnam countered on 14 December with a new public elaboration of its position in the form of a 16-point political program of the National Liberation Front (NLF) circulated to members of the United Nations. The main feature of the program was the enemy's apparent acceptance of a coalition government in Saigon. Specifically, the NLF called for establishment of a "national union democratic government" by means of a "free general election." Through its press spokesman, the State Department discounted this proposal. It declared that the communists' objective in any coalition would be to secure control of the machinery of government at all levels.[10]

In a television interview on 19 December, President Johnson offered his own points for peace. He stated that a fair solution of the war could be based on five points: 1) the DMZ must be respected in accordance with the Geneva Agreement of 1954; 2) reunification of Vietnam must be arrived at through peaceful adjustments and negotiations; 3) North Vietnamese troops must leave Laos as required by the Geneva Agreement of 1962; 4) South Vietnam should be governed on the basis of one man, one vote; and 5) President Thieu should be encouraged to undertake informal discussions with the NLF as he already had said he was prepared to do. Hanoi promptly rejected this plan. On 25 December, *Nhan Dan* condemned the five points as "nothing but worn-out tricks." The paper reiterated Hanoi's demand for

an unconditional halt to the bombing of North Vietnam and the withdrawal of US troops from South Vietnam.[11]

If Peace Breaks Out: The SEA CABIN Study

Despite North Vietnam's rejection of the San Antonio Formula, General Wheeler became seriously concerned over what might follow if the other side accepted it. Accordingly, on 19 October, Wheeler established an *ad hoc* study group, code named SEA CABIN, directed by Lieutenant General Andrew J. Goodpaster, USA, consisting of representatives of the Joint Staff, DIA, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (OASD) International Security Affairs (ISA). The study group was to examine the major military and political-military questions that would arise from Hanoi's acceptance of the President's offer, and to consider the implications of the "assumption" that North Vietnam would not "take advantage" of a halt in the bombing. In particular, the study group was to identify the dangers that a bombing halt would pose to the US military position in South Vietnam, determine the actions needed to overcome those dangers, and establish, in the event ROLLING THUNDER were stopped, the conditions that would call for a resumption of the bombing.

Submitted to General Wheeler on 22 November, the SEA CABIN study concluded that US intelligence lacked evidence to assess precisely the effects of the bombing of North Vietnam. The group was convinced, however, that cessation of bombing would make possible a higher rate of infiltration from North to South Vietnam. But current detection techniques were so crude that such an increase could not be discovered until four to six months after the event. Hence, the enemy could increase infiltration during protracted talks with confidence that detection would be too slow and uncertain for the US to justify stopping negotiations or resuming the bombing. The study group nevertheless included among the "minimum acceptable" North Vietnamese actions "that for the DRV to increase over the current level the flow of personnel and material south of 19 degrees N latitude would be to take advantage of cessation and that it will refrain from doing so." The other "minimum acceptable actions" to which North Vietnam should adhere were to stop artillery fire from and over the DMZ into South Vietnam, accept "open skies" for reconnaissance over North Vietnam, and withdraw from the DMZ within two weeks after cessation of bombing.[12]

On 5 December, General Wheeler directed the Joint Staff to examine the study to determine whether it would be "timely and useful" to initiate an interdepartmental study of the subject, using SEA CABIN as an input. After considering the Joint Staff recommendations, the JCS on 15 December suggested to the Secretary of Defense that an interdepartmental study group be formed to examine "the problem of NVN acceptance of the San Antonio offer, or other possible offers, and to recommend a US national position." The Joint Chiefs asked to be represented on

such a study group if one was organized and to be allowed to review its findings. Mr. McNamara accepted the JCS recommendation. He and Secretary of State Rusk brought about the establishment, on 22 January 1968, of the "Contingency Study Group/VN," chaired by Assistant Secretary of State (Far East) William Bundy and including members from the Department of State, OASD (ISA), JCS, DIA, CIA, and the White House.[13]

The JCS, meanwhile, subjected the SEA CABIN study to close scrutiny. On 31 January, they forwarded to Secretary McNamara their views on the substantive issues raised in the study. They emphasized that the air campaign against North Vietnam was "one of our strongest bargaining points"; therefore, the price for stopping it should be high. To illustrate what they meant by a high price, the Joint Chiefs offered precise definitions of key terms in the San Antonio Formula. Those terms were "not take advantage," "promptly," and "productive discussions."

With regard to "not take advantage," the JCS agreed with the proposed definition in the SEA CABIN report, but subtracted one condition and added another: they deleted the call for North Vietnamese withdrawal from the DMZ but added the condition that North Vietnamese forces not attack South Vietnam across the DMZ. With regard to "prompt" discussions, the Joint Chiefs called for the North Vietnamese to make initial contacts with the United States within 48 hours of suspension of the bombing. "Serious discussions should begin within one week and be "substantively productive" within 30 days.

The Joint Chiefs defined "substantively productive" discussion in terms of purely military conditions—timely and reciprocal action by North Vietnam "which will de-escalate the war in South Vietnam." Actions would include: 1) withdrawal of all North Vietnamese forces from the DMZ within 15 days from the end of the bombing; 2) cessation of all personnel movement into the South within 30 days of the end of bombing; 3) agreement within 30 days of the bombing halt to withdraw all North Vietnamese forces, including fillers in VC units, to the North within 120 days of the end of bombing, or within 30 days after giving evidence that withdrawal had begun; 4) agreement within 15 days of the cessation of air strikes to exchange prisoners of war within 60 days from the bombing halt. North Vietnamese failure to live up to these terms or any attempt to take advantage of a bombing cessation should, the Joint Chiefs recommended, lead to a resumption of air attacks.

Operation Quick Results

A second phase of President Johnson's campaign to restore public confidence in his Vietnam policy was to demonstrate significant progress toward victory. To this end, the President set his key advisors on a search for means to attain quick and visible progress in the war effort. At a meeting of the Tuesday luncheon group on 12 September, the President called for preparation on an urgent basis of a list

of actions that would increase the pressures on North Vietnam. General Harold K. Johnson, the Army Chief of Staff, who attended the meeting in place of the ailing General Wheeler, reported the President's desire to the Joint Chiefs who then initiated the appropriate staff study on 22 September.[14]

On 17 October, the JCS forwarded to Mr. McNamara their answer to the President's request for new options in Vietnam and asked the Secretary to submit their proposals to the Chief Executive. In their memorandum, the Joint Chiefs contended that the military effort, conducted under the current policy guidelines and operational restraints, was making North Vietnam pay a heavy price for its aggression, and that North Vietnam had lost the initiative in South Vietnam. However, accelerated progress toward a Free World victory would require an appropriate increase in military pressure.

The JCS acknowledged the existence of policy guidelines designed to achieve US objectives without expanding the conflict—to avoid widening the war into a clash with Communist China or the Soviet Union; to refrain from invading North Vietnam or attempting to overthrow its government; and to be guided by the principles of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962. United States objectives in Southeast Asia could be achieved within the framework of these policies, the Joint Chiefs said. However, to bring an end to North Vietnam's military effort in the near future would require the relaxation of certain existing operational limitations. The expansion of operations resulting from the removal of these restraints would entail some additional risk, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the danger of overt Soviet or Chinese Communist intervention to be remote.

Turning to specific measures to speed the war to a successful conclusion, the Joint Chiefs recommended actions they had advocated unsuccessfully in the past: the removal of restrictions on the bombing of all militarily significant targets in North Vietnam; the mining of North Vietnam's deep water ports; the mining of inland waterways and estuaries in North Vietnam to within 5 nautical miles (nm) of the Chinese border; the extension of coastal interdiction operations to within 10 nm of the Chinese border; the use of ship-based TALOS missiles against enemy aircraft over North Vietnam; an increase of air interdiction in Laos and along the borders of North Vietnam; authority for B–52s to fly over Laos and attack targets there both day and night; and the expansion of covert operations in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam.[15]

Although he declined to authorize the military actions listed by the Joint Chiefs, President Johnson directed a continuing search for measures promising quick and dramatic results. In response, the Chiefs developed a mixed bag of actions in South Vietnam. On 8 November, the Chairman informed General Westmoreland that the items under consideration included: coordinated attack on the VC infrastructure; increased integration of ARVN into operations with US forces; operations aimed at destroying VC provincial battalions; reinforcement of Revolutionary Development (RD) teams with local personnel; assignment of additional US advisors for the

Regional and Popular Forces; the opening and securing of lines of communication; various social and economic programs, such as land reform, universal elementary education, and an increase in agricultural productivity; an attack on corruption; and encouragement of local government to assume more responsibility.[16]

Most of these were programs that MACV and the US Mission in South Vietnam already were trying to carry out. Tactfully, General Westmoreland replied to the Chairman that he agreed with assigning priority to these measures, "because these are precisely the items to which we have already been devoting urgent efforts." An additional area promising good results, said COMUSMACV, was improvement of the RVNAF.[17]

After analyzing General Westmoreland's reply and conducting a study of the various programs under consideration, the Director of the Joint Staff advised General Wheeler that "progress in South Vietnam can be enhanced substantially by forward movement in all . . . [these] programs." For discernible progress within six months on the attack on the VC infrastructure, action was required at the Washington level. Washington authorities could expedite the construction of detention centers and the assignment of advisors to the Infrastructure Intelligence and Exploitation Program recently launched by CORDS. In the longer run, the most promising program was improvement of the RVNAF. If the necessary decisions were made to overcome equipment shortages, the Director said, "good momentum could be imparted to the program within twelve months."[18]

In the end, the search for means to bring about dramatic progress in the war had produced little. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended their same old collection of measures against North Vietnam, which the President once again rejected. The administration then turned to new initiatives in South Vietnam, few of which were in fact new and some of which had been pursued, with variable effectiveness, since the early 1960s. Finally, the JCS could do nothing but recommend minor adjustments or reinforcements of efforts already under way.

Operation Reassurance

If dramatic new actions to accelerate progress were not available, the administration might gain popular support by asserting more frequently and forcefully that the existing strategy was working. To this end, President Johnson sought optimistic reports of progress from the commanders and officials in charge of operations in South Vietnam. He asked Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland, whom he had ordered home to discuss the progress of the war effort, to set the record straight in public speeches. Speaking before the National Press Club on 18 November, Bunker stressed that "steady but not spectacular progress" was being made militarily and in nation building. He asserted that the development of representative institutions and vigorous political life was encouraging and claimed that the

enemy's attempt to impose its will by force had "run into a stone wall." Ultimate victory seemed assured, but the Ambassador acknowledged that "I can't answer the big question that I know is on your minds: how long will it take?"[19]

In his own address to the National Press Club three days later, General Westmoreland also expressed confidence that the war could be and was being won. He described progress in the war effort in terms of four phases. In Phase I, which had ended successfully in mid-1966, the United States had built up an elaborate logistic infrastructure in South Vietnam, deployed some 400,000 men and several thousand aircraft, expanded, equipped, and revitalized the South Vietnamese Army, and prevented an enemy military victory. In Phase II, which would be concluded by the end of 1967, the United States had continued the activities of Phase I, driven the enemy's large units back to cross-border sanctuaries or into hiding, disrupted enemy base areas and destroyed his supplies, and raised enemy losses beyond his capability to replace them.

With 1968, Westmoreland said, a third phase would begin, during which "the end begins to come into view." During Phase III, the main emphasis would be on strengthening the South Vietnamese government and its armed forces to the point where they would be able to take over the burden of self-defense. When this objective was reached, Phase IV would begin. This phase would see the gradual withdrawal of US troops and a final mopping up of the Viet Cong by the South Vietnamese forces. (Westmoreland did not specify who, if anyone would mop up the North Vietnamese.) General Westmoreland set no specific date for the beginning of Phase IV, but he declared, "It is conceivable to me that within two years or less, it will be possible for us to phase down our level of commitment and turn more of the burden of the war over to the Vietnamese Armed Forces, who are improving and who, I believe, will be prepared to assume this greater burden." In response to a question, Westmoreland expressed satisfaction with the US force level set in Program Five, which would provide him with "a well-balanced, hard-hitting military force that our country is capable of sustaining as long as required." He concluded that the US goal in Vietnam "lies within our grasp—the enemy's hopes are bankrupt."[20]

Ambassador Bunker's and General Westmoreland's assurances that the war was progressing well at least partially achieved what the President wanted. Immediately after their speeches, popular support for administration policy as measured in the polls suddenly and sharply increased. A Harris poll showed a rise from 23 to 34 percent in approval of the President's conduct of the war. According to Gallup, approval of President Johnson's overall performance advanced from 38 to 41 percent. By the year's end, the administration appeared to have regained a narrow plurality of support. Within the President's own party, a Harris poll showed 63 percent of Democrats favoring Johnson's re-nomination as compared to 20 percent for his challenger, Senator Eugene McCarthy (D, WI).

On the other hand, support among the public at large specifically for President Johnson's Vietnam policy remained weak. For example, a December poll by *Good*

Housekeeping indicated that the magazine's overwhelmingly female readership favored continuation of the war effort by only 46 to 41 percent. A survey of the University of Michigan faculty showed that members were almost evenly divided on the war and that only among natural scientists did a majority favor continuing the bombing of North Vietnam. Despite reports of military progress, public expectations about the outcome of the conflict were diminished. A Gallup report indicated that 65 percent of those polled foresaw a compromise peace while only 19 percent envisioned a complete military victory. Most ominous for the President, wrote the prominent news columnist James Reston, was the persistence of the "credibility gap." Could President Johnson regain that popular trust which was the first condition of effective leadership?[21]

Toward a Change in Policy

Even as they attempted to convince the American people that the war was going well, President Johnson and his advisors were moving toward decisions to place a ceiling on the expansion of the American effort in Vietnam and to reduce the costs of the conflict. They knew that escalation in both North and South Vietnam had about reached the limits of feasibility. With regard to North Vietnam, the additional courses of action recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff—notably mining and blockading the ports and striking the most sensitive targets in Hanoi and Haiphong—entailed what the President considered unacceptable risks of conflict with China and the Soviet Union. In South Vietnam, the US troop levels set in Program Five represented about the maximum that could be sent without a politically divisive reserve mobilization. Given these circumstances, during the last months of 1967, the administration began thinking in terms of leveling off the American effort and turning more of the burden over to the South Vietnamese while at the same time continuing the gradual military and nation-building progress that appeared to be occurring.

Exemplifying the emerging frame of mind was an interagency study, entitled "Prognosis for Vietnam" that Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach presented to Secretary Rusk on 1 November. Compiled by analysts from the State Department, the Agency for International Development, the National Security Council, and the Central Intelligence Agency, the study concluded that:

> ...One year from now we will be stronger than we are now, making continued progress against the VC, and slowly building up the GVN—but that there will not have been a decisive and undeniable breakthrough, that the enemy will still be very much with us, that it will remain difficult to produce dramatic and convincing evidence of victory in the near future.[22]

As he had for the past year, Secretary McNamara argued strongly for de-escalation or at least stabilization of the American War effort. On 1 November, in a memorandum for the President, McNamara declared that continuation of the present US course of action would not break the enemy's will to keep up the fight and would not "bring us by the end of 1968 enough closer to success, in the eyes of the American public, to prevent the continued erosion of popular support for our involvement in Vietnam." Further escalation, as proposed by the Joint Chiefs on 17 October, would "carry major risks of widening the war" while not bringing the US "significantly" closer to victory. Instead, McNamara favored a "policy of stabilization of our military effort" that would convince Hanoi that the United States was prepared to stay in Vietnam as long as necessary and was "resigned to a long struggle." Such a policy would also "increase support for the war at home by removing anxiety about possible increases in our activity."

McNamara recommended that the stabilization policy consist of three elements. First, the US should announce that it was making "slow but steady" progress in Vietnam and expected to "move ahead without expanding our operations against the North, and without increasing the size of our forces in the South beyond those already planned." Second, the administration should "plan a halt in the bombing [of North Vietnam] some time before the end of the year." The cessation should be unconditional and indefinite in duration, but air strikes on the infiltration routes in Laos would continue during such a halt. McNamara believed that the end of air attacks on the North was "likely" to lead to talks with Hanoi and possibly a cessation of enemy operations across the DMZ. Even if it did not, the action would refute those war critics who claimed that the American bombing of North Vietnam was the principal obstacle to peace. Finally, the administration should "review extensively" the conduct of military operations in South Vietnam, with an eye to reducing US casualties, progressively turning over to Saigon's forces "greater responsibility" for security, and reducing destruction of "the people and wealth of South Vietnam."[23]

The immediate effect of this memo, McNamara recalled, was to raise "the tension between two men who loved and respected each other—Lyndon Johnson and me—to the breaking point." The President had come to view his Secretary of Defense as no longer reliable on the war. Yet he was unwilling to fire a man for whom he still had high respect and wanted to avoid a politically embarrassing resignation by a prominent member of his cabinet. Johnson resorted to indirection. He arranged for McNamara's nomination for the presidency of the World Bank, a position in which the Defense Secretary was known to be interested. The Bank's member governments approved the nomination, and McNamara accepted the job. On 29 November, at a Pentagon news conference, McNamara announced that he would be leaving the position he had held for nearly seven years, but that he would remain in office through February 1968 to complete preparation of the next defense budget. Of this proceeding, McNamara later said, "I do not know to this day whether I quit

or was fired. Maybe it was both." Whatever the truth, McNamara made no public mention of his disillusionment with existing Vietnam policy throughout his remaining tenure in the Defense Department. To the end, he continued loyally to serve the President whom he still admired.[24]

Although McNamara's days as Secretary of Defense were numbered, President Johnson's principal advisors during November moved toward acceptance of the concepts of placing a ceiling on the US commitment to Vietnam and gradually transferring the operational burden to the South Vietnamese. Commenting at the President's request on McNamara's 1 November memorandum, Secretary of State Rusk, Undersecretary of State Katzenbach, McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow, Ambassador Bunker, and unofficial presidential counselors Justice Abe Fortas and Clark Clifford all rejected an unconditional, indefinite, unreciprocated halt to the bombing of North Vietnam. They saw no reason to believe that such a cessation would lead to meaningful negotiations; instead, the North Vietnamese likely would view it as a sign of American weakness. For the latter reason, they also opposed any publicly announced stabilization of the US force in South Vietnam.

Yet all those consulted also rejected further escalation. They considered that heavier bombing or a naval blockade of North Vietnam, deployment of additional US troops to the South, and ground offensives in Laos and Cambodia were unlikely to produce decisive success but certain to push the human, economic, and political costs of the war to an unsustainable level. Instead, they favored keeping ROLLING THUNDER at about its present intensity, holding MACV's troop strength at the Program Five goal of 525,000, and gradually shifting military operations and pacification to the South Vietnamese as Saigon's forces improved. Like McNamara, they believed that this approach would help to maintain American public support for the war and reconcile the people to a prolonged struggle. They opposed, however, any formal announcement of a leveling off of the US effort. Typical of the emerging consensus, Secretary Rusk on 20 November advised President Johnson to "stabilize but not announce it," assuming that "actual results in the South will continue to accelerate." As to ROLLING THUNDER, Rusk would "take some of the drama, and the losses, out of our bombing effort in the Hanoi-Haiphong area" while keeping the bombing as "a central card to play" in the event of "some interest on the part of Hanoi in a peaceful settlement."[25]

On the military side, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not asked to and did not comment on McNamara's 1 November memorandum. However, their recommendations of 17 October indicated a continuing preference for further escalation, and they took a hard line on conditions for a bombing halt. General Westmoreland, queried by Presidential Special Assistant Walt Rostow during his November visit to Washington, endorsed the emerging civilian consensus. He opposed a bombing halt but saw no need to mine Haiphong and expressed willingness to live with the Program Five troop ceiling, which he noted would not be reached for nearly a year at any event. The MACV commander acknowledged the political obstacles to

ground operations in Laos and Cambodia but urged that the option not be publicly foreclosed. He declared that he sought always to limit military and civilian casualties in his operations in South Vietnam but insisted that he "cannot permit his tactical operations to be controlled by these criteria." Endorsing what later would be called "Vietnamization," Westmoreland stated that a turnover of the war to the South Vietnamese would be his "central purpose" over the next two years. In his 21 November address to the National Press Club, he publicly reiterated the themes of level-off force and transfer of the burden to the South Vietnamese.[26]

On 18 December, in a "memorandum for the file," President Johnson recorded his views on what future US policy on Vietnam should be. He declared that he had read and studied McNamara's 1 November memorandum with the "utmost care" and consulted with advisors and with Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland about it. He had reached certain conclusions. With respect to bombing North Vietnam, he wanted the United States to:

> authorize and strike those remaining targets which, after study, we judge to have significant military content but which would not involve excessive civilian casualties; excessive US losses; or substantial increased risk of engaging the USSR or Communist China in the war;
>
> maintain on a routine basis a restrike program for major targets throughout North Vietnam;
>
> strive to remove the drama and public attention given to our North Vietnamese bombing operations.

The President concluded that "under present circumstances, a unilateral and unrequited bombing stand-down would be read in both Hanoi and the United States as a sign of weakening will." At home, it would "encourage the extreme doves," increase pressure for withdrawal from those who wanted to "bomb or get out"; reduce support from "our most steady friends"; and gain support from "only a small group of moderate doves." Johnson would not rule out "playing our bombing card" if and when there was reason for "confidence that it would move us toward peace," but at present he saw no "hard evidence" that a policy change would be "profitable."

Regarding operations in South Vietnam, Johnson proposed to adopt a policy of stabilization but not to announce it, since such an announcement would have "some of the political effects in Hanoi and in the United States of a unilateral bombing stand-down." Nevertheless, "at the moment," the President saw no reason for increasing US forces above the Program Five level. He was "inclined to be extremely reserved" regarding offensives into Laos or Cambodia "unless a powerful case can be made." His reserve stemmed from the "political risks involved" and from a desire to avoid diverting forces from "pressure on the VC and all other dimensions of pacification." Again, he believed it would be "unwise to announce a policy that would deny us these options." Finally, Johnson agreed with McNamara that the US should try to reduce its combat losses

as well as civilian casualties and damage in South Vietnam and "accelerate" the turnover of responsibility to the Saigon government.[27]

By the end of 1967, President Johnson and his senior advisors—except the Joint Chiefs of Staff—were arriving at a policy of leveling off the US effort in Southeast Asia. They would hold the line both at home and in Vietnam until gradual military and political progress, the improvement of Saigon's armed forces, or a diplomatic breakthrough opened an honorable way out of the war. This policy had yet to be embodied in formal directives and detailed plans, but key elements of it were in effect as the result of earlier decisions. By his repeated refusal to breach the political barrier of a reserve call-up, for example, President Johnson for all practical purposes already had imposed a ceiling on US troop strength in South Vietnam. The emerging administration approach turned, however, on the assumption of a reasonably stable situation in South Vietnam, one that at best was slowly improving for the allies and at worst was a stalemate. Dramatic actions by the enemy would soon call that assumption into question.

10

The TET Offensive

As they debated Vietnam policy and strategy, President Johnson and his advisors were unaware that for almost two years their adversaries in Hanoi and South Vietnam had been engaged in a similar debate. Like the Americans, the Vietnamese leaders had come to believe that under their existing strategy their forces were taking heavy losses for little visible gain. Unlike the Americans, the Vietnamese Communists remained confident of ultimate success. Far from looking for a way out of the war, they sought means to regain the initiative and resume the march to victory. At the end of their search, the Communists decided upon and carried out a multifaceted nationwide offensive that took the United States and South Vietnam at least partially by surprise. In South Vietnam, the offensive failed with heavy North Vietnamese and Viet Cong casualties. In the United States, however, the attack profoundly shocked the Johnson administration, shattered its belief that the war effort was progressing, and pushed it further toward the de-escalation to which the administration already was inclined.

Origins of an Offensive

The North Vietnamese-Viet Cong general offensive of early 1968—known as the Tet Offensive because it began during the Vietnamese lunar New Year holiday—was essentially a response to the entry of US ground forces into the war. Until that intervention, the scale of which took the Communist leaders by surprise, the enemy had seemed near victory in South Vietnam. During late 1964 and early 1965, while the Saigon government staggered from one political crisis to another, Viet Cong large units reinforced by North Vietnamese regular formations were grinding up ARVN regiments and battalions and pushing South Vietnam's army toward demoralization and disintegration. Then, in late 1965 and during 1966,

American divisions, with their helicopter mobility and massive air and artillery fire power, entered the battle, and Communist hopes of early victory faded. In expanding "search-and-destroy" operations, the Americans inflicted heavy losses on enemy units and pushed them away from the populated areas while gradually uprooting the Viet Cong logistical system in South Vietnam. Behind the American shield, the Saigon government achieved stability and pacification showed new signs of life.

In response to these developments, factions within the North Vietnamese military and political leadership engaged in a prolonged strategy debate, publicizing their views through polemics in the official press and state radio. Initially, proponents of pressing on with large-unit warfare, notably the senior commander in South Vietnam, General Nguyen Chi Thanh, were in the ascendancy. As 1966 wore on, however, this approach seemed to be producing little but heavy casualties. As a result, an opposing faction, which may have included General Vo Nguyen Giap, North Vietnam's Minister of Defense and the victor of Dien Bien Phu, gained ground for their strategy of protracted conflict employing a mixture of large-unit and guerrilla operations with emphasis on the latter. Yet protracted conflict by itself was unlikely to move the war off dead center. By the time General Thanh died in July 1967, the leadership had reached consensus on a third approach, and planning for its execution was well under way.[1]

During the spring of 1967, the collective leadership of the North Vietnamese Communist Party decided to commit all their available military and political forces in the south to "strike a decisive blow against the enemy, win a great victory, bring about a great-leap-forward transformation, and force the US to accept military defeat." To accomplish this, the enemy would launch a General Offensive/General Uprising. Long envisioned in revolutionary people's war theory, the General Offensive consisted of large-scale battles of annihilation to shatter the opposing military forces. The concurrent General Uprising entailed mass popular revolts in the cities organized by the Viet Cong political underground and spearheaded by commando attacks on the Saigon regime's administrative and military command centers. This part of the offensive also would include proselytizing within the ARVN to bring about unit mutinies and defections. Each reinforcing the other, the two prongs of the offensive would cause the collapse of the South Vietnamese government and armed forces, followed by establishment of a pro-Communist regime. With their own troops under heavy attack, the Americans would have no choice but to accept defeat and extricate themselves from the conflict as best they could.[2]

In its final form, completed late in 1967, the plan specified two strategic objectives for the General Offensive/General Uprising: to "annihilate and cause the total disintegration" of the bulk of the South Vietnamese army while overthrowing the "puppet regime" at "all administrative levels"; and to "annihilate a significant portion of the American military's troop strength." This was to be accomplished by striking two "main blows"—"the attack of our large main force units on battlefields where conditions favored our forces" and "the attack of our

assault units supporting popular uprisings in the cities and their surrounding areas." Although the offensive would be nationwide, the "decisive" battlefields would be Saigon and its environs and northern I Corps (the Route 9-Tri Thien-Quang Da front), where Hue and Da Nang would be the critical objectives. The plan depended heavily for success on secrecy and surprise. Hence, until the very last weeks before the assault, only the highest level North Vietnamese and Viet Cong commanders knew the full extent of the plan. Lower level commanders and political cadres made most of their preparations without information about the ultimate objective of their efforts. Further to ensure surprise, the Politburo in Hanoi decided to launch the attack during the Tet holiday of 1968, which would come at the end of January. During the long war, the Tet celebration customarily had included a military truce generally respected by both sides, so that the government's alert level would be low.[3]

As North Vietnamese histories acknowledged in retrospect, this ambitious plan was based on an overestimation of the revolutionary forces' military and political strength and an underestimation of those of the allies. In particular, the leaders in Hanoi assumed that the mass of South Vietnam's urban population was seething with hatred of the Saigon regime and its American sponsors, needing only a spark to ignite the revolutionary fire. Similarly, they exaggerated the prospects for mutiny and defection by the ARVN. These misapprehensions may have resulted from inflated reports of success by southern party officials. In fact, South Vietnam's urban dwellers were more apathetic than rebellious, and the ARVN, for all its many faults, displayed little interest in joining the enemy. Making this problem worse, the Communists, in order to secure surprise, delayed until very late in their preparations the beginning of mass revolutionary agitation. In summary, a senior North Vietnamese general declared:

> During Tet of 1968 we did not correctly evaluate the specific balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy, did not fully realize that the enemy still had considerable capabilities and that our capabilities were limited, and set requirements that were beyond our actual strength. In other words, we did not base ourselves on scientific calculation or a careful weighing of all factors, but in part on an illusion based on our subjective desires. . . .[4]

Well before the North Vietnamese settled all the details of their final offensive plan, preparations for its execution got under way. During the summer and fall of 1967, the enemy increased the flow of men and materiel down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and through Sihanoukville in nominally neutral Cambodia. According to a later Communist account, some 81,000 personnel entered South Vietnam during 1967, more than twice the number infiltrated the previous year, although many of these were replacements for continuing heavy battle losses. The enemy moved in over 6,500 tons of weapons and supplies, including thousands of automatic rifles, machine guns, and rocket-propelled anti-tank grenade launchers. Viet Cong

units, usually still unaware of the purpose of their efforts, clandestinely stockpiled supplies near South Vietnam's cities and trained for their urban attack missions. Underground cadres in the cities and towns made up lists of government officials and supporters to be killed and kidnapped and of prospective members of local revolutionary administrations. During the autumn, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main forces engaged the allies in a series of unusually prolonged battles along the DMZ and on the western edges of II and III Corps, which the Americans collectively labeled the "border battles"; and there was as well an upsurge in smaller attacks by local units and guerrillas. The aims of the big operations, which cost the Communists thousands of men, were to wear down US units, distract allied attention from offensive preparations against the cities, and allow the main force to refine its tactics for fighting large-scale battles.[5]

The enemy also made political and diplomatic preparations. North Vietnam signed new military and economic aid agreements with the Soviet Union and China. To strengthen the home front, the Hanoi government purged over 200 senior officials and party members considered insufficiently committed to the struggle and passed strict new laws against "counterrevolutionary" crimes. At the same time, the North Vietnamese tried to politically divide and confuse the allies. The PENNSYLVANIA initiative dragged on into October, and a captured Viet Cong official tried to open direct talks with the United States on prisoner exchanges and "other matters." The National Liberation Front, the political arm of the Viet Cong, publicized a new program aimed at broadening its appeal to the South Vietnamese people and extending a special welcome to defecting government soldiers and police. The Front's agents spread rumors through Saigon and other cities that the Front and the United States secretly were close to agreement on replacing the Thieu-Ky regime with a Viet Cong-dominated coalition government.[6]

Missed Signals and Holiday Ceasefires

As enemy offensive preparations accelerated during the fall, American and South Vietnamese intelligence organizations began picking up signals that an attack of unusual size and scope was in the making. Working from prisoner interrogations, captured documents, and communications intercepts, analysts in the MACV J2 (Intelligence) and the CIA Saigon station during October and November developed forecasts of a nationwide enemy offensive, to take place early in 1968, that would include major attacks on the cities. A CIA study completed in November, for example, suggested that the border battles were part of the first phase of this offensive and that a second phase, possibly including city attacks, would begin in January.[7]

Until late in 1967, senior officials in Saigon and Washington received these studies at best with skepticism. They did so because they believed, correctly as

it turned out, that a nationwide offensive was beyond North Vietnamese and Viet Cong capabilities. In particular, an assault on the cities, where enemy activity hitherto had been limited to terrorism, espionage, supply thefts, and political agitation, appeared especially improbable. As allied leaders saw it, the Communists lacked the conventional military strength to seize and hold major towns and could count on little help from an urban citizenry that evidenced no mass loyalty to the National Liberation Front. Crediting the Communists with possessing excellent intelligence on conditions in South Vietnam, American officials doubted that the enemy would throw away troops and political cadres in a hopeless endeavor. No one on the allied side considered the possibility that the enemy leaders might be miscalculating and, if they were, what they might attempt. The city attack plans that fell into allied hands, therefore, could be viewed as propaganda and the border battles understood as unsuccessful efforts at attrition which had merely exposed Communist troops to destruction by US fire power. In sum, the miscalculations in the North Vietnamese plan, by causing the allies to discount early evidence of the nature of the attack, helped to conceal the preparations for its execution.[8]

During the last three months of 1967, US officials in Washington and Saigon spent much time discussing plans for the by now customary ceasefires to mark the three approaching holidays: Christmas, New Year, and Tet. As in previous years, American military commanders deplored these pauses, which the enemy used to redeploy and resupply their troops. The administration, however, considering the question from a political viewpoint, and sensitive to public criticism at home and abroad, decided it could not afford to reject suggestions for holiday truces.

Ambassador Bunker first raised the subject on 13 October 1967. Following a recommendation from MACV, Bunker urged that the Christmas and New Year truces, if they were decided upon, be limited to 24 hours each. For Tet, he suggested 48 hours, with 72 as a maximum "fallback" position. At the same time, Bunker pointed out that last year's rules had been inadequate to regulate enemy supply efforts; hence, he recommended a total freeze on logistic activity and force repositioning by both sides during the ceasefires. General Westmoreland declared these time limits acceptable if ceasefires were considered necessary. However, at Admiral Sharp's urging, he opposed any logistic and redeployment freeze as impossible to verify and potentially crippling to allied forces if a ceasefire should be extended by diplomatic maneuvering. For his part, Admiral Sharp recorded his opposition to any holiday ceasefires.[9]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with CINCPAC's views. On 23 October, they told the Secretary of Defense that, in their opinion, the United States should urge the Republic of Vietnam and its allies to announce, as soon as possible, that there would be no stand-down of military operations during any of the holidays. Even a 24-hour truce, they argued, was disadvantageous to US forces. In particular, they opposed the suggested freeze on logistic activities. The enemy, they declared, could carry out his supply movements clandestinely, but it would be impossible

to conceal the steady flow of logistic support and personnel required by the allies' forces.[10]

In mid-November, while US officials debated the issue, the enemy announced his own holiday ceasefires. The Viet Cong Liberation Radio announced that its forces would observe ceasefires of 72 hours at Christmas and New Year, extending respectively from 24 to 27 December and from 30 December to 2 January 1968, and a seven-day period at Tet (27 January–2 February). In each case the ceasefire would begin at 0100, Saigon time. The Tet announcement was part of the enemy's deception plan for his nationwide offensive.[11]

With this announcement, it became urgent for the allies to determine and declare their own policy. During administration discussions, General Wheeler affirmed the JCS opposition to any ceasefires and urged that, if they were politically necessary, they should not exceed the periods originally suggested by Ambassador Bunker. The President and his advisors accepted the latter view. Late in November, the Department of State instructed Bunker to propose the 24-24-48 hour formula to the Saigon government. President Thieu initially favored a 36-36-72 hour formula, but dropped it and accepted the US recommendation, as did the other troop-contributing countries. The beginning of the allies' 24-hour Christmas truce was set for 1800, Saigon time, on 24 December (240500, EST).[12]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff drafted rules of engagement for the ceasefire periods, modifying those of the preceding year in order to lessen enemy opportunities to take advantage of the pauses in operations. When the JCS submitted their draft to the Defense and State Departments, civilian officials amended the rules to make them slightly more restrictive for US forces. As finally promulgated on 15 December, the rules provided that US military forces, during the Christmas, New Year, and Tet stand-downs, would initiate no offensive operations except in response to (1) enemy initiatives that endangered allied forces; (2) "abnormally great" resupply activities or infiltration into the southern part of the DMZ or immediately south thereof; and (3) other "abnormally great" resupply activities.[13] Authority to react to such enemy violations was vested in CINCPAC. US forces would maintain full alert posture and continue all security precautions, including patrol activity. Forces in contact with the enemy when the ceasefire went into effect were not to break contact unless enemy effort to withdraw was "clearly evident," or until the operation was concluded. Coastal and riverine interdiction and search and rescue operations would continue, and aerial reconnaissance would be intensified. Air and naval support were authorized in support of any of the above operations, and ARC LIGHT strikes might be requested through normal channels.

American operations in and over North Vietnam were to be suspended unless authorized by Admiral Sharp. Sharp could approve coastal naval operations, air strikes, and artillery fire south of the 20th parallel against "abnormally great" resupply activities or other actions that posed a "direct and immediate threat" to friendly forces. North of 20 degrees, CINCPAC might authorize air strikes against targets

presenting an "immediate and direct threat," for example movement of SAM batteries indicating extension of antiaircraft missile defenses south of the 20-degree line. Normal operations in Laos and Cambodia were to continue. Notwithstanding these restrictions, US commanders were given "full authority" to resume military actions if necessary "for the safety of their forces." Moreover, they were to hold their troops ready to resume full-scale operations at once should enemy violations make it necessary to terminate the ceasefire.[14]

The allies carried out the Christmas and New Year truces more or less as planned. For Christmas, US and allied forces observed a truce from 1800 on 24 December to the same hour on the 25th. During this period, according to US estimates, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese committed 118 truce violations, of which 40 were considered "major." Visual and photographic evidence collected over North Vietnam showed at least 750 trucks moving southward between Than Hoa and Dong Hoi. Despite this indication that the enemy was making maximum use of the ceasefire for supply movement, Admiral Sharp did not exercise his discretionary authority to order attacks below the 20th parallel.[15]

The allies' New Year ceasefire was scheduled to run from 1800 on 31 December to the same hour on 1 January. Before it took effect, however, Pope Paul VI personally appealed to President Johnson to prolong the period beyond the planned 24 hours so as to make New Year's Day a full "day of peace." Accordingly, on 28 December, the Department of State informed Ambassador Bunker that the administration was considering a 12-hour extension until 0600 on 2 January 1968. This period would stretch beyond 0100 hours on the 2nd, the announced termination of the Viet Cong ceasefire. However, it seemed preferable to the alternative of an earlier beginning for the truce, which would have increased the number of daylight hours available to the enemy. Since General Westmoreland was then in Manila, Ambassador Bunker at once consulted the Deputy COMUSMACV, General Creighton W. Abrams, USA. Abrams reluctantly concurred in the State Department's proposal, noting that in his judgment the projected 12-hour increase would have little effect on enemy capabilities in view of the current weather in North Vietnam.[16]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed any extension of the agreed 24-hour period. Contacted at Manila, General Westmoreland also declared the extension undesirable but accepted it as politically unavoidable. Disagreeing with the Department of State, the MACV commander urged chronological limits that would include a maximum of daylight hours, since the enemy usually made most of his movements during darkness. He recommended a period running from 1200 on 31 December to 2400 on 1 January, which still would allow the Pope his "day of peace." The State Department, however, considered that discussion of the original extension plan had progressed too far to allow modification of the proposal in this manner.[17]

Following agreement among the allies, the South Vietnamese government publicly announced that a ceasefire would be observed from 1800 on 31 December to 0600 on 2 January. Before the truce took effect, Admiral Sharp, on the basis of a

review of logistic activity observed in North Vietnam during the Christmas truce, instructed his commanders that any repetition of this volume of supply movement would be considered "abnormally great" as defined in the rules of engagement. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred in this interpretation, with the exception of General McConnell, the Acting Chairman. Admiral Sharp made no use of this authority, however, although US forces reported 63 major and 107 minor enemy violations during the 36-hour period.[18]

As the New Year truce ran its course, the North Vietnamese made an unexpected diplomatic move. On 1 January 1968, Radio Hanoi broadcast an official statement that Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh had made on 29 December to a visiting delegation from Mongolia. In the statement, Trinh repeated North Vietnam's long-standing insistence that an "unconditional" cessation of US bombing of the north must precede any peace negotiations. However, he added that after the bombing halt, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam "will start conversations with the United States on relevant problems." Previously, Hanoi had used the word "could" in this context; hence, the change to "will" could be construed as movement toward acceptance of President Johnson's San Antonio formula. Two days later, in Paris, Mai Van Bo, North Vietnam's representative to France, told the French Foreign Minister that Trinh's statement was a "direct answer" to President Johnson and that Hanoi "will guarantee that the conversations will be explicit... and serious."[19]

In the light of the enemy's truce violations and the growing indications that the Communists were going to launch a major military offensive early in 1968, US and South Vietnamese officials responded cautiously to Hanoi's overture. Both Secretary of State Rusk and South Vietnamese President Thieu stated publicly that Trinh's pronouncement contained nothing really new. Nevertheless, the administration spent the rest of January exploring the North Vietnamese position, using the Rumanian government as intermediary. In addition, President Johnson stopped US bombing within a 5-mile radius of Hanoi while a Rumanian diplomat carried a US reply to Hanoi. These peace feelers continued until the Tet Offensive began at the end of January. American officials at the time and historians since have speculated as to the enemy's reasons for this overture on the eve of his major assault. Probably, the North Vietnamese wanted keep the Americans uncertain of their intentions during the final weeks of offensive preparations and perhaps to lay the groundwork for negotiation of the US retreat after the expected Communist victory.[20]

Warnings and a Threat in the North

By late December, US officials in Saigon and Washington had been compelled to recognize that the enemy was preparing for an unusually large and ambitious offensive early in the new year. A growing volume of prisoner interrogations,

captured documents, and intercepted radio traffic pointed to a nationwide effort that would include attacks on cities. The enemy's hard fighting in the border battles and a widespread upsurge of smaller attacks also indicated a possible change in the pattern of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong operations. Especially ominous were reports derived from special intelligence that several People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) divisions, hitherto held in reserve in North Vietnam, were moving into northern I Corps and converging on Khe Sanh, III MAF's westernmost outpost below the DMZ.[21]

It was becoming clear that the enemy was building to a major assault that possibly would precede or accompany a change in strategy. The intelligence community, however, was uncertain as to the direction of that change, especially in the light of the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister's 31 December statement. Typical of the confusion, on 18 January, the CIA's Board of National Estimates identified three hypotheses about Hanoi's future course of action: (1) to terminate the fighting in the course of the next year; (2) to "fight on until it perceives a break in its favor in US policy"; and (3) to keep its options open by continued hard fighting with the option to seek a "compromise solution" within the next year, "according to the way things develop." None of these hypotheses "is capable of conclusive proof or disproof, mainly because the evidence is either insufficient or can be interpreted in various and often diametrically opposed ways"; but the Board considered that there was "much to recommend the third case."[22]

General Westmoreland inclined toward the third hypothesis. On 20 December, he wrote to General Wheeler:

> The enemy has already made a crucial decision concerning the conduct of the war.... The enemy decided that prolongation of his past policies... would lead to his defeat, and that he would have to make a major effort to reverse the downward trend.... His decision therefore was to undertake an intensified countrywide effort, perhaps a maximum effort, over a relatively short period.... If the enemy is successful in winning a significant military victory somewhere in SVN [Soutn Vietnam], or gaining even an apparent position of strength, he may seek to initiate negotiations. If, on the other hand, he fails badly, we do not believe that he will negotiate from weakness, but will continue the war at a reduced intensity. In short, I believe that the enemy has already made a crucial decision to make a maximum effort. The results of this effort will determine the next move.[23]

Westmoreland's superior, Admiral Sharp, viewed this assessment with skepticism. On 26 December, he declared that he saw "no criticality in the current enemy situation which portends a final push effort." He doubted that the Communists, with their excellent intelligence network in South Vietnam, had deceived themselves into believing that conditions in the south were ripe for victory. During the next few months, Sharp expected the enemy to strike some heavy blows aimed at pressuring the United States to accept a Viet Cong-dominated coalition

government, and he acknowledged that Hanoi might be "considering further changes concerning the future conduct of the war." He concluded, however, that "the likelihood of a final effort... sometime after Tet cannot be discounted but remains remote."[24]

As January 1968 began, the most ominous enemy threat appeared to be developing around the Marine base at Khe Sanh in far northwestern I Corps. The enemy had massed an estimated three PAVN divisions, recently brought down from the north, around the position and set up a large supply base just across the border in Laos. Initially held by two Marine battalions, Khe Sanh appeared to be in a precarious situation, since its land line of communications to the coast had been rendered impassable by weather and enemy action. General Westmoreland long had expected a large-scale North Vietnamese offensive in northern I Corps, which was isolated from the rest of the corps area by a mountain spur and contained the former Vietnamese imperial capital city, Hue, an important strategic and political objective. He and his staff believed that the developing siege of Khe Sanh might be part of a larger effort to overrun all of northern I Corps. Since spring 1967, Westmoreland had been shifting US Army and Marine units northward to reinforce the threatened region; and by early January 1968 he was preparing to move the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) from II Corps into the area.[25]

General Westmoreland's concern about northern I Corps was well founded. The enemy's final plan for the General Offensive/General Uprising designated the region as "one of our important strategic theaters of operations." In December 1967, Hanoi assigned four divisions plus artillery and supporting units to what it called the Route 9-Northern Quang Tri Front, to attack Khe Sanh and other allied positions. A Communist official history declared: "This was a combat battlefield for our main force units that was assigned the mission of annihilating enemy forces and of drawing in and tying down a significant portion of the mobile reserve forces of the US and puppet armies, thereby creating favorable conditions for the focal points of our attacks and uprisings, and especially for Tri-Thien and Hue."[26]

Khe Sanh itself was important for a number of reasons. It was the westernmost position on the McNamara barrier line, overlooked major infiltration routes into South Vietnam, served as a base for Special Forces led irregulars operating against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and was a potential launching point for a major allied offensive to block the Trail, if one ever was authorized. Lying some 30 miles from the ocean, Khe Sanh was separated by approximately 23 miles from the Marines' logistic base at Dong Ha. Two Marine fire support bases were located respectively seven and ten miles east of Khe Sanh. The base area at Khe Sanh itself lay on a plateau dominated on the north, west, and south by higher hills, the key peaks of which were occupied by well dug-in Marines.[27]

General Westmoreland, working closely with General Robert E. Cushman, USMC, commander of III MAF, laid plans to reinforce Khe Sanh on short notice. Four additional Marine battalions could be sent in within 12 hours. Other forces

assembled in northern I Corps. At Westmoreland's urging, the Vietnamese Joint General Staff agreed to deploy two additional airborne battalions of the ARVN central reserve to I CTZ, making a total of four in that zone. In mid-January, MACV deployed the headquarters and two brigades of the 1st Cavalry Division to the Hue/Phu Bai region and later rounded out the division with a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division transferred from II Field Force. General Westmoreland also approved plans for a coordinated air support campaign of round-the-clock strikes by US Air Force and Marine Corps tactical aircraft and USAF B–52s on the enemy forces massing around Khe Sanh. MACV and III MAF also prepared for air reinforcement and supply of Khe Sanh by fixed wing transports and helicopters.[28]

Inevitably, the position of the Marines at Khe Sanh—surrounded by swelling numbers of North Vietnamese regulars and wholly dependent for survival upon aerial resupply—invited comparison to that of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, where the Communists had won a smashing victory. By early January, administration policymakers were making this comparison. On 11 January, General Wheeler informed General Westmoreland that two courses of action, based on the Dien Bien Phu analogy, were being discussed in "high non-military quarters." One was to launch an attack into the enemy's rear bases in Laos. The other was to withdraw from Khe Sanh while it could still be done with relatively little public notice. Advocates of the latter course argued that the road to Khe Sanh had already been cut; that the enemy controlled the surrounding hills and would soon be able to interdict the airfield with artillery (as the Viet Minh had done at Dien Bien Phu); and that there was an "awkward relationship" between COMUSMACV and CG III MAF, which made the latter reluctant to withdraw and the former reluctant to order him to do so. General Wheeler referred these suggestions to General Westmoreland, making clear that the Chairman himself rejected both.[29]

General Westmoreland pronounced both courses of action infeasible. A large-scale attack into Laos would strain MACV's airlift capabilities to the utmost at a time when the beginning of the northeast monsoon was likely to hinder air operations. Moreover, enemy forces in the proposed target area were probably too strong to be decisively defeated in a short campaign. A withdrawal was unthinkable. Khe Sanh was militarily important, as the western anchor of the defense line below the DMZ and as a base for operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but it was even more important psychologically. Westmoreland declared: "To relinquish this area would be a major propaganda victory for the enemy." Addressing the arguments for withdrawal, Westmoreland assured Wheeler that the base could be reinforced and resupplied by air and that all tactically important hills around Khe Sanh were in US hands and would remain so. The enemy would have great difficulty in moving heavy artillery through the terrain of western Quang Tri Province, although large quantities of mortar and rocket fire should be expected. Finally, Westmoreland dismissed as "absurd" allegations of a difficult relationship between himself and General Cushman; his latter assertion was not entirely accurate.[30]

On 13 January, General Wheeler forwarded COMUSMACV's comments to the Secretary of Defense, indicating his concurrence. Admiral Sharp also emphatically rejected both of the suggested courses of action. "In the event a major attack on Khe Sanh materializes," he declared, "it will be fought on our terms, on our ground, and within supporting range of our weapons."[31]

The North Vietnamese opened their attack on Khe Sanh in the small hours of 21 January. They launched a fierce assault on one of the Marines' hilltop outposts, but the Marines held their ground in fighting that at times was hand-to-hand. The enemy followed up with a seven-hour rocket, mortar, and artillery barrage against Khe Sanh itself that destroyed the Marines' principal ammunition dump; and they overran the village of Khe Sanh outside the main perimeter. The Marine defenders, reinforced a few days earlier by a third battalion, withdrew into the base fortifications, abandoning all outposts except the commanding hill positions.[32]

General Westmoreland announced on 21 January that "the anticipated enemy attack on Khe Sanh was initiated last evening." In response, he launched Operation NIAGARA, the air campaign to keep the enemy forces off balance. From then on, B–52s and tactical aircraft pounded suspected North Vietnamese troop concentrations, storage areas, and artillery positions around Khe Sanh. By 29 January, some 40 B–52 and 500 tactical air sorties were being flown each day as part of this campaign. The large number of secondary explosions suggested that these strikes, together with artillery fire from Khe Sanh, were disrupting the enemy's buildup and attack preparations. The III Marine Amphibious Force airlifted a fourth Marine battalion into Khe Sanh, followed several days later by an ARVN Ranger battalion. These reinforcements increased the number of defenders to about 5,700 US Marines and 500 Vietnamese Rangers. They faced an estimated 20,000–25,000 North Vietnamese.[33]

After the initial attacks, the North Vietnamese kept up a steady mortar and artillery bombardment of Khe Sanh while digging a network of trenches approaching the Marine perimeter. The Americans responded with artillery and air strikes on the enemy positions. On 23 January, General Westmoreland appraised the first assaults as "reconnaissance in force designed to knock off the outposts." "It remains to be seen," he concluded, "whether our initiatives thus far have off-set his time-table." There was no doubt in Westmoreland's mind that a major battle impended. He predicted to Admiral Sharp that the operations around Khe Sanh would be misunderstood at home and that it would be possible for "skeptics and dissenters to construct erroneous and misleading assessments of our battlefield posture .... As the Quang Tri battle develops there will be those quick to advocate abandonment of 'indefensible and unimportant positions'." The MACV commander maintained "unreservedly" that "Khe Sanh is of significance; strategic, tactical, and most importantly, psychological." While expressing confidence in the battlefield position, Westmoreland and Sharp nevertheless initiated highly secret contingency

planning for use of tactical nuclear weapons around Khe Sanh if the situation became desperate.[34]

On 25 January, General Westmoreland announced his intention to revise the US command structure in I Corps, the better to fight the expected big battle. He created a new provisional field army headquarters in the Hue/Phu Bai area, which was to assume operational control of all American ground forces in I Corps and in particular to direct the fight in the threatened northern provinces. To be designated MACV Forward, the headquarters was to be commanded by Westmoreland's deputy, General Abrams. Westmoreland's official rationale for this change was to assist III MAF in managing the increasingly large and complex war in I Corps. However, by placing the four-star Abrams over the three-star Cushman, Westmoreland in effect was superseding the Marine general as the senior US commander in the region. The MACV commander's action resulted from long-standing doubts about Cushman's leadership and about the quality of III MAF's staff work and conduct of tactical operations, typified by the Marines' neglect to dig in their ammunition dump at Khe Sanh which was blown up in the first attack. Marines at III MAF and on the MACV staff bitterly objected to this action, which they considered unnecessary and an insult to their Service. Westmoreland relented slightly, specifying that Abrams would issue all orders to III MAF forces through General Cushman's headquarters. Nevertheless, logistical preparations went forward to establish MACV Forward at the US base at Phu Bai. The 366-man joint headquarters was to go into operation around 5 February.[35]

Prodded by continuing presidential concern, the Joint Chiefs of Staff kept in close touch with the developing siege of Khe Sanh. On 29 January, General Wheeler discussed the battle via telephone with General Westmoreland. The MACV commander affirmed his conviction that "we can hold Khe Sanh and we should hold Khe Sanh." He reported that the defenders' morale was high and that the allies had an opportunity to inflict a "severe defeat" upon the enemy. Westmoreland assured Wheeler that everything possible had been done, both in Vietnam and in Washington, to guarantee success. The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately forwarded this information to President Johnson. They declared their agreement with COMUSMACV's assessment of the situation and recommended that Khe Sanh be held. In effect, the President now had the assurance of his highest military advisors, given in writing, that Khe Sanh was defensible.[36]

Final Preparations and a Truncated Truce

Although MACV's concern centered on northern I Corps, during January the command also responded to multiplying indications of a wider enemy threat to cities and coastal areas elsewhere in South Vietnam. The indications induced General Westmoreland to warn General Wheeler and Admiral Sharp on 20 January:

"The enemy is presently developing a threatening posture in several areas in order to seek victories essential to achieving prestige and bargaining power. He may exercise his initiatives prior to, during or after Tet."[37]

In its most important response, MACV authorized II Field Force to reposition its troops to protect Saigon. At a meeting with Westmoreland on 9 January, Lieutenant General Frederick C. Weyand, CG II FFV, reviewed for COMUSMACV intelligence showing that enemy main force units in the III Corps area were moving in from the Cambodian border toward the capital. Weyand requested permission to cancel scheduled operations near the border and shift his forces back toward Saigon. Westmoreland agreed. As a result of this decision, by the end of January, 27 US maneuver battalions were operating within 30 kilometers of Saigon, along with the better part of the ARVN III Corps. By this action, combined with the reinforcement of northern I CTZ, Westmoreland, although still unaware of the full extent of the enemy's plan, had massed much of his combat power on what the North Vietnamese had designated as the two decisive battlefields of the coming offensive.[38]

Although an enemy offensive appeared likely during the Tet period, much uncertainty existed at MACV headquarters and in the US intelligence community about the probable exact timing of the attack. Few officials believed that the Communists would strike during the holiday itself, because such a violation of the most sacred of Vietnamese festivals would alienate the population. General Westmoreland thought the enemy most likely to make his move before the holiday and then regroup during the ceasefire. The MACV intelligence chief expected the enemy to exploit the truce for preparations and then attack after Tet.[39]

With a major enemy offensive appearing imminent, General Westmoreland sought to avoid any ceasefire during the approaching Tet holiday. The US and South Vietnamese governments tentatively had agreed on a 48-hour stand-down, but on 8 January Westmoreland indicated to General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff, his opposition to any truce at Tet. Although General Vien agreed with this view, he insisted that some cessation of operations for this important festival was essential for the morale of his troops. He was willing, however, to support a recommendation that it be limited to 24 hours. Admiral Sharp approved this proposal. President Thieu, when it was presented to him, demurred, since he had publicly committed himself to the 48-hour plan. He finally accepted a 36-hour period, to begin at 1800H on 29 January. Ambassador Bunker endorsed this compromise.[40]

In Washington, President Johnson questioned the reasons for thus reducing the agreed 48-hour period; and Secretaries Rusk and McNamara expressed concern that a change in Tet plans might hinder diplomatic exploration of the new North Vietnamese statement on bombing and negotiations. In response, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after consulting Westmoreland and Sharp, furnished a detailed justification. They argued in substance that in 12 additional hours the enemy could quadruple the volume of supplies moving southward. During a 36-hour ceasefire, the

enemy, according to their estimate, could move 3,300 tons; in 48 hours, the figure would rise to 14,400 tons. Coastal shipments, possible during the longer period, would account for this enormous difference. Noting that the enemy was preparing for a large military initiative and might well use the truce period to complete his buildup, the JCS argued that the allies "should do all possible to restrict the movement of men and materials by the enemy in RVN during the ceasefire. . . . "[41]

The Joint Chiefs' reasoning prevailed. The United States and the allied governments agreed to limit the Tet ceasefire to 36 hours. Further truncation followed immediately. With the siege of Khe Sanh under way, General Westmoreland concluded that the situation in I CTZ was so threatening that the region should be excluded from the ceasefire. Besides calling off the ceasefire in I Corps, Westmoreland recommended that bombing continue in North Vietnam, at least as far north as Vinh, just below the 19th parallel. Ambassador Bunker and Admiral Sharp agreed with these proposals.[42]

The Administration promptly accepted General Westmoreland's recommendations, with the stipulation that bombing in North Vietnam would be restricted to the region south of Vinh. President Thieu also gave his concurrence. On 26 January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC and CINCSAC of these exceptions to the 36-hour truce, which would begin at 1800H on 29 January in II, III, and IV Corps. The ceasefire began on schedule, but was short-lived. Soon after midnight on the 29th, enemy forces in southern I Corps and parts of II Corps, evidently acting prematurely due to a mix-up in orders, attacked key towns and installations. This action resolved the allies' questions about the timing of the general offensive. At 1000 hours on the 30th, Saigon time, President Thieu formally cancelled the truce throughout South Vietnam, and both the US and ARVN commands placed all their forces on full alert. The alert came too late, however, to recall thousands of South Vietnamese soldiers who had gone on leave for the holiday. Outside of I Corps, where the absentee rate was around 20 percent, most ARVN units were at about half strength when the truce was cancelled. Allied forces thus were partially off-balance when the Communists began their nationwide attacks in the early hours of 31 January.[43]

The Attack and Its Repulse

The scope and intensity of the offensive that erupted across South Vietnam on 30–31 January was unprecedented in the war. During the first two days, at least 84,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops struck five of South Vietnam's six autonomous cities, 36 provincial capitals, 64 district towns, and the major American airbases with varying combinations of ground assaults and attacks by fire. Infiltrated commando units, often reinforced by additional enemy battalions, occupied portions of many cities, including Saigon, and fought until driven out by US and

ARVN forces. Elements of a North Vietnamese regular division held virtually complete control of Hue for the better part of a month, being expelled only after weeks of stubborn house-to-house combat by American and South Vietnamese units.

Casualties and destruction were extensive. In the first month's combat, more than 2,100 American and 4,000 South Vietnamese soldiers were killed. The attacks left tens of thousands of South Vietnamese civilians dead and injured, including some 3,000 massacred during the Communist occupation of Hue. Hundreds of thousands were left homeless. Sections of Saigon and other cities lay in ruins; South Vietnam's economy was temporarily paralyzed; and rural pacification seemingly destroyed.[44]

For all the slaughter and damage it caused, the General Offensive/General Uprising fell far short of the political and military goals the leaders in Hanoi had set for it. The enemy was repulsed at many points, was unable for long to hold the places he did seize, and failed to destroy any large US or South Vietnamese units. The city attacks had depended for success on coordination between infiltrated units and reinforcements from outside, but the coordination often was lacking. Deprived of reinforcements, the infiltrators were hunted down and killed by allied troops, although often at the cost of bitter and destructive fighting. Most important, the General Uprising never took place. The Saigon government did not collapse, its armed forces did not defect, and the urban population did not rise in support of the offensive. As allied intelligence officers had believed, the Communists had overestimated their own strength and underestimated that of their opponents. They paid a high price for their miscalculation. During the first month of post-Tet fighting, the enemy lost, by MACV estimate, nearly 50,000 men killed, many of them hard-to-replace Viet Cong local troops, guerrillas, and political cadres.[45]

Although US and South Vietnamese authorities had been aware for months that a major attack was coming, the scale and intensity of the assault on the cities took them by surprise. The allies, nevertheless, rallied quickly and expelled the enemy from the cities and towns and launched offensive operations to destroy Communist forces in the vicinity of the urban areas. At the urging of General Westmoreland and his pacification deputy, Ambassador Robert Komer, US and South Vietnamese troops then pushed back into the countryside, where movement of many Viet Cong units into the cities had left a military vacuum. Westmoreland, Bunker, and Komer also persuaded President Thieu to launch an immediate nationwide effort to care for civilian victims of the fighting, restore public services, rebuild damaged areas, and revive the economy.[46]

While the attacks on the cities ran their course, the siege of Khe Sanh moved toward an anticlimactic conclusion. During February, the North Vietnamese kept up pressure on the base. Using tanks for the first time in the war, they overran the nearby Special Forces camp at Lang Vei and once again (without tanks) unsuccessfully assaulted a Marine outpost. They repeatedly attacked the positions on the base perimeter of the garrison's lone ARVN Ranger battalion; but each time the South

Vietnamese, aided by US supporting fires, drove them off. The North Vietnamese bombarded the base daily. On 23 February, the crescendo of the attack by fire, they struck Khe Sanh with more than 1,300 rocket, artillery, and mortar rounds. The Americans responded with a much heavier rain of bombs and shells on enemy positions, turning the landscape around Khe Sanh into a barren expanse of craters. Even under the heaviest bombardment, fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters kept ammunition and rations coming in to the base and took the wounded out. During March, enemy pressure on Khe Sanh slackened, as the besieging North Vietnamese divisions gradually slipped away. During the first part of April, US Army and Marine forces, in Operation PEGASUS, re-established ground contact with Khe Sanh, although sporadic fighting continued around the base. From the US perspective at least, Operation PEGASUS brought a successful end to the battle for Khe Sanh.[47]

If the fight for Khe Sanh concluded without drama, so did the brief existence of MACV Forward, the headquarters that General Westmoreland had established to oversee the battle for I CTZ. The headquarters went into operation on 9 February under General Abrams's command, with authority to "provide instructions" to General Cushman on "all tactical matters in 1 CTZ." In practice MACV Forward simply supervised while the CG III MAF and his division commanders directed the battles at Khe Sanh, Hue, and other places. In mid-February, General Westmoreland announced his intention to replace MACV Forward with a Provisional Corps Vietnam (Prov Corps), under General Cushman's operational control, which would direct combat operations in Thua Thien and Quang Tri, the two northernmost provinces of I Corps. The corps went into operation on 10 March, under command of Lieutenant General William B. Rosson, USA.[48]

By the time Prov Corps went into operation and Khe Sanh was relieved, the great enemy offensive had ended. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong soldiers who had invaded the cities were dead or had fallen back into the countryside, harried on their way by allied counterattacks. Relief and reconstruction operations were under way in battle-damaged areas of South Vietnam. Pushed by Ambassador Komer, territorial forces and civilian pacification teams were moving out into the countryside, where they exploited the military power vacuum left by Viet Cong units that had gone to the cities and not returned. President Thieu's government had responded to the crisis with energy that impressed its American sponsors; and the ARVN, for the most part, had fought creditably. In both cities and countryside, there were signs of increased popular support for the Saigon government and declining belief in Viet Cong claims of legitimacy and victory.[49]

On the ground in South Vietnam, the allies thus could view the outcome of the Tet offensive as a tactical success for themselves. On the larger stage, however, the enemy had good reason to call the General Offensive/General Uprising "a great strategic victory." In the United States, the offensive profoundly shocked both officialdom and the public—an effect intensified by graphic and dramatic news media coverage of the fighting and destruction. Television images of wrecked buildings,

corpses in city streets, and haggard Marines cowering under artillery fire at Khe Sanh left an impression that optimistic reports from MACV and the US Embassy in Saigon could not eradicate. Military men had been perfectly aware that the enemy possessed the capability to attack on a large scale if he were willing to pay the price. The administration had known since late 1967 that a big offensive was likely, but it did nothing to prepare the American people for this eventuality. When the attack came, it appeared to many Americans in and outside of government that previous optimistic progress appraisals had been wholly erroneous. The enemy seemed to be growing stronger rather than weaker, a hydra-headed monster invulnerable to military defeat. Whether the leaders in Hanoi had included influencing US opinion among the objectives for their attack is doubtful. But there could be no doubt whatever that, in this realm, they had attained unqualified success, to a degree exceeding their fondest hopes.[50]

11

A New Departure in Policy

Reacting to the Tet offensive, the Johnson administration reopened fundamental questions of Vietnam policy and strategy. Before the offensive, the President and his advisers had been moving toward leveling off both ROLLING THUNDER and the commitment of US troops and trying to turn more of the war over to the South Vietnamese. The communist assault raised questions as to whether that policy was viable in the light of the enemy's unexpected display of power. Shaken by the violence in Vietnam, some presidential advisers, in common with many members of Congress, much of the news media, and a growing proportion of the general public, concluded that the war was lost and that the only issue for the United States was to find an honorable way out. On the other hand, General Wheeler, along with the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland, perceived an opportunity to move the administration toward the expanded war effort they long had advocated while at the same time remedying major defects in the overall US military posture. Their efforts, however, would have the opposite effect of what they intended.

An Effort to Expand ROLLING THUNDER

When the news of the Tet attack reached the Joint Chiefs of Staff, their first reaction was to urge the application of increased airpower against North Vietnam. On 31 January, General McConnell declared that "this vicious turn in the nature and conduct of the war must be met in kind with greater force than is permitted by our present policy of limited objectives with limited force." Consequently, he recommended removal of all geographic restrictions on military operations. The JCS considered this suggestion but decided to send a less sweeping recommendation to the Secretary of Defense. On 3 February, they urged that the existing five-mile prohibited and restricted areas around Hanoi and Haiphong

be eliminated. They recommended instead the establishment of "control" areas around the centers of these two cities with radii of three nautical miles (nm) for Hanoi and one and one-half nm for Haiphong. Strikes on targets within these circles would be permitted under close Washington control.[1]

On 6 February, President Johnson discussed this recommendation at his Tuesday lunch with his senior civilian and military advisers. General Wheeler pressed the case for increased bombing, noting that the hitherto prohibited areas around Hanoi and Haiphong contained targets of military value. These targets, he contended, could be struck without heavy collateral civilian casualties, although "this . . . does not bother me when I compare it with the organized death and butchery by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong during the last two weeks in South Vietnam." Secretary McNamara, then in his last weeks of office, predictably argued against the proposed attacks, declaring that "the price is high and the gain is low." His designated successor, Clark Clifford, who also attended the meeting, took the JCS side because the North Vietnamese had thus far rejected the San Antonio Formula. Secretary of State Rusk suggested striking fourteen previously authorized targets within the restricted areas that had not yet been attacked, a proposal Wheeler indicated was acceptable. President Johnson approved bombing of the fourteen targets and removed the five-mile limit but did not explicitly establish the proposed three- and one and one half-mile zones.[2]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to firmly resist suggestions that ROLLING THUNDER be curtailed. On 7 February 1968, the Joint Staff sent General Wheeler a critique of a study by the Institute for Defense Analyses that downgraded the effectiveness of the bombing campaign. The Joint Staff concluded that the authors of the study had produced misleading results by compartmentalizing the campaign and had ignored the cumulative effectiveness of an interdiction program unhampered by "vacillating restraints that permit and aid recuperation." On 19 February, the Joint Chiefs agreed that the Chairman would present their views on ROLLING THUNDER to higher authority "as the opportunity presented itself." They advocated conduct of armed reconnaissance within eight miles of the Chinese border and reaffirmed their view that the Hanoi-Haiphong control areas should be reduced.[3]

More Troops for MACV?

At the same time as they considered a strengthened air offensive, the Joint Chiefs of Staff faced the possible necessity of sending troop reinforcements to COMUSMACV. In doing so, they would have to persuade the President to break through the MACV strength ceiling he had established the previous year. Even more important, the Joint Chiefs would have to address the gravely depleted state of the US strategic reserves. Both to provide additional troops for Vietnam and to prepare for other contingencies, General Wheeler and his colleagues felt compelled to raise the politically

explosive issue of a reserve mobilization—an issue President Johnson had avoided since the start of major American combat operations in Southeast Asia.

On 5 February, J–5 submitted a list of forces available for rapid dispatch to Southeast Asia. It was a bleak picture. The only available Army unit in CONUS strategic reserve (apart from three heavy divisions committed to NATO, each of which required twelve weeks for mobilization) was the 82nd Airborne Division. The Marine Corps had available approximately one and one-third divisions/wings: elements of the 5th Division/3rd Wing in Pacific Command and the 2nd Division/Wing in Atlantic Command. All these forces, as well as those deployed overseas, had been stripped of skilled specialists and subjected to constant personnel turnover to sustain the units in South Vietnam, and their combat readiness had declined as a result. Even with these sacrifices, the Army and Marines barely could maintain their strength in Vietnam, and heavy Tet casualties had imposed demands for additional replacements. The Navy could supply five aircraft carriers and an equal number of cruisers, but only by drawing on forces required to support NATO. The Air Force had in CONUS reserve twelve tactical fighter squadrons, eight of which were Air National Guard units recently called to active duty in response to the USS Pueblo crisis in Korea. The J–5 pointed out that deployment of any of these meager forces would require a compensating mobilization of Reserve units to replenish the strategic reserve.[4]

After studying this paper, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to call for more information. On 7 February, they considered a somewhat more comprehensive study prepared by J–5. They agreed that any dispatch of reinforcements to MACV, which as yet had not requested any, would require mobilization of some reserve units and some change in rotation policies and other existing ground rules. On the following day, at the request of General Wheeler, J–5 prepared a study of the deployability status of the 82nd Airborne Division and of the 5th Marine Division/3rd Wing available in PACOM. J–5 concluded that the former could arrive in South Vietnam within 9 to 29 days after a deployment decision was made and the latter within 5 to 17 days, depending on various possible "mixes" of airlift.[5]

In General Wheeler's view, reserve mobilization had become essential, both to deal with the Communist offensive in Vietnam and to provide the United States with forces to respond to other possible contingencies. Early 1968 was a time of tension on several fronts. In Vietnam, General Westmoreland might need additional forces to counter a possible second wave of city attacks while holding Khe Sanh. Outside Southeast Asia, the Middle East was in turmoil following the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Even more ominous, late in 1966, North Korea had launched a campaign of pressure against South Korea and the US troops stationed there. Between May 1967 and January 1968, the North Koreans killed 15 American soldiers and wounded 65 in attacks south of the demilitarized zone. They also expanded commando, sabotage, and guerrilla actions in the south. During the summer of 1967, US Special Forces teams from Okinawa fought North Koreans in the

mountains of South Korea. This "second Korean War" culminated in January 1968, shortly before Tet, when the North Koreans launched an unsuccessful commando assault on the presidential residence in Seoul and captured at sea the American intelligence ship, USS *Pueblo*. The trouble in Korea raised the daunting possibility that the Seoul government would want to withdraw all or part of its two divisions and marine brigade in South Vietnam for home defense. Such action would create a need for forces, likely American, to replace them.[6]

In the light of these facts, General Wheeler was determined to bring the mobilization issue to a head with the President. To do so, he needed a substantial reinforcement request from General Westmoreland. However, as of early February 1968, the MACV commander had made no such request.

Westmoreland's hesitation to ask for additional troops stemmed from a number of sources. From the first days of the Tet offensive, Westmoreland, his field commanders, and his principal staff officers considered that the attack had failed and had represented the enemy's maximum effort—an assessment validated by subsequent events. In the MACV commander's view, the enemy might launch another, and probably weaker, wave of city attacks and remained a threat in northern I Corps. Nevertheless, Westmoreland was confident that his forces had "the strength, disposition, and are in the proper frame of mind to keep at the enemy and inflict even greater losses if he persists in the attack." In addition, about 25,000 men of the 525,000 provided for in Program Five had yet to arrive in South Vietnam. The MACV commander recognized that these troops, and those he had in hand, represented most of what the United States could provide without a reserve mobilization. Finally, Westmoreland was aware of President Johnson's desire to level off the American ground force commitment to Vietnam, and the general himself had gone on public record in support of that position. Under these circumstances, Westmoreland was not willing to make a major new troop request unless he received a signal from Washington that the administration would be receptive to such an initiative.[7]

Westmoreland's immediate post-Tet requests were modest and in line with administration policy as he understood it. On 3 February, in response to an inquiry from President Johnson, he asked for the accelerated issue of M16 rifles, M60 machine guns, and mortars to the ARVN. From US resources, he called for additional air transport squadrons and air drop equipment for resupply of Khe Sanh; for helicopters and reconnaissance aircraft to replace combat losses; and for earlier shipment of a Navy construction battalion already part of Program Five. He urged the administration to try to prevent any Korean withdrawals and to push forward negotiations, begun before Tet, for an additional Korean light division. In addition, the MACV commander suggested that the administration reconsider the project, initiated under Program Five, to replace 12,000 US military support personnel with Vietnamese civilians, claiming that local workers could not be relied upon in emergencies such as the Tet attacks.[8]

General Wheeler took the initiative in eliciting a reinforcement request from COMUSMACV. On 7 February (Washington time), during a telephone conversation, the Chairman learned that General Westmoreland was contemplating movement of the 101st Airborne Division, recently arrived in Vietnam, from III CTZ to meet the threat in I Corps. In a message to COMUSMACV later that day, General Wheeler suggested that the enemy buildup around Khe Sanh was intended to serve just such a purpose—to siphon off forces from the south, exposing the ARVN and Saigon to attack. To counter this enemy strategy, the Chairman suggested that reinforcements could be sent in the form of the 82nd Airborne Division and of approximately one-half of a Marine division. This would require lengthening tours in Vietnam and reducing the time between tours. Although such changes would not be popular, the US government, according to Wheeler, "is not prepared to accept a defeat in South Vietnam." "In summary," he concluded, "if you need more troops, ask for them."[9]

General Westmoreland only nibbled at the bait Wheeler had offered. Replying to the Chairman's message, Westmoreland agreed that General Wheeler's view of enemy strategy was logical and declared that it would be well to plan for the worst possible contingency—the loss of Khe Sanh, which would then have to be retaken. Therefore, Westmoreland "strongly urged" that plans be made to provide the 82nd Airborne and one-half Marine division of which General Wheeler had spoken. In the event of a setback in northern I CTZ, these reinforcements could make an amphibious landing somewhere in the area to eject the enemy. Surf conditions for such an effort would be favorable in April.[10]

In a second message, Westmoreland became more expansive. He furnished to Wheeler a preliminary list of "the additional resources required in the coming year if we are to achieve our national purpose in South Vietnam," predicated on the assumption "that the 525,000 force structure ceiling will be lifted." The MACV commander listed as "number one priority" more equipment for the South Vietnamese armed forces, including helicopters and armored personnel carriers, so that they could assume "a greater share of the burden of defeating the enemy." Second priority should go to securing the South Korean light division or a US equivalent for deployment to northern II Corps and prompt dispatch of the remaining Program Five forces. The shopping list also included an additional jet airfield near Hue/Phu Bai. Under the heading of "restoration of items eliminated by the 525,000 force structure ceiling," Westmoreland included an additional American infantry division, "particularly if operations in Laos are authorized," a four-battalion engineer group to help with post-Tet reconstruction, helicopter units to convert one of his infantry divisions into an airmobile division, additional air transport and fighter squadrons, and vessels to expand the Mobile Riverine Force in the Mekong Delta. He also repeated his recommendation that the civilianization program be curtailed.[11]

General Wheeler pressed the field commander for a more forceful recommendation. The Chairman instructed Westmoreland to set aside temporarily his larger program, since the administration could deal with only one major problem at a

time. Instead, Westmoreland should concentrate on "your immediate requirements stemming from the present situation in South Vietnam." Wheeler suggested that reinforcements might be desirable earlier than April, to assist in defense or pursuit. "I am not trying to sell you on the deployment of additional forces which in any event I cannot guarantee," he said. But, sensing that "the critical phase of the war is upon us," he did not believe that COMUSMACV should "refrain from asking for what you believe is required under the circumstances."[12]

On 9 February, the Joint Chiefs discussed with the President the possible deployment of the 82nd Airborne and part of a Marine division, to be accompanied by mobilization of 120,000 reservists and by legislative action to extend terms of service and to permit recall of individual reservists. Outgoing Secretary of Defense McNamara, his replacement, Clark Clifford, and other senior officials also were present. Questioned closely by President Johnson as to why General Westmoreland needed more men, General Wheeler described MACV's situation in more urgent terms than COMUSMACV had done up to that point. He emphasized the threat of a second wave of enemy attacks, Westmoreland's lack of in-theater reserves, and doubts as to whether the ARVN, battered in the initial Communist assaults, could hold together under renewed pressure. Linking reinforcements to mobilization, Wheeler warned President Johnson that deployment of the 82nd Airborne Division would leave the nation with "no readily deployable strategic reserves." "In all prudence," the Chairman declared, "I do not think we should deploy these troops without reconstituting our strategic reserves in the United States."[13]

The meeting ended with no decision. Later that day, Secretary McNamara asked General Wheeler to submit a tentative deployment plan for sending the entire reinforcement, plus two others of lesser scope, one for dispatching only the 82nd Airborne, another for sending only those Marine battalions available in CONUS. Neither of these smaller plans would require reserve mobilization or legislative action. Mr. McNamara stressed the difficulty of getting Congressional action, which would probably be preceded by "prolonged and divisive debate." He pointed out, moreover, that it was necessary to plan for the possibility of "substantial and perhaps widespread civil disorders" in the United States during the coming summer.[14]

The J–5 drew up the three plans and sent them to the Joint Chiefs on 10 February. The J–5 planners concluded that the most comprehensive plan, embracing both the 82nd Airborne and two-thirds of a Marine division, would be the most advantageous, but that it would require immediate callup of reserve component units at least comparable in size. The JCS considered the J–5 paper and sent it back for a revision that would indicate more clearly the support forces required for the proposed deployments and would stress the impact on the US world-wide force posture.[15]

Meanwhile, COMUSMACV remained lukewarm in his requests for reinforcements. On 9 February, in a long assessment of the enemy's strategy and his own situation, General Westmoreland declared that he "would welcome reinforcements at any time they can be made available." Even a "six-month loan" of additional troops

might "turn the tide to the point where the enemy might see the light or be so weakened that we could return them." Two days later, he declared that "additional forces from CONUS would be most helpful in permitting us to rapidly stabilize the current situation."[16]

Such language was not strong enough to sway the administration. On 11 February, at a White House meeting, President Johnson and his advisers considered General Westmoreland's message of 9 February. General Wheeler, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, Secretary-designate Clifford, and other officials were present. The conferees expressed confusion as to whether Westmoreland really was asking for reinforcements. Secretary Rusk quipped: "If General Westmoreland is requesting troops in this cable he has a poor colonel doing the drafting for him." McNamara and Wheeler both concluded that Westmoreland was not calling for more men and hence recommended that the 82nd Airborne and the Marines not be sent at that point. The other participants accepted their view. Summarizing the results for Westmoreland, General Wheeler declared that the conferees had concluded that "you could use additional US troop units, but you are not expressing a firm demand for them; in sum, you do not fear defeat if you are not reinforced."[17]

Before the MACV commander could reply to this message, the Joint Staff J–5 completed the revised deployment paper called for by the JCS. The paper again linked reinforcements to mobilization. J–5 recommended that measures be taken at once to prepare the 82nd Airborne and two-thirds of a Marine division for possible deployment, but that the decision on sending these units be deferred temporarily. Meanwhile, according to J–5, reserve units to replace the contemplated reinforcements should be called up and legislation should be sought to authorize recall of individual reservists and to extend terms of service for active duty personnel. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved this paper on 11 February and sent their conclusions to Secretary McNamara the following day.[18]

Early on 12 February, General Westmoreland, after additional backchannel prodding from General Wheeler, finally made an unequivocal statement that he "desperately" needed reinforcements to enable him to hold northern I CTZ without endangering other areas. The MACV commander pointed out that he was 25,000 troops short of his authorized ceiling of 525,000, which under existing deployment programs would not be reached until 1969. "I need these 525,000 troops now," he declared. He requested immediate deployment of two force packages: a Marine regiment and a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, with the remaining elements of those units to be sent later. The two immediate packages would amount to about 10,300 men and six maneuver battalions. "Time is of the essence," he declared, to ensure defeat of the enemy's offensive in northern I Corps and also "to capitalize on his losses by seizing the initiative in other areas." Westmoreland asked that the Secretary of Defense and the President be informed of his views, with which Ambassador Bunker concurred. In a further communication to General Wheeler, Westmoreland elaborated that "I am expressing a firm request for additional troops,

not because I fear defeat if I am not reinforced, but because I do not feel that I can fully grasp the initiative from the recently reinforced enemy without them."[19]

This message reached Washington, DC, early in the morning of 12 February. Informed of the message, Secretary McNamara at once telephoned the President and recommended sending the requested troops, but as an emergency supplement, not a permanent expansion over the 525,000 ceiling; and he opposed any call for reserves. Also that morning, the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed Westmoreland's appeal. They agreed to reconvene that afternoon, at which time the Army and Marine Corps would provide information on the impact of deployments to South Vietnam and on the minimum levels of reserve mobilization required to compensate.[20]

Before this subsequent meeting could be held, however, General Wheeler was summoned to the White House, to discuss the reinforcement request with President Johnson and his senior foreign policy advisers. Reflecting his earlier conversation with McNamara, the President ordered the dispatch to Vietnam as rapidly as possible of the brigade of the 82nd Airborne and the Marine regiment, to remain "for the period of the emergency only, not a permanent augmentation." All the advisers present concurred in this course of action. Following the decision, General Wheeler declared that "if you deploy these men there should be a call-up of the reserves"—at a minimum two brigades of the Army National Guard and elements of the 4th Marine Division. Johnson, however, postponed any decision on mobilization, merely asking Wheeler and McNamara to develop an agreed recommendation as to whom to call up. At 1600 on the 12th, the Chairman informed the Joint Chiefs of these decisions, set the deployments in motion, and directed the Joint Staff to prepare a study of the necessary reserve mobilization and legislative actions.[21]

The reinforcements deployed without delay. Moving by air and sea, the 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division and the 27th Marine Regimental Landing Team (RLT) had arrived in Vietnam by the end of the month. General Westmoreland used both units to strengthen northern I CTZ. Reflecting the parlous condition of the nation's strategic reserve, both units arrived in the theater in what Westmoreland described as "marginal shape," requiring a shakedown period before they could enter combat. To bring the 3rd Brigade up to strength, the Army was compelled to reduce the other two brigades of its parent division almost to cadre level. The Marine Corps hastily reshuffled personnel to bring the 27th RLT to combat strength and ultimately had to send over 900 Marines on second tours to Vietnam after less than the regulation two-year interval between war assignments.[22]

Up to this point, from General Wheeler's perspective, the President's decisions had merely worsened the problem of the strategic reserve. Six additional battalions were on the way to Vietnam, but they had come out of the already perilously diminished pool in the United States. Concerned about the political repercussions, President Johnson persisted in putting off a decision on calling up forces to replace those battalions and replenish the strategic reserve.

A Major Reinforcement Request

More concerned than ever about the strategic reserve, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to press the mobilization issue. On 13 February, J–5 submitted a report on the mobilization requirements created by the emergency reinforcement of MACV. To compensate, J–5 concluded, the administration should call up the following reserve units: two Army infantry brigades; one Marine regiment; one composite Marine aircraft group; and two Navy mobile construction battalions. A total of 46,300 reservists would have to be called immediately to active duty, and 137,000 more should be placed in readiness for probable mobilization. The Joint Chiefs approved this report the same day they received it and transmitted their conclusion to Secretary McNamara.[23]

Concurrently, McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs to study four possible courses of action consequent upon the emergency deployments to South Vietnam. These were: a) to defer any additional actions pending receipt of further information from COMUSMACV; b) to mobilize 40,000 reservists (which could be done without congressional action); c) to call up either 40,000 or 130,000 reservists and at the same time ask Congress to authorize additional personnel actions to strengthen the armed forces; d) in addition to course c, to submit supplemental appropriation requests for legislative approval.

On 15 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that further reinforcements to South Vietnam should be deferred until General Westmoreland asked for them, but they did not consent to delay in the mobilization of reserve units. They again recommended immediate call-up of 46,300 men and a concurrent request for authority to call individual reservists and to extend terms of service. They also urged prompt action to obtain financial authorization to support these recommendations.[24]

President Johnson, however, tended to favor one of Mr. McNamara's more moderate alternatives. On 16 February, the President's Special Assistant, Walt Rostow, told General Wheeler that, while no decision had been made, Mr. Johnson was considering a call-up of 40,000 reservists in units, plus a request to Congress for the necessary appropriations, but with no further action for the moment. Reporting this development to his colleagues, the Chairman directed the Joint Staff to study further actions to improve the US posture in Southeast Asia, indicating the rationale for the recommendation for authority to extend terms of service and to call up individual reservists.[25]

Before making any additional reinforcement and mobilization decisions, President Johnson dispatched General Wheeler to South Vietnam to assess the situation and MACV's longer-term military requirements. The purpose of the trip, Wheeler informed General Westmoreland, was "to get a comprehensive view of where we stand today," focusing on the outcome of the Tet offensive, the condition of friendly and enemy forces, and the capability of MACV's combined forces to accomplish their missions under current conditions. The administration, Wheeler declared

"must face up to some hard decisions in the near future regarding the possibility of providing you additional troops, recouping our strategic reserves in CONUS, and obtaining the necessary legislative support in terms of money and authorities." The Chairman indicated that President Johnson, Secretary McNamara, and soon-to-be Secretary Clifford would base those decisions largely on his findings.[26]

General Wheeler arrived in Saigon on 23 February, accompanied by Philip Habib of the State Department; Major General William E. Depuy, USA, the Chairman's Assistant for Counterinsurgency (SACSA); and a small staff. The Chairman, who had suffered a severe heart attack the previous year, seemed to his hosts at MACV to be haggard, nervous, and close to exhaustion. Conducted with minimal publicity, Wheeler's three-day visit was informal. At the Chairman's request, MACV omitted most of the briefings and trips to the field that were customary for such occasions. Except for a flight to Da Nang to meet with Generals Abrams and Cushman, Wheeler and his entourage spent all their time in Saigon conferring with General Westmoreland, his senior commanders and staff, and Ambassador Bunker. The Chairman also met with President Thieu, Vice President Ky, and the Chief of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff.[27]

During the course of the visit, Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland decided to prepare a reinforcement request much larger than anything previously discussed. As the generals saw it, this bold course of action would serve several purposes. It would provide MACV with ample reserves to counter any additional enemy nationwide offensives as well as make troops available for what General Westmoreland hoped would be expanded, more decisive operations, such as a drive into Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. At the same time, General Wheeler intended the request to advance his purpose of reconstituting the national strategic reserve by forcing the President to face the mobilization issue. According to a senior MACV staff officer privy to the generals' conversations, the Chairman stated that "we have to mobilize to handle long term small wars ... and multiple contingencies" and that "the President must act or we are all in trouble." For his part, Westmoreland "wants what he thinks he needs; no more discount jobs."[28]

Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland decided to call for forces adequate for both the worst and best contingencies. The worst would be a renewed and expanded enemy offensive, complete collapse of the South Vietnamese forces, and a South Korean withdrawal from Vietnam. The best would be continued South Vietnamese political stability and improved military performance plus authorization for US ground attacks into Laos, Cambodia, and southern North Vietnam. Wheeler and Westmoreland believed that the administration, in the crisis atmosphere created by the Tet attacks, would be receptive to proposals for such operations. They also expected Clark Clifford, who would replace McNamara within a couple of weeks, to be more supportive of military escalation than his predecessor. The moment thus seemed favorable for an attempt to reverse the President's tentative level-off decisions of late 1967.[29]

Wheeler and Westmoreland assembled a troop request that added up to more than 205,000 men over and above Program Five and the brigade and RLT deployed as "emergency" reinforcements in February. They divided these forces into three packages. The first, dubbed "Immediate, Priority One," would consist of a brigade of the 5th Mechanized Division and an armored cavalry regiment from the Army, the 5th Marine Division less one regimental landing team, eight Air Force tactical fighter squadrons (three part of Program Five), and various support units, all to be in Vietnam by 1 May 1968. The second package, "Immediate, Priority Two," to reach Vietnam by 1 September, would include the remainder of the 5th Mechanized Division, four fighter squadrons, and the South Korean light division, if it could be obtained. The third "Follow-on" package would consist of a US infantry division, three fighter squadrons, and more support units, to arrive in Vietnam by the end of 1968. Wheeler and Westmoreland recognized that provision of these forces would require a major reserve mobilization. Only the first package definitely was to go to Vietnam. The second and third were to deploy only if the military situation grew worse or President Johnson authorized an expansion of ground operations. Otherwise, they would serve General Wheeler's purpose of reconstituting the strategic reserve in the United States.[30]

In retrospect, both Westmoreland and Wheeler characterized this reinforcement request as more a contingency plan than a call for the actual dispatch of the full 205,000 additional US troops to Vietnam. General Westmoreland called the request a "contingency plan" rather than a "demand per se for the deployment of additional forces." It was, he added, a statement of "forces that would be required to accomplish approved military objectives," such as expanded operations outside South Vietnam. The requirements "would actually materialize only if certain objectives keyed to a new strategy were approved." Also using the term "contingency plan," General Wheeler emphasized that "the only firm request that Westmoreland really made was for the first increment; the second and third increments would have been deployed only on the decision of the President, in the light of circumstances that prevailed at that time."[31]

After a stop in Honolulu to discuss the reinforcement plan with Admiral Sharp, General Wheeler and his party flew on to Washington. Enroute, the Chairman on 27 February transmitted his report ahead of him to the capital. The following day, he discussed his conclusions and recommendations with President Johnson and his national security team.[32]

In his report and in discussion of it, General Wheeler made no mention of the contingent character of at least the second and third reinforcement packages, nor did he mention reconstituting the national reserve or expanding military operations in Southeast Asia. Instead, he gave the impression that General Westmoreland needed the entire 205,000 troops simply to repel another enemy offensive and regain lost ground in South Vietnam. The Chairman pictured the Tet offensive as coming close to success in many places, with the allies' victory margin "very very

small indeed." He predicted that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong would renew the attack with even greater force, suggesting that the US "must be prepared to encounter enemy use of longer range missiles or rockets . . . and limited use of enemy tactical air." The South Vietnamese forces had held together under the first assault and recouped many of their losses. However, their staying power against a renewed offensive was uncertain. General Westmoreland's US forces were in good shape and fighting well, but they were stretched thin and "he does not have a theater reserve." Under these circumstances, "If the enemy synchronizes his expected major attacks with increased pressure throughout the country, General Westmoreland's margin will be paper thin." "We can expect some cliff-hangers," Wheeler continued, "and with bad luck on weather or some local RVNAF failures [COMUSMACV] may suffer some reverses." The only alternative to the requested reinforcements, Wheeler told the President on 28 February, would be a decision "to be prepared to give up areas in lieu of more troops," specifically "the 2 northern provinces of South Vietnam."[33]

A Major Policy Review

On 29 February, General Wheeler informed General Westmoreland that "My report on the situation in South Vietnam and your force requirements touched off an intense discussion of where we stand and where we are going in the war." The Chairman's words were a masterpiece of understatement. Wheeler's report was a staggering blow to a politically beleaguered administration already shaken by the Tet assault. President Johnson and his advisers were dismayed by Wheeler's gloomy assessment of the Vietnam situation, which was in sharp contrast to the more reassuring reports they had been receiving from General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker. They were even more dismayed by the fact that Wheeler had confronted the administration with an apparent choice between military defeat and full-scale national mobilization in a presidential election year.[34]

Any effort to send major reinforcements to MACV, especially one calling for a wholesale reserve mobilization, was sure to spawn a host of political difficulties for the Johnson administration. Before the Tet offensive, American popular support for the war and for President Johnson's conduct of it already had been wavering. The assault itself elicited an initial public response of unity and resolution. However, that sentiment rapidly declined as Johnson—his own nerve shaken—made no personal effort to rally the nation. By late February and early March, public opinion polls recorded declining public confidence in victory in Vietnam and in the President's handling of the war.[35]

Even more troubling to the administration was the shock of the enemy offensive in the minds of many political leaders and molders of public opinion. To earlier doubters and a growing number of new ones, Tet had confirmed the falsity of

official claims of progress in Vietnam and made clear that the war was at best a stalemate and at worst a lost cause. Thus the *New York Times* declared that "the facts of life about the war have finally been made unmistakably clear to everyone in the United States, from President Johnson on down." Similarly, Senator Robert F. Kennedy proclaimed that events had "finally shattered the mask of official illusion," revealing the impossibility of a military solution. One of the worst blows to the administration came from the widely respected CBS news anchorman Walter Cronkite, "the most trusted man in America." On 27 February, after a two-week trip to Vietnam, Cronkite, a veteran World War II battlefield correspondent, concluded that the United States was "mired in stalemate" and that "the only rational way out would be to negotiate—not as victims, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to victory and democracy and did the best they could." He also termed the defense of Khe Sanh a symbol of "administrative intransigence and military miscalculation" and expressed doubt that the outpost could be held "if the North Vietnamese are determined to take it." Coincidentally, Cronkite's views were broadcast the same day General Wheeler forwarded his report.[36]

Understandably in this context, President Johnson reacted cautiously to Wheeler's recommendations. On 28 February, he appointed a task force, headed by incoming Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford, to examine afresh the reinforcement and mobilization issue as part of a major review of Vietnam policy and strategy. The committee, which included General Wheeler as well as General Maxwell Taylor and representatives of the State, Defense, and Treasury Departments, was instructed to report to the President by 4 March on the military implications of five possible courses of action. The five courses of action were: 1) to honor COMUSMACV's request as submitted; 2) to do so, but with accompanying stipulations that the forces would not be employed in Cambodia, Laos (except as already authorized), or North Vietnam, that no further increase in US forces would be contemplated, and that ROLLING THUNDER would not be expanded; 3) to maintain forces at the present Program Five level (525,000 spaces plus the units deployed during February); 4) to increase the present level by 50,000; and 5) to increase it by 100,000.[37]

General Wheeler marshaled military support for alternative One. He asked General Westmoreland to consider the feasibility of changes in US political and military objectives and of alternative military strategies that could be implemented by smaller forces than those he had requested. The MACV commander replied that, in his opinion, existing objectives in Vietnam were sound. The reinforcements he was seeking, he declared, were needed to restore flexibility to his command, which had been stretched thin by the Tet attacks and the concentration of enemy troops in northern I CTZ. If suitably enlarged, his forces could expand and intensify offensive operations against opposing units, base areas, and infiltration routes, maintaining pressure against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese in all corps tactical zones to hinder their recovery from their recent defeat. Without reinforcements, Westmoreland would need to continue to accept a calculated risk in II and III CTZs, which

had become "economy of force" areas, and would not be able to maintain constantly a division-size force in IV CTZ (as had been done before the Khe Sanh threat had necessitated a northward shift of forces). In justifying the additional forces, Westmoreland thus took a less urgent tone than Wheeler had sounded in Washington.[38]

Admiral Sharp endorsed COMUSMACV's troop request, but pointed out that the proposed reinforcement could not at once affect the situation. Returning to his favorite theme, Sharp urged a major step-up in the air war against North Vietnam, to be followed by "a combined amphibious and air mobile campaign" against the north "as early as the weather and the current situation permits." On 9 March 1968, Admiral Sharp reported that, in accordance with his instructions, General Westmoreland had submitted plans for such an assault into North Vietnam just above the Demilitarized Zone, followed by a drive southward through the DMZ to destroy enemy forces and materiel. CINCPAC requested authority to conduct this operation, codenamed DURANGO CITY, on or about 1 June.[39]

Studies by the Joint Staff supported both the full reinforcement and enlargement of the sphere of military operations. In two examinations made at the Chairman's direction, J–5 emphatically endorsed the first of the five options under consideration by the Clifford committee. J–5's Southeast Asia Branch concluded that the initiation of a strategic ground offensive in North Vietnam, coupled with the expansion of the existing strategic air and naval campaigns "would hasten the accomplishment of US objectives in South Vietnam and successfully conclude the war." Similarly, the Short Range Branch of J–5 judged that implementation of Option One "will greatly reduce risks to Free World Forces in South Vietnam and will accomplish US objectives more rapidly than the forces of the other options" and recommended that "restraints on military operations in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam be removed." Reviewing this latter paper, the Army Chief of Staff registered a partial dissent. General Johnson wrote to General Wheeler that, while he supported the force levels recommended in Option One, he did not approve the advocacy of expanded ground operations outside South Vietnam. "The guidance for consideration of the option did not include a change in basic national objective nor alter political guidance in any way," he pointed out. Consequently, General Johnson believed, the strategy pursued by CINCPAC and COMUSMACV must continue to fall within the limits of current political guidance until that guidance was changed.[40]

The Clifford committee heard other influential voices in opposition to the 205,000-man reinforcement. Besides the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State and Treasury Departments, the Central Intelligence Agency, and Defense Department civilians provided analyses and policy papers to the committee. In the main, those papers repeated arguments made in earlier reinforcement debates, to the effect that the North Vietnamese easily could neutralize any number of additional American troops by sending in much smaller numbers of their own. Hence, sending more American soldiers would increase US casualties and war costs and have

divisive political effects at home without producing decisive military results. If American military objectives in Vietnam could not be achieved with the existing force levels, the dissenters argued, COMUSMACV should be assigned the limited mission of protecting populated areas while the United States exerted its efforts to build up the Saigon government and its armed forces to enable them to assume the burden of the war. Civilian opinion thus inclined toward a reaffirmation of the pre-Tet level-off policy.[41]

Contrary to the hopes and expectations of Wheeler and Westmoreland, the new Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford, became a convert to the cause of de-escalation. A Washington lawyer well connected in business and politics and a long-time friend and adviser of President Johnson, Clifford on various occasions had expressed "hawkish" views on Vietnam. However, as he assumed his Defense post, he had begun to have doubts about the war. During his committee's deliberations, he was much influenced by several Defense Department civilians, former McNamara assistants, notably Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs Paul Warnke. These men and others of like mind reinforced Clifford's growing conviction that further military escalation would be futile, and they dominated the drafting of the Clifford committee's recommendations. Clifford himself emerged from the policy review with the conclusion that the war was probably unwinnable and that its costs to the United States—strategic, economic, political, and social—had become excessive in relation to the stakes involved. The United States, Clifford decided, should "level off our involvement . . . and work toward gradual disengagement" through negotiations. From then on, he consistently advocated that position in administration councils.[42]

The Clifford committee forwarded its recommendations to the President on 4 March. The committee proposed the immediate deployment of about 22,000 reinforcements over and above the Program Five level, which could be done from existing resources. In addition, the administration should mobilize enough reservists, some 262,000, to improve the strategic reserve and make forces available to grant COMUSMACV's full request if the President ultimately decided to do so. Along with increased draft calls and extension of terms of service, which the committee also favored, these measures would increase the FY 1969 end strength of the armed forces by 511,000 men.

That was as far, however, as the committee would go toward escalation. Beyond the 22,000 immediate reinforcements, a decision on deploying the rest of the 205,000 should be deferred, contingent upon a "week-by-week" review of the situation in South Vietnam. At the insistence of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who opposed any imposition of military tactics on the field commander, the committee proposed no new guidance for the ground campaign. Instead, it called for "a study in depth, to be initiated immediately, of possible new political and strategic guidance for the conduct of US operations in South Vietnam, and of our Vietnamese policy in the context of our world-wide politico-military strategy." Such a study

should precede any larger deployment of reinforcements. The committee urged in addition a "highly forceful" effort to obtain from the Saigon government "certain key commitments for improvement, tied to our own increased effort and to increased US support for the ARVN."

On the question of ROLLING THUNDER, the committee reported itself divided. Some members, notably General Wheeler, sought a substantial expansion of targets and bombing authority in and near Hanoi and Haiphong, including the mining of Haiphong harbor, and the extension of coastal naval operations up to a Chinese border buffer zone. Other members favored nothing more than a "seasonal step-up" in air operations through the spring. With regard to negotiating options, the committee was united in doubting that Hanoi would be prepared for a "serious move toward peace" in the near future, except on its own terms. The members therefore recommended that the San Antonio formula remain as the "rock bottom" US negotiating position. Any change in the terms appeared to be "extremely unwise" at present.[43]

In sum, Clifford and his associates restated much of Secretary McNamara's pre-Tet position. They came down in favor of sending the modest reinforcements that were readily available, renewing the effort to turn more of the fight over to the South Vietnamese, and keeping ROLLING THUNDER about as it was. They postponed the issue of changing US ground strategy in South Vietnam.

Program Six for MACV

The Clifford committee's recommendations were in harmony with President Johnson's already well established inclination to level off the American effort in Vietnam. Hence, although Johnson did not at once render a formal decision, it soon became clear that the committee's recommendations regarding reinforcements would be generally followed. On 5 March, at the President's direction, General Wheeler informed General Westmoreland that he was unlikely to receive any reinforcements beyond the 22,000 Clifford proposed; in effect, the 205,000 request was dead. In addition, the Chairman informed the MACV commander that there was "tremendous interest" in Washington in MACV's plans for strengthening the RVNAF. On 8 March, the President increased the planned reinforcement to 30,000 men upon learning that the services could furnish that many. These were in addition to the emergency regiment and brigade sent in February, considered to be on temporary loan to MACV, and to the Program Five units still in the process of deployment. Johnson also cancelled the decision to "civilianize" 12,545 of MACV's military spaces, thus raising the approved Program Five ceiling to 537,545. To provide these forces, the administration planned to mobilize nearly 100,000 reservists.[44]

On the basis of these decisions, and of a list furnished by General Wheeler of available units that could be deployed by 15 June 1968, MACV developed a troop

list built around an Army infantry brigade (to replace the 27th RLT), an Army mechanized brigade, an Army armored cavalry squadron, a Military Police battalion, and four tactical fighter squadrons. At Secretary Clifford's direction, MACV planners excluded Marine ground units from the package, because the Corps at its existing strength could not sustain any additional forces in Vietnam. Approved by the President on 13 March, the reinforcement was dubbed Program Six.[45]

Program Six soon underwent a major reduction, primarily as the result of an inflamed domestic political environment and an international economic crisis. On the home front, General Wheeler informed Westmoreland on 8 March, there was "strong resistance from all quarters to putting more ground force units in South Vietnam." A call-up of reserves and concomitant actions, the Chairman declared, "will raise unshirted hell in many quarters. . . ." One such quarter was the US Senate, where a revolt against further escalation seemed imminent. In the course of an 8 March floor debate, Robert Kennedy proclaimed that it had become "immoral and intolerable to continue the way we are" in Vietnam. Senator William Fulbright demanded that the President consult Congress before making any further decisions. He also announced that the Tonkin Gulf resolution was a "contract based on misrepresentation" and therefore "null and void."[46]

The tone of public discussion became more shrill on 10 March, when the *New York Times* published details of the 205,000-man reinforcement request—ironically after it was all but dead—and of the administration's internal policy debates. Newspaper and congressional criticism was immediate and strong. The *New York Times* editorially denounced the proposal as "suicidal escalation" and called for abandonment of this "bankrupt policy." The paper accused the administration of pushing the American people "beyond the limits of gullibility." In the Senate, Democrats and Republicans alike condemned the troop request as a disastrous and futile escalation of a war that was already all but lost. Echoing Walter Cronkite's conclusion, NBC News broadcast a special program alleging that the US had lost the military initiative in South Vietnam and was on the way to losing the war. On 12 March, Senator Eugene McCarthy, running for the Democratic presidential nomination on an anti-war platform, came within a few hundred votes of defeating President Johnson in the New Hampshire primary. The day after the primary, a Gallup poll showed that 69 percent of all Americans, regardless of party affiliation, favored a phased US withdrawal from Vietnam as soon as the South Vietnamese could be trained and equipped to take over the fighting.[47]

At this juncture, a sudden financial crisis was added to the administration's troubles. On 13 March, the London gold market suspended trading amid intense speculation. The international monetary system seemingly stood on the brink of collapse, a victim of the Vietnam War and of Congress's refusal to approve a tax increase, which had resulted in growing federal fiscal deficits. The troop request would produce still greater budgetary strains, and for that reason some observers considered its fulfillment an economic impossibility. General Wheeler told General

Westmoreland on 16 March that the fiscal crisis and the troop deployment issue together had "placed the Government in as difficult a situation as I have seen in the past five years." The Chairman further cautioned Westmoreland not to reveal to anyone that the situation "is as serious as I think it is." At an emergency conference in Washington, the United States and six western European nations agreed on measures to stabilize the price of gold. However, the larger problem of taxes, budgets, and deficits remained to be settled.[48]

Under these pressures, the administration sharply reduced Program Six. On 22 March, Johnson and his advisers decided to drop the 30,000-man reinforcement. Instead, they would allow Westmoreland to retain the two units shipped in February or their equivalents and would send in addition about 13,500 troops needed to support those units. To compensate for this deployment, the administration would mobilize about 62,000 reservists. President Johnson based his decision, he declared later, on reported improvements in the military situation in Vietnam, on less alarmist views of the state of the ARVN, on the US government's fiscal difficulties, and on the impossibility of overcoming domestic opposition to further expansion of the American commitment.[49]

Before announcing this decision, President Johnson sent General Wheeler back across the Pacific to obtain General Westmoreland's assent to it. At a hurriedly arranged meeting on 24 March at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, Wheeler, who had kept the MACV commander informed of the deteriorating US domestic situation, told Westmoreland that a major reinforcement and expansion of ground operations were out of the question. By this time, most of the dire fears of February had dissipated. No second wave offensive had occurred; the North Vietnamese had not assaulted Khe Sanh; the South Vietnamese forces were in good condition; the South Koreans had not asked to withdraw their divisions; pacification in the countryside was still alive; and the enemy had suffered severe losses at Tet, not only of troops but of hard-to-replace underground cadres. Westmoreland, accordingly, told Wheeler that under these circumstances he could carry out his mission provided that he could keep the brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division and the 27th RLT or replacements for them, and provided he received all his Program Five troops along with the 13,500 extra men to support the two brigade equivalents that had arrived in February.[50]

General Wheeler returned to Washington, accompanied by Westmoreland's designated successor, General Creighton D. Abrams, USA, and presented this conclusion to President Johnson at a White House meeting on 26 March. Meanwhile, Westmoreland sent a message announcing that, in the light of the improved situation after the defeat of the Tet Offensive and the strong showing of the RVNAF, he could cut back his estimated requirements for the immediate future. He asked for retention of the two units shipped in February (or their equivalents), the three tactical fighter squadrons still due under Program Five, two more TFS, one armored cavalry squadron, and additions to the Navy Mobile Riverine Force. The MACV

commander believed that these reinforcements, with the forces already available, would "provide us the means necessary to contain further enemy initiated actions while continuing forward progress in most areas." They would be adequate for any eventuality other than "heavy enemy reinforcements from the north."[51]

As finally approved in early April, Program Six—the last reinforcement program for MACV—established a new troop ceiling of 549,500—an increase of 24,500 over Program Five. Approximately 11,250 men of the increase would be combat troops. This figure included the reinforcements already in Vietnam (the 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, to be converted to a separate light infantry brigade, and the 27th Marine RLT, to be replaced by an Army mechanized brigade), plus an armored cavalry squadron and two TFS. The remainder consisted of engineer, artillery, and other support units, and constituted COMUSMACV's principal net gain under Program Six. The new ceiling assumed that the "civilianization" program would go forward as originally planned, starting in September 1968. Other elements of Program Six included deployment of three TFS authorized under Program Five but not yet sent; an increase in the B–52 sortie rate from 1,200 to 1,800 per month for the period March–June 1968 and 1,400 per month thereafter; and increased allowances for air ordnance consumption and for replacement of fixed-wing and helicopter aircraft losses based on recent experience and the added Program Six deployments.[52]

The revised service ceilings under Program Six were as follows:[53]

Service	*Program 5*	*Program 6 Add-On*	*Program 6 Total*
Army	348,896	19,692	368,588
Navy	35,447	1,775	37,222
Air Force	58,977	2,540	61,517
Marines	81,680	493	82,173
Total	525,000	24,500	549,500

Such was the meager result of the reinforcement maneuver instigated by General Wheeler, with General Westmoreland as a willing accomplice. The JCS Chairman and the MACV commander had sought to break through the Program Five troop ceiling, secure a major mobilization to rebuild the national strategic reserve, and obtain authorization for expanded military operations in Southeast Asia. Instead, they brought about the reverse of what they intended. The administration had reaffirmed the pre-Tet level-off decision, with a slightly higher

manpower ceiling and with only a limited reserve call-up. More than that, by making a huge reinforcement request and justifying it by painting an ominous picture of the situation in South Vietnam, General Wheeler had strengthened the conviction among President Johnson's advisers, notably Secretary Clifford, that the war could not be won and was costing too much for the stakes involved. As a result, sentiment grew for moving toward de-escalation and a negotiated settlement. This effect was evident in the debate, which ran concurrently with that over reinforcements, about overall political and military strategy and the future of ROLLING THUNDER.

The Policy Decision

Announcement of even the limited reserve mobilization requisite for Program Six was certain to fuel the flames of controversy raging in Congress and the news media over the Vietnam War. Therefore, President Johnson and his advisers needed to balance the call-up with a statement of broader strategy and with reassurance that the administration was seeking a way to end the conflict. Almost inevitably, the search for a new political initiative centered on proposals to cut back the bombing of North Vietnam as a gesture toward peace.

Former Secretary of Defense McNamara had advocated such a course of action throughout his last year in office. On 5 March 1968, Secretary of State Rusk revived the issue. In a memorandum to Secretary Clifford, Rusk suggested that the President might announce that bombing attacks henceforth would be "limited to those areas which are integrally related to the battlefield" without demanding any preconditions from Hanoi. ROLLING THUNDER would continue "presumably as far north as Vinh." Full bombing could resume in the event of either a major attack on Khe Sanh or a second wave of assaults against the cities. The advantage of this course of action was that it "would shift away from the logical debates about words and put the problem on the de facto level of action. If Hanoi took no corresponding military action, the bombing would be resumed." Secretary of Defense Clifford, however, in spite of his own interest in extricating the United States from the war, objected to Rusk's proposal, arguing that the US should insist on some specific quid pro quo for limiting the bombing of North Vietnam. The members of Clifford's committee were divided on the issue between those, including General Wheeler, who favored heavier bombing and those who supported keeping ROLLING THUNDER about as it was.[54]

Discussions continued throughout March, as successive political blows fell upon the administration. At mid-month, the outcome of the debate still seemed highly uncertain. On 16 March, General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that, although there was little hope for approval of mining Haiphong harbor, the long-standing JCS request to reduce the Hanoi and Haiphong control areas to 3 and 1.5 nm respectively

"appears to stand a good chance of approval." Simultaneously, the Department of State asked Ambassador Bunker's opinion of proposals that the United States discontinue or sharply limit ROLLING THUNDER. Bunker replied that these proposals were most unwise. They would raise doubts among the South Vietnamese about US intentions, feed the latent anti-Americanism that the Viet Cong were exploiting, and endanger the post-Tet "new mood of unity and anti-Communism" in the country.[55]

As March wore on, however, the tide turned toward a pause. By the 22nd, as he planned a speech to the nation announcing the Program Six reinforcement and reserve call-up, President Johnson was inclined to include in the address a scaling back of ROLLING THUNDER. On the 20th, Secretary Clifford, in a memorandum to General Wheeler, asked the Chairman what the military effect would be of the cessation "for a specific period of time" of bombing in the Hanoi/Haiphong area or north of 20 degrees North Latitude. Wheeler replied that operations against the northern route packages would be restricted by bad weather to little more than harassing attacks until about 15 April. Hence, if the US stopped bombing north of 20 degrees "during the period from now through 15 April 1968," it would be "giving up relatively little military effect on the enemy." This memo expressed only the Chairman's views. The other Joint Chiefs were not consulted at this time about a bombing cut-back.[56]

A key development in the course of presidential decision was a meeting of his Senior Informal Advisory Group on 25–26 March. Nicknamed the "Wise Men," members of this group included former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, George Ball, Arthur Dean, McGeorge Bundy, Cyrus Vance, and Douglas Dillon and retired Generals Ridgeway, Taylor, and Bradley. On 25 March, the group, along with a number of high government officials, met at the State Department for a series of briefings on Vietnam. Major General DePuy (SACSA) described the military situation and Mr. George Carver, of the Central Intelligence Agency, reviewed the state of internal security. Mr. Phil Habib, of the State Department, discussed South Vietnam's political situation, while Mr. William Bundy, of the same department, appraised the prospects for negotiations. The general tone of the briefings was not optimistic.[57]

On the following day, the members met with the President. Generals Wheeler and Abrams also were present. Dean Acheson summed up the group's majority view, declaring that "we can no longer do the job we set out to do in the time we have left and we must begin to take steps to disengage." The majority of the group favored at least a reduction of ROLLING THUNDER, and they opposed any major troop increase. This verdict represented a reversal of opinion for most of the members of the group; hence, it had considerable impact on the President. However, since Johnson already had decided to include a bombing cutback in his speech, the advice of the "Wise Men" probably was not the decisive factor determining Johnson's course.[58]

By 27 March at the latest, President Johnson had made a firm decision to couple the announcement of Program Six and the reserve mobilization with a new initiative for peace in the form of a cessation of bombing in North Vietnam above the

twentieth parallel. This action would allow the US to continue air attacks on enemy forces and supply routes north of the DMZ while avoiding the public controversy aroused by raids on Hanoi and Haiphong. The President revealed this decision to Congressional leaders before announcing it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, although General Wheeler had been aware of the proposal at least since 20 March. Secretary Clifford explained the decision to the entire JCS at a meeting on the 29th, and the President repeated it to them at the White House the following day.[59]

As General Wheeler later explained to Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, President Johnson based his decision on the following considerations: 1) Public support for the war had decreased alarmingly since the Tet offensive. 2) Weather over North Vietnam would be unfavorable for air operations during the next 30 days. 3) Announcement of a US peace initiative might reverse the growth of domestic dissent and opposition, and would aid in countering foreign criticism. 4) President Thieu of South Vietnam had been consulted and agreed to the limitation of bombing.[60]

In their meeting with Secretary Clifford on 29 March, the Joint Chiefs had their one chance to comment as a group on the bombing pause decision. Mr. Clifford explained that the President would announce a pause in bombing above the 20th parallel, "which, if followed by reciprocal action on the other side, could lead to a cessation of bombing of North Vietnam and negotiations." The Defense Secretary emphasized that the length of the pause would be uncertain, but he added that weather would limit air action through the end of April and that sorties not flown north of the 20th parallel would be employed in southern North Vietnam and Laos. The "principal object" of the pause, Clifford declared, "would be to broaden the base of domestic support for our policy and to put the monkey on the back of the other side."

General Wheeler and the other Chiefs then gave their views. Although reluctant in principal to ease pressure on the enemy, the Chairman repeated his earlier statement that a temporary pause would have "negligible" adverse effect on US military capabilities or the allies' morale. However, he was concerned about "the question of resumption after a pause." The Army Chief of Staff, General Johnson, expressed uneasiness about the effect of the pause on South Vietnamese morale, as well as fear that the announcement of the action "would lead people to believe we had decided to leave the war." Speaking for the Chief of Naval Operations, who was absent, Admiral Bernard Clarey, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations also was concerned about what the US would do if the enemy failed to respond to the pause: "to go back and merely do more of the same would seem to him not to be enough." General McConnell observed that "if the US public had rallied to the cause,... we should have gone harder against the North." However, in view of the situation as it was, McConnell "supports the President's decision and will see to it that the Air Force as a whole does." The newly installed Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Leonard F. Chapman, feared that the pause would have adverse

effects on the morale of Marines fighting at the DMZ and questioned "whether the will of Americans would be strengthened by a weaker position."

In the end, in response to a direct question from Clifford, all the Joint Chiefs agreed that they would support the President's decision. Generals Wheeler, McConnell, and Chapman felt that "in view of all the circumstances, the President's position was an appropriate one." General Johnson said that he would support the decision. However, "if asked in a Congressional hearing as to whether he had proposed the action, he would reply in the negative, and if asked for his personal views, he would have to express the doubts he had in his mind." At the conclusion of the meeting, Secretary Clifford "asked whether any of the Chiefs ... desired to express their views directly to the President or whether they would rely upon his, Mr. Clifford's, presentation of their views...." All the Joint Chiefs "agreed that they saw no necessity for their seeing the President."[61]

The President's Speech of 31 March 1968

Addressing the nation on 31 March 1968, President Johnson proclaimed to the world his willingness "to move immediately toward peace through negotiations." As a step in that direction, he announced that he was "taking the first step to de-escalate the conflict" by unilaterally reducing the level of hostilities. "Tonight," he said, "I have ordered our aircraft and our naval vessels to make no attacks on North Vietnam, except in the area north of the demilitarized zone where the continuing enemy buildup directly threatens allied forward positions and where the movements of their troops and supplies are clearly related to that threat." Mr. Johnson did not delimit the precise area in which attacks would continue. He pointed out, however, that the area in which the US was stopping air strikes "includes almost 90 percent of North Vietnam's population and most of its territory." In addition, the President promised that "even this very limited bombing of the North could come to an early end if our restraint is matched by restraint in Hanoi."

Continuing with his peace theme, the President announced that the United States was "ready to send its representatives to any forum, at any time, to discuss means of bringing this ugly war to an end." For this purpose, he designated Ambassador Averell Harriman as his "personal representative for such talks." He called on North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh to "respond positively and favorably" to his overture. At the same time, he made it clear that the US objective in South Vietnam had not been changed. The goal, Mr. Johnson said, was not the "annihilation of the enemy," but rather the creation of conditions that would permit the people of South Vietnam "to chart their course free of any outside domination or interference, from us or from anyone else."

Turning to the military program, the President told his hearers that approximately 11,000 men had been sent to South Vietnam on an emergency basis a few

weeks earlier. Now, he continued, support forces totaling 13,500 troops would be added over the next five months, in accord with JCS recommendations. Some of these men would be drawn from Reserve units that were to be called up for service. Mr. Johnson did not indicate the number of reservists to be mobilized. He estimated that actions taken since the beginning of the year to strengthen US forces in South Vietnam (and also those in Korea), and to build up the RVNAF, would require an additional $2.5 billion in expenditures in the current fiscal year and $2.6 billion in the following year.

President Johnson saved for the end of his speech the most moving and dramatic announcement of all. He informed the American people that "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President." He thus renounced further political ambitions, he said, in order to advance the cause of national unity and put an end to the ugly spirit of divisiveness that was developing in the nation. "What we won when all of our people united," Mr. Johnson declared, "just must not now be lost in suspicion, distrust, selfishness, and politics among any of our people." As he searched for peace, the President concluded, "I should not permit the Presidency to become involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year. . . ."[62]

In retrospect, President Johnson's decisions of 31 March marked the beginning of a steady process of American disengagement from Vietnam. At the time, the future direction was not so certain. Johnson's decisions of late March were incremental, intended as much to regain public support for carrying on the war rather than to bring about the conflict's termination. On the reinforcement issue, the administration essentially affirmed its 1967 decision to level off American troop strength in Vietnam at a point just below that requiring mobilization and to devote more attention and resources to building up the South Vietnamese forces so that they could take over the fighting. On ROLLING THUNDER, the President had directed only a partial suspension that the Joint Chiefs hoped would be short-lived. Nevertheless, the March decisions, arising out of the shock and dismay generated by the Tet offensive, constituted for practical purposes an American abandonment of hope for real victory in South Vietnam. From then on, the objective became extrication on acceptable terms.

Without intending to, America's military leaders contributed to this change of course. In this respect, the decisive action was General Westmoreland's request, elicited by General Wheeler, for 205,000 reinforcements. By making the request, Wheeler and Westmoreland at once nullified the MACV commander's claims of victory in the Tet battles and confronted the administration with a set of unwelcome choices: on the one hand, further escalation at unacceptable domestic political and economic cost with no guarantee of victory, and on the other, a major scaling down of objectives and operations. While the generals had sought to move the administration toward the first course, they in fact contributed heavily to driving it onto the second. They had helped to bring about a turning point in the war, but not in the direction they desired.

12

De-escalation and the Quest for Talks

Implementing the Bombing Restrictions

On the evening of 30 March, upon receiving the President's order to limit the bombing of North Vietnam to the area south of the 20th parallel, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff went immediately to his office to dispatch a brief "execute" order to CINCPAC. General Wheeler directed Admiral Sharp to discontinue all ROLLING THUNDER strikes north of 20 degrees beginning at 0800, 1 April, Saigon time (1900, 31 March, Washington time), two hours before the beginning of the President's nation-wide address. Photo and visual reconnaissance was still permitted above the 20th parallel, but the flights no longer could include armed escorts. The restriction against escorted reconnaissance missions did not apply to the Gulf of Tonkin beyond the twelve nautical mile territorial limit claimed by North Vietnam.[1]

In subsequent messages to Admiral Sharp, General Wheeler defined the objective of the curtailed ROLLING THUNDER program and expressed his view of the military consequences of the President's unilateral de-escalatory measure. The objective, Wheeler declared, was "the maximum destruction and disruption of [North Vietnamese] NVN support of their combat forces." To this end, air strikes in the area below the 20th parallel would be concentrated against troop and supply movements, as well as against any enemy activity that posed a threat to friendly forces. The long-standing prohibition against attacks on targets in populated areas, however, remained in force. Reflecting upon the military effects of the bombing reduction, the Chairman concluded that these would be negligible, at least for the

next thirty days, since weather over the northern route packages would be unsuitable for air operations throughout the month of April.[2]

Minutes after transmitting his orders to CINCPAC limiting operations in North Vietnam, General Wheeler sent another message to COMUSMACV conveying the President's instructions for operations in the south. Here, the message was to keep up all possible offensive pressure on the enemy. General Westmoreland was to continue his efforts to regain the initiative after the Tet offensive. Among these actions was Operation PEGASUS, MACV's planned large-scale operation to relieve Khe Sanh, which was scheduled to begin on 31 March, the same day the bombing restrictions were to take effect. These instructions were in keeping with President Johnson's intention to assume a strong fight-and-talk posture during any negotiations that might materialize with North Vietnam.[3]

Predictably, Admiral Sharp expressed objections to General Wheeler's order to restrict ROLLING THUNDER operations even as he executed the directive. He was annoyed at the short notice he had been given of the policy change. "Again," he said, "I have been caught completely unaware of an impending major change of policy on the air war.... Frankly I simply cannot understand why I am not forewarned of the possibility of such important decisions." Sharp also was concerned because the President's decision went against his repeated recommendations that ROLLING THUNDER be expanded as the weather over the north improved. Had his recommendations been given any consideration at all? Finally, Admiral Sharp inquired as to whether or not the thirty-day time period General Wheeler had mentioned in his assessment of the consequences of the restriction was intended to indicate the actual duration of the bombing curb.[4]

Seeking to mollify Admiral Sharp, General Wheeler replied that he had informed the Pacific commander of the President's decision as soon as he received it himself. He went on to assure Sharp that he and the Service chiefs had not only given serious attention to the admiral's ROLLING THUNDER recommendations but also had approved them and intended to present them again to higher authority as soon as events would permit. With regard to the duration of the restrictions, however, the Chairman had bad news for Sharp. He told the admiral that he could not be certain when the limits would be lifted, if at all. Hanoi's response to the President's peace overture, when and if it came, would have a major influence on this matter. At the conclusion of this message, General Wheeler explained to Admiral Sharp that the President, in his speech, had not specified the exact line of demarcation for the bombing limitation. According to Wheeler, the President intended the 20th parallel as the boundary, as was mentioned in the "execute" order, but he had omitted it from his speech in order to keep the information from the enemy.[5]

Although the President had not revealed the exact dimensions of the bombing reduction in his 31 March address, he had privately informed several foreign nations, including the Soviet Union, of the actual demarcation line. Nevertheless, by avoiding a public commitment to the limitation, President Johnson could retain

flexibility in the bombing of North Vietnam, allowing an expansion of ROLLING THUNDER if the situation warranted it.[6]

Whatever the President's intentions, the 20 degree line quickly became public via a Senate debate. On 1 April, a UPI story from Saigon reported a US air strike against the city of Thanh Hoa, located more than two hundred miles from the DMZ although still below the 20th parallel. The next day in the Senate, Senator Fulbright, who had believed the new bombing line to be much closer to the DMZ, claimed that he had been misled as to the dimensions of the restriction. He criticized the President's peace gesture as inadequate, a "very limited step" and one "not calculated to bring a response from North Vietnam." In response, Senator Mike Mansfield (D, Montana), primed by a telephone conversation with President Johnson and Secretary Clifford, for the first time publicly revealed the 20th parallel as being the demarcation line for the bombing and pointed out that Thanh Hoa was within the authorized area. Mansfield declared that the President's vagueness on the limitation stemmed from his wish to avoid giving the enemy a clear sanctuary and not from a desire to deceive his critics. Mansfield added that, while he had personally preferred a greater restriction on the bombing than the President had ordered, it was nevertheless a substantial concession and a serious bid for a negotiated peace.[7]

The administration followed up Mansfield's revelation with its own public explanation. At 1650 EST on 2 April, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Phil Goulding released a statement to the effect that attacks on North Vietnam were continuing "from the twentieth parallel just north of Thanh Hoa, south to the DMZ," the area where, as the President had said on 31 March, "the movements of their troops and supplies are clearly related to the threat against allied forward positions." Goulding emphasized that the region of North Vietnam freed from attack by the President contained almost 90 percent of the country's population and three fourths of its land. In addition, he stated, bombing since 31 March had been directed "primarily against targets in the southernmost areas of the panhandle." Ninety percent of the sorties had been "within 60 miles of the DMZ while only 2.3 percent were against targets in the Thanh Hoa area."[8]

As an additional measure to calm the public furor, at about the same time Mr. Goulding was making his statement, General Wheeler sent a message to Admiral Sharp. The Chairman directed a forty-eight hour postponement of a strike against the Thanh Hoa Bridge—which had been scheduled for the following day, 3 April. In addition, Wheeler suggested that responsible commanders "maintain a close control over strike sorties over the next week or so to the end that our weight of effort favors the southern portions of the authorized strike area in North Vietnam." This was not to be construed, however, as preventing attacks against lucrative targets throughout the zone, especially supplies and men moving toward the DMZ or into Laos.[9]

If it was difficult for the President to convince his critics that his bombing curb was a genuine de-escalatory gesture, how could he answer the charge that

continuing offensive operations in South Vietnam were in contradiction to the search for peace? Mindful of the US experience in Korea fifteen years before, Mr. Johnson was determined not to relax military pressure on the enemy in South Vietnam while negotiations proceeded. The President spoke with General Wheeler about this problem on the eve of his 31 March speech. Mr. Johnson wanted to avoid this charge and yet did not wish to curtail General Westmoreland's actions in any way. General Wheeler recognized that it would be impossible to conceal the extent of military operations in the presence of more than six hundred news reporters in South Vietnam alone. Hence, the Chairman could suggest only that General Westmoreland be instructed not to modify his plans but to try to "play them in low key." In other words, COMUSMACV should make every effort to describe Operation PEGASUS and other large-scale actions as the usual run of attacks on the enemy in order to provoke as little adverse criticism as possible.[10]

Hanoi's Positive Response: Further Restrictions on Military Operations

Initially, Hanoi made no reply to the President's message of 31 March, and the administration was preoccupied with its domestic critics. Then, on the morning of 3 April, Radio Hanoi broadcast the North Vietnamese government's first response to President Johnson's remarks. The Hanoi statement followed the usual harsh line but with one important exception: it no longer insisted on a complete cessation of the bombing before contacts between the United States and North Vietnam were made. Now, the statement declared, "the DRV Government declares its readiness to send its representatives to decide with the US side the unconditional cessation of bombing and all other acts by the United States against the DRV so that talks could begin."[11]

The President and his advisers quickly decided to treat this passage as a favorable response. In a broadcast of his own on the 3rd, President Johnson reiterated his willingness to send representatives "to any forum at any time" to discuss ways in which the war could be brought to an end. "Accordingly," the President went on, "we will establish contact with the representatives of North Vietnam." The next day, the Department of State instructed the US Embassy in Vientiane, Laos, to deliver a written message to "the highest ranking DRV official you can reach." The message declared that the United States "accepts the proposal of the DRV" and stated that Ambassador W. Averell Harriman "will be available forthwith to establish contacts with the representatives of the DRV." Subsequently, the State Department repeated this message to US embassies in New Delhi, Moscow, Paris, and London and to United Nations Secretary General U Thant.[12]

During previous diplomatic feelers for talks with the North Vietnamese, there had been breakdowns in coordination between the negotiation attempts and US

military actions in the field. This time, President Johnson was determined to avoid any incident, even an accidental one, which might jeopardize the current exchange. To this end, the Chairman ordered US forces, for the time being and until further notice, to cease all operations over North Vietnam and the Tonkin Gulf above the 20th parallel. As an added precaution, the President directed his military commanders to halt all air strikes and naval operations above the 19th parallel. This change placed Thanh Hoa off limits. In so doing, he stressed the importance of not revealing this new restriction, which if known might weaken the American negotiating position. Accordingly, General Wheeler instructed CINCPAC to hold this directive as closely as possible and to execute it in a manner that would conceal the fact that the change in operations came from a decision by higher authority. Revealing his displeasure over past "leaks," the Chairman further suggested that on the subject of operations over North Vietnam, field commanders should adopt the same "no comment" rule for press inquiries that was being followed in Washington.[13]

Something akin to what the President had feared actually occurred on the very day these precautionary measures were ordered. On 4 April, Radio Hanoi charged that the previous day three waves of US aircraft had bombed populated areas in the province of Lai Chau in northwestern North Vietnam along the Laos border, many miles above the 20th parallel. In response to these allegations, the Secretary of Defense ordered a review of all strikes in North Vietnam and Laos to determine if any US or allied aircraft could have made the alleged attack. After a thorough check of all missions scheduled and/or flown in the areas in question, the Joint Chiefs found no evidence that US aircraft were responsible. The American Embassy in Vientiane reported that no Laotian planes had attacked North Vietnam, and bad weather in the area inclined the JCS to believe it. Still, the Joint Chiefs were not willing to rule out the possibility that Lao T-28s might have been the culprits. For his part, Prince Souvanna Phouma denied that his aircraft were involved. He suggested that the People's Republic of China might have launched the raid to disrupt US-North Vietnamese contacts that Beijing opposed. Foregoing public speculation on the matter, Secretary Clifford merely declared US innocence in the incident in a press conference on 8 April.[14]

The Lai Chau incident prompted the administration to place new restrictions on its military operations in Laos. On 4 April, the JCS directed CINCPAC to discontinue until further notice BARREL ROLL air strikes in the areas of Laos bordering northwestern North Vietnam. BARREL ROLL operations in other areas along the Laos-North Vietnam border above the 19th parallel were still authorized but had to be conducted under positive forward air control. These restrictions represented a sharp reduction in the level of operations the US had intended to carry out in Laos. In fact, on the eve of the President's 31 March speech, Ambassador Sullivan in Vientiane had been instructed to assure Prince Souvanna that air strikes in Laos would be augmented rather than curtailed.[15]

Seeking to avoid any incident that might lead to charges of trying to sabotage prospective talks, the administration soon restricted the actions of its South Viet-

namese ally. On 12 April, the Vietnamese Air Force had proposed to General Westmoreland that their recently acquired F-5 squadron be included in air interdiction missions north of the Demilitarized Zone. In a cable to General Wheeler, the MACV commander expressed concern that, while such a step would mean an increase of only six sorties per day, it would mark Saigon's first use of jet aircraft against the north and have an escalatory connotation. Wheeler, after conferring with Secretary Clifford, agreed with General Westmoreland and asked that he persuade the VNAF to withdraw its request. "As you no doubt know," he told COMUSMACV, "we are in a real hassle as to the locale of the prospective talks, and one more propaganda advantage placed in the hands of the North Vietnamese could well bring the whole effort to naught." He went on: "A breakdown in talks attributable to us would be a disaster here in the United States."[16]

Some of the precautionary limits on US military activity ordered by the President after the 3 April exchange with Hanoi were short lived. This was particularly true in the case of reconnaissance flights, which had been prohibited in North Vietnam above the 20th parallel. Defense Secretary Clifford and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were especially concerned with the military risks that this prohibition entailed. They wanted the missions resumed as early as politically possible and continued throughout the course of any future negotiations. On 6 April, Mr. Clifford and General Wheeler raised the issue at a White House meeting with the President. Apparently persuaded by their arguments, on 11 April the Chief Executive ordered the resumption of a slightly reduced reconnaissance program above the 20th parallel.[17]

The Search for an Acceptable Talk Site

The "hassle" over the location for talks that General Wheeler referred to in his 12 April message to General Westmoreland had been going on since the first US-North Vietnamese exchange on 3 April. At that time, President Johnson had promised to establish direct contact with Hanoi's representatives regarding specific arrangements for talks. This was done formally through the US Embassy in Vientiane, where North Vietnam was represented and where previous diplomatic contacts between the US and Hanoi had occurred. In the note that Ambassador Sullivan delivered to his North Vietnamese counterpart, the President proposed a meeting on 8 April at the ambassadorial level in Geneva. The Swiss city, a traditional location for international meetings, easily could accommodate a large number of diplomats and the world press. In addition, Switzerland was neutral toward the Vietnam war and not a member of NATO. However, Switzerland was a European nation, and North Vietnam did not have a diplomatic mission there. President Johnson therefore stated his readiness to consider "any reasonable alternative suggestions" of a site from North Vietnam.[18]

For the next five days, Hanoi did not reply. On 8 April, through its representative in Vientiane, the North Vietnamese government, ignoring the President's proposal of Geneva, suggested Phnom Penh, Cambodia, as a site. In his official response, on 9 April, the President rejected Phnom Penh because the United States had no diplomatic mission there and hence could not ensure secure communications. President Johnson reiterated his preference for Geneva, but also proposed four Asian sites as acceptable alternatives: Vientiane, Rangoon, Djakarta, and New Delhi. He suggested that the first meeting take place on 15 April.[19]

The jockeying over the site continued and moved from diplomatic notes to public exchanges. On 11 April, North Vietnam proposed Warsaw, with a date of 18 April for the beginning of the talks. The United States, in a White House statement, rejected Warsaw because Poland, which was assisting North Vietnam, did not qualify as a neutral in the war. Indirectly accusing Hanoi of bad faith, the White House declared that it was "important to conduct talks in a neutral atmosphere, fair to both sides.... Those acting in good faith will not seek to make this a matter of propaganda." Two days, later, Radio Hanoi bitterly attacked this statement, declared that the US was proposing sites that were "not adequate to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," and accused the US of trying to sabotage the talks.[20]

At this point, Paris surfaced as a possible talk site. The Poles, aware that the US was dissatisfied with Warsaw and under pressure from France, began mentioning the French capital as a suitable venue. Several other interested governments, as well as the French Foreign Minister, also pushed for Paris. The United States, however, was decidedly cool to Paris as a site for negotiations. In view of France's criticism of American policy in Vietnam, and its uncooperative attitude on issues in Western Europe, it seemed doubtful that France would be an impartial host; and the administration did not wish to risk giving the French any credit for resolving the Vietnam War. Accordingly, on 18 April, the US offered North Vietnam the five previously mentioned sites and added six others in Asia and four in Europe, namely Colombo, Tokyo, Kabul, Katmandu, Rawalpindi, Kuala Lumpur, Rome, Brussels, Helsinki, and Vienna. North Vietnam promptly rejected all these sites on grounds that many of the countries on the list were not neutral and most had no diplomatic relations with North Vietnam. Hanoi repeated its preference for Warsaw. The United States replied that Warsaw was unacceptable because Poland was a direct contributor to the Vietnamese war. There the matter rested, with each side publicly accusing the other of stalling the peace talks.[21]

Increasing Enemy Threat and the Question of Expanding ROLLING THUNDER

Administration doubts about North Vietnam's sincerity with regard to the talks had increased with recent reports from the field. Before mid-April, enemy-initiated actions had declined sharply. Some American observers viewed this as

evidence of de-escalation on the part of the enemy. Others, including the allied military commanders, believed that the decline resulted from the continuing US and South Vietnamese offensive, which was forcing the enemy to withdraw to comparatively safe sanctuaries in the border areas of Cambodia and Laos where he could prepare his forces for another offensive. The field commanders were right. At the direction of the Hanoi Politburo, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were regrouping and reinforcing for another round of attacks on South Vietnam's cities and towns.[22]

Evidence of this buildup for another offensive had begun to mount by mid-April. On 18 April, a MACV intelligence survey of enemy lines of communication in the DMZ area revealed a massive North Vietnamese effort underway to move equipment, supplies, and personnel into the south. Truck traffic on the major routes in southern Laos and the North Vietnamese panhandle was approaching an all-time high. The enemy were accelerating the repair and improvement of existing roads and railways and building new roads in South Vietnam. A PACOM intelligence survey of the panhandle area corroborated MACV's evaluation. Air reconnaissance had revealed an increased use of both coastal and inland waterways. Water traffic around Vinh was heavier than it had been since 1965, and convoys of more than 100 trucks each, ten times the normal average, were sighted frequently in the panhandle.[23]

In North Vietnam above the 20th parallel, aerial reconnaissance, resumed after 11 April, revealed that the enemy was rapidly repairing the damage to his lines of communication caused by ROLLING THUNDER, as well as making increased efforts to support infiltration into South Vietnam. Photographs taken of Hanoi and Haiphong on 14 and 15 April showed the completed repair and reconstruction of key rail bridges in that vicinity, including the vital Doumer bypass on the Hanoi-Vinh line. With the repair of these bridges, rail traffic between Hanoi and Haiphong and between those cities and the south once again was resumed. Repair and improvement of port facilities also were underway. On 18 April, reconnaissance planes over Haiphong photographed a large Soviet-made suction dredge, which had been absent from the harbor for two years. With this vessel, North Vietnam had the capability of clearing the Haiphong channel of the accumulated silt that had impeded shipping for the past year.[24]

The North Vietnamese also were repairing and constructing military installations at an alarming pace, particularly those related to air defense, such as MIG bases and SAM sites. On 22 April, for example, photo reconnaissance detected a large SAM site about five miles southeast of Hanoi in the last stages of construction. This was the second such site discovered in that area in the past two weeks.[25]

In the light of the deadlock over the talk site and the North Vietnamese buildup for an offensive in the south, General Wheeler initiated planning for a re-expansion of ROLLING THUNDER. On 23 April, the Chairman directed CINCPAC to make contingency plans for resuming bombing above the 20th parallel. The plans were to

cover three target options, each for a minimum of two days of strikes, and capable of being executed on short notice and with maximum surprise.[26]

President Johnson also was concerned about the North Vietnamese buildup. The decline in enemy-initiated attacks in South Vietnam since his 31 March speech was encouraging, but the administration viewed the ever-increasing flow of troops and supplies into the south as a clear violation of the "no advantage" condition of the President's 1967 San Antonio Formula. As Secretary of Defense Clifford interpreted the formula, infiltration was not supposed to exceed "normal" levels, estimated at around 6,000 men per month. In contrast, the estimated infiltration rate for April, while admittedly "rougher" than usual, was in the neighborhood of 20,000—a peak rate for the entire war.[27]

In the administration's estimate, North Vietnam thus was taking an intolerable military advantage of the bombing restrictions. Nevertheless, President Johnson did not believe that he could resume the bombing above the 20th parallel, at least not as a first step. The unannounced restriction on raids between the 19th and 20th parallels was another matter. On 28 April, the President indicated to General Wheeler that he was considering the possibility of resuming the bombing between the two parallels and would probably make a decision on 30 April. If he did decide to resume air strikes in this area, President Johnson wanted to make certain that they would come as a surprise so as to achieve maximum destruction. Accordingly, General Wheeler instructed CINCPAC to be prepared to resume strikes between the 19th and 20th parallels in line with the President's wishes.[28]

Before reaching a decision, the President sought General Westmoreland's personal assessment of the effects of the bombing restriction on the situation in South Vietnam. Specifically, he wanted to know how the movement of the line from the 20th to the 19th parallel had affected infiltration and whether or not, in COMUSMACV's opinion, the line should be returned to the 20th parallel. Replying to the President on 30 April, Westmoreland observed that the bombing restriction had enabled the enemy to shift his logistic center of gravity from Hanoi southward. The resulting increase in the infiltration of men and supplies into the south might already have adversely affected the allies' combat position. Accordingly, General Westmoreland strongly recommended the resumption of bombing between the 19th and 20th parallels, immediately and in force. It should be directed particularly at the area of Thanh Hoa, the critical link in the north's system for moving men and supplies southward.[29]

At a White House meeting on 30 April, General Wheeler urged a northward shift of the bombing line. Secretary of State Rusk made no objection. However, Secretary Clifford advocated waiting for another response from Hanoi in the continuing exchanges over negotiating sites, fearing disruption of the "relationship we are trying to build with them." The President seemed inclined to expand the bombing to the 20th parallel, and there was discussion of how to present that action to the public. In the end, however, the President still hoped for some agreement with

Hanoi and did not wish to take any action that might jeopardize that possibility. No decision was reached at the 30 April meeting. On 2 May, General Wheeler told CINCPAC that the question was still being considered.[30]

Breakthrough on a Negotiating Site

Diplomatic events rendered discussion of expanding ROLLING THUNDER moot. As late as 2 May, after weeks of fruitless exchanges with the North Vietnamese and third parties, Secretary Rusk remained pessimistic about the prospect for talks. That day, in an appearance before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rusk cited North Vietnamese infiltration as an indication of Hanoi's lack of good faith. He warned that an enemy offensive would measurably set back the possibility of talks.[31]

Only a few hours later, however, the North Vietnamese representative in Vientiane unexpectedly delivered another note to Ambassador Sullivan. The note proposed Paris as the site for talks commencing on or about 10 May. Although President Johnson commented that he "would rather go to almost any place than Paris," the administration at once decided to accept Hanoi's proposal and so informed its allies. Admittedly, Paris was less than ideal from the American standpoint, but it was acceptable for initial talks. If the French government created difficulties, a change of venue could be arranged for the substantive negotiations to follow.[32]

After obtaining agreement from the allies, President Johnson announced on 3 May that the US government accepted Hanoi's proposal to meet in Paris on 10 May. The President spoke of his belief that in Paris the parties would receive fair and impartial treatment. He also expressed hope that these initial contacts would lead to peace in Southeast Asia, but he added a cautionary note to those who might expect too much from the talks: "This is only the first step. There are many, many hazards and difficulties ahead." As if to underline these words, on 4 May the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong launched the second wave of their nationwide offensive.[33]

13

Strengthening the RVNAF

The US military intervention in Vietnam had begun as an attempt to build up South Vietnam's armed forces to enable them to defeat the Viet Cong insurgency. After 1965, MACV continued to advise and support the RVNAF, but that effort took second place in command attention and resource allocation to the problems of the US troop buildup and the expanding commitment of American forces to combat.[1] During 1967, RVNAF expansion, improvement, and modernization moved back toward center stage. As the pressures of war mounted on the United States, the Johnson administration sought to relieve the burden by enlarging the South Vietnamese military's role in the conflict. By the end of 1967, the administration had tentatively committed itself to level off the American force in South Vietnam while building up Saigon's armed forces to the point where they could begin to replace US troops in the fighting. Early in 1968, the Tet offensive, the presidential decision not to send large additional US reinforcements, and the beginning of negotiations with Hanoi led the administration to give still higher priority to strengthening South Vietnam's forces. In Washington and Saigon, 1968 was a year of planning and action for the enlargement of the RVNAF, the modernization of its weaponry, and the improvement of its training and leadership.

The RVNAF in 1967

During most of 1967, RVNAF improvement made only modest progress. Concerned that expansion of South Vietnam's forces was outstripping the nation's supply of competent leaders, General Westmoreland supported only limited increases in troop strength, most of which went to the Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF), the territorial components most directly engaged in pacification. As of 31 December, the RVNAF had 643,100 men under arms—342,900 in the regular

army, navy, air force, and Marine Corps and 300,200 in the RF/PF. MACV continued its effort to improve RVNAF leadership, reduce desertion, and upgrade troop living conditions but reported only marginal gains in these areas. In spite of vigorous lobbying by General Westmoreland, both the outgoing military Directory and the newly elected government that took office in October declined to enact enhanced mobilization measures, such as a draft of eighteen year olds. United States support of modernization also lagged. The Department of Defense, for example, despite repeated requests from General Westmoreland, delayed the provision of up-to-date weapons, such as the M–16 rifle, to the ARVN, giving US forces first call on these arms. As a result, ARVN infantrymen went into battle outgunned by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main force troops who fought with modern AK–47s and other first line Communist bloc weapons.[2]

The Combined Campaign Plan for 1968, adopted by MACV and the Joint General Staff in November 1967, provided for the same division of labor between US and South Vietnamese forces that had prevailed since the arrival of American combat units in 1965. The RVNAF were given primary responsibility for the support of pacification in the "National Priority" areas, those containing a large majority of the population, food production, and vital lines of communication. US and Free World forces assumed primary responsibility for destroying the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese main force military units, base areas, and resources. This division, however, was not absolute. US and allied forces would support pacification when circumstances required, and some RVNAF units, notably the airborne and marine brigades, would spend most of their time on offensive operations.[3]

As 1967 wore on, the administration pressed General Westmoreland with increasing urgency for ideas on how to get more out of the South Vietnamese war effort. President Johnson and his senior officials were impelled by several considerations—reluctance to send more US troops to Vietnam, persistent news media criticism of an apparent lack of ARVN participation in serious fighting, and the possibility of mutual US-North Vietnamese troop withdrawals as the President had proposed at Manila in late 1966. During the summer and fall of 1967, General Wheeler repeatedly warned General Westmoreland that the view was widely held in the United States that the ARVN was not "carrying its fair share of the combat burden." The Chairman urged the MACV commander to push the South Vietnamese more prominently to the front. Enlarging upon this theme, in November General Wheeler emphasized to Westmoreland that "high interest" existed in Washington in modernization of South Vietnam's forces and in ways to make them "bear visibly a greater share of the load of combat operations." In the aftermath of the debate over the Program Five reinforcement, Wheeler told Westmoreland that RVNAF improvement was "one of the few remaining areas in which . . . significant increases in [allied] effectiveness and capabilities are possible." RVNAF improvement took on additional urgency, the Chairman declared, "with the possibility of some kind of cease fire or negotiations hanging over our heads."[4]

By the end of 1967, the Johnson administration was close to settling upon a policy of leveling off the US force in South Vietnam while building up Saigon's military to gradually take over the combat mission. In November, reflecting this policy trend, General Westmoreland made his National Press Club speech predicting that a US troop draw-down in Vietnam might begin within two years. The MACV commander announced that his headquarters was initiating further actions to improve RVNAF equipment, organization, leadership, training, morale, and management. He also signaled a renewal of attention to the advisory effort by establishing a MACV Assistant Chief of Staff for Military Assistance. The new staff directorate was to "supervise, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate, in conjunction with the appropriate agencies," the joint advisory effort and the Military Assistance Program. Finally, on 12 November, Westmoreland presented General Wheeler with a rough outline plan for turning the war over to the RVNAF in the event of a ceasefire or mutual US and North Vietnamese troop withdrawal. Beyond these pronouncements and plans, however, little was done to implement the emerging new policy.[5]

In support of RVNAF modernization, General Westmoreland continued his campaign to upgrade his allies' firepower, mobility, and communications. During November, he requested delivery of ten priority items of equipment to Saigon's forces during 1968. These items included M16 rifles, M79 grenade launchers, M60 machine guns, 81mm mortars, howitzers, trucks, radios, and additional ammunition. The Department of Defense approved most of these items, including the M16s, for delivery during 1968, but held up some pending a decision on the FY 1969 RVNAF force structure.[6]

The Tet Offensive and Its Effects

None of this equipment had reached the RVNAF when the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Tet offensive broke across South Vietnam at the end of January 1968. As they intended, the Communists caught the RVNAF short-handed. In spite of a Joint General Staff directive of 11 January 1968 to limit customary holiday leaves to no more than 5 percent of strength, up to 50 percent of the soldiers in most units were absent for Tet with or without authorization. When the Tet truce was cancelled after the first premature enemy attacks, the JGS sent last-minute warnings to its forces, but too late to recall many men. In I Corps, because of the threat to Khe Sanh and the early abrogation of the truce, ARVN units were at more nearly full strength and readiness, although even there the absentee rate was over 20 percent.[7]

Caught off-balance, Saigon's forces bent but did not break. Intelligence obtained after the offensive indicated clearly that the enemy high command had expected ARVN units and personnel to defect in large numbers or offer only half-hearted resistance. With this expectation in mind, the Communists directed the

brunt of their initial attack against the ARVN. But the troops of South Vietnam in most cases defended stoutly and on occasion counterattacked effectively. US advisers later reported that, of the 149 ARVN maneuver battalions, 42 had performed exceptionally well during the attack, while only eight were rated poor in performance. Not a single ARVN unit defected to the enemy. MACV reported that the South Vietnamese air force, navy, and Marine Corps all had performed well during the crisis. For this record, the ARVN and territorial forces paid with some 4,000 men killed during the first month of the offensive, as compared to 2,100 American dead during the same period. General Westmoreland reported on 29 February 1968 that the effectiveness of the ARVN had been degraded in all four corps tactical zones. But already the losses were being replaced and South Vietnamese units were approaching their pre-Tet operational status.[8]

To help defend and retake South Vietnam's cities and towns, the Saigon government supplemented the ARVN with Regional and Popular Force units redeployed from the countryside. As a result, in II, III, and IV Corps, some 96 RF companies and 388 PF platoons had changed their mission or their location as of 29 February. US advisers reported that RF/PF capabilities had been degraded in 20 of the 44 provinces, but noted that the territorials had performed better in combat than expected. In most cases, these units had held their positions and beaten back the enemy. By April, at the urging of General Westmoreland and his CORDS deputy, Ambassador Komer, the RF and PF were returning to their rural pacification duties.[9]

The Tet battles underscored deficiencies in RVNAF weaponry and transportation that the United States had sought to rectify prior to the offensive. The South Vietnamese had fought with less sophisticated weapons than those of the enemy, whose Russian AK–47 assault rifles, light and heavy machine guns, and antitank and artillery rockets had given him fire superiority where allied artillery and air power did not restore the balance. The shortage of transportation facilities in many cases had prevented RVNAF personnel on leave from rejoining their units during the offensive.[10]

Accordingly, General Westmoreland's initial requests to Washington in response to the attack focused on more and better equipment for the RVNAF. On 3 February, he asked that the US accelerate delivery of the M16 rifles, M60 machine guns, and M29 mortars that he had requested for the South Vietnamese before the Tet assault. He called also for additional helicopters and armored personnel carriers for Saigon's forces. Within 24 hours, General Wheeler told Westmoreland that his requests had been approved. The Department of Defense was making immediate arrangements to accelerate delivery of the needed items.[11]

Following the Tet offensive, South Vietnamese President Thieu took advantage of the crisis to implement mobilization measures long urged by his American allies. As he later told his countrymen, these actions were necessary because "we must make greater effort and accept more sacrifices.... The existence of the nation is

at stake and this is mainly a Vietnamese responsibility." Before the offensive, Thieu temporarily suspended most military discharges, and on 10 February he recalled 15,000 reservists to active duty. Early in April, the South Vietnamese president launched a drive for a more nearly total mobilization of South Vietnamese manpower. In June 1968, after gradually overcoming the resistance of the national legislature, Thieu secured a law that reduced South Vietnam's military draft age from 20 to 18 and allowed the government to conscript males up to the age of 38 for the regulars and RF/PF, to serve for the duration of the war. Youths of 17 and men between the ages of 39 and 43 could be conscripted for noncombatant military service, and those between 16 and 50 were to serve in a new hamlet militia, the People's Self-Defense Force. Even before these measures took effect, a vigorous recruiting drive replaced most battle casualties and drove RVNAF strength to a new high of 647,000 by mid-March, just 38,739 short of the 685,739 the US had agreed to support in FY 1968.[12]

In March, picking up on the administration's theme of strengthening Saigon, General Westmoreland envisioned building a "self-sustaining RVNAF capable of expanding or contracting its main effort to conform to shifts in the direction of the war." He estimated that the accelerated recruiting drive then under way would swell South Vietnam's armed forces to 707,000 by September 1968 and to 751,739 by December. If the recruiting momentum continued at the immediate post-Tet level, the RVNAF could be expanded to 779,154 personnel by the end of FY 1969 and to a maximum sustainable strength of 801,215 by the end of FY 1970. The MACV commander recommended that the administration approve these figures as planning objectives for the years indicated. He recommended also that the government approve an immediate increase of the RVNAF by 31,475 spaces so as to allow the South Vietnamese to expand their draft calls and begin training replacements, officers, NCOs, and badly needed specialists.[13]

General Westmoreland's proposals for support of Saigon's mobilization efforts and for accelerated RVNAF expansion and modernization received the full support of Ambassador Bunker. On 11 March, the Ambassador informed the Secretary of State that it was "most urgent that we get the weapons RVNAF needs over here as expeditiously as possible, in order to maintain the momentum of the GVN's present mobilization efforts." Bunker endorsed General Westmoreland's suggested increase in RVNAF force levels for FY 1969. He advised that the United States encourage Saigon to continue its mobilization efforts "not only to form additional units that are sorely needed and to fill up their ranks, but to deny this manpower to the Viet Cong, who are themselves in desperate need of manpower."[14]

General Wheeler promptly endorsed COMUSMACV's proposals. On 19 March, he recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the United States authorize expansion of the RVNAF beyond the established FY 1968 level of 685,739 so as to permit South Vietnam to fill unit shortages and sustain the momentum of RVNAF manpower procurement and training programs. Such action also would show

US support of Saigon's mobilization efforts. Wheeler recommended immediately authorizing the addition of the 31,475 spaces that Westmoreland had requested, spaces already part of the RVNAF expansion plan for FY 1969.[15]

In his speech to the nation on 31 March, President Johnson publicly affirmed his administration's commitment to prepare the RVNAF to assume a greater share of the war effort. Mr. Johnson applauded South Vietnam's recent mobilization efforts and declared that "our first priority" would be to support them. He continued: "We shall accelerate the re-equipment of South Vietnam's armed forces in order to meet the enemy's increased firepower." This, he said, "will enable them [the South Vietnamese] to undertake a large share of combat operations against the Communist invaders."[16]

The administration promptly began translating these presidential words into action. Early in April, General Westmoreland recommended revision of the current practice of distributing M16 rifles to US and RVNAF troops on a 50-50 basis. He asked that the South Vietnamese receive 75 percent of the available M16s; to capitalize on what Westmoreland termed the high morale and aggressiveness that RVNAF personnel were exhibiting since the Tet attacks. The MACV commander also recommended for the first time that this weapon be provided to the Regional and Popular Forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the request and stipulated that the RVNAF was to continue receiving 75 percent of the monthly M16 allocation until they possessed all they required.[17]

At the same time, the Department of Defense acted on the JCS 19 March request for 31,475 additional RVNAF personnel spaces for FY 1968. On 4 April, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze approved the proposal, raising the authorized South Vietnamese strength ceiling to 717,214. Mr. Nitze further requested that the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, submit to his office additional information on RVNAF force structure, combat effectiveness, and equipment shortages, together with studies that would justify the 779,154 RVNAF force level that General Westmoreland had recommended for FY 1969.[18]

Long-Range Objectives: Initial JCS Plans

Before the Joint Chiefs of Staff could provide Mr. Nitze with the information he had requested, the United States and North Vietnam agreed to open negotiations in Paris. This development had important implications for the RVNAF improvement program. Negotiations might well lead to a "freeze" on force levels and armaments in South Vietnam or to restrictions on post-hostilities US military aid to Saigon. It was therefore important to bring the RVNAF to maximum strength and effectiveness as soon as possible.

These facts shaped the JCS reply to Mr. Nitze. On 15 April, the Joint Chiefs declared that the US should aim at bringing the RVNAF "to a self-sufficient posture

prior to any freeze, and thus create the largest sustainable RVNAF in-being prior to a negotiated settlement." By "self-sufficient" the Joint Chiefs of Staff meant a South Vietnamese force structure capable of coping with a "residual insurgency threat" but not of defeating a renewed invasion by North Vietnam. The JCS expressed confidence that the 801,215 strength could be reached even before the end of FY 1970, the date originally proposed by COMUSMACV. Recognizing that the armor, artillery, transport, construction, engineer, and other special equipment could not arrive in South Vietnam in time to arm all these new recruits, the JCS suggested that the additional personnel could be armed with available M2 carbines as an interim weapon and assigned to existing units as light infantrymen until the equipment could be deployed. They also recommended that ultimately all South Vietnamese soldiers, including the RF/PF, be armed with M16s.[19]

This JCS memorandum apparently crossed one from the Deputy Secretary of Defense that showed that Mr. Nitze was thinking along the same lines. Nitze wrote: "We have embarked upon a course of gradually shifting the burden of the war to GVN forces." Hence, the United States must support "as quickly as possible and to the maximum extent feasible" Saigon's efforts to "enlarge, improve, and modernize" its military establishment. Nitze recognized that in the course of negotiations the US and North Vietnam might agree to a mutual restriction of military operations. Given this possibility, he requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a comprehensive and feasible plan to make the South Vietnamese forces self-sufficient in the areas of logistics, airlift, and air and artillery support.[20]

On 17 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed MACV, through Admiral Sharp, to develop a plan according to Mr. Nitze's specifications. Elaborating upon those specifications, the new Secretary of Defense, Mr. Clifford, reiterated that RVNAF support units must be built up with "the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency vis-à-vis the NLF/NVA." During a transition period, Clifford allowed, American units temporarily could make up serious support deficiencies. The Defense Secretary authorized COMUSMACV to "coordinate" his planning with the RVNAF Joint General Staff, but suggested that he do so on the basis of "strengthening" Saigon's forces rather than preparing them to continue the war alone. Mr. Clifford emphasized the "urgency" of strengthening the RVNAF as soon as possible, as well as the need to gradually shift "the burden of the war" to the South Vietnamese forces. He set 6 May as the deadline for completion of MACV's plans.[21]

Even as the MACV staff worked on the plan, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland expressed caution regarding the prospects of a larger RVNAF role in the war. Both commanders agreed that the RVNAF was not capable of self-sufficiency at the present time and that US units would be needed, for a time at least, to provide substantial combat and logistical support to Saigon's troops.[22]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff took a similarly cautious approach to placing more of the combat burden on the RVNAF. They recognized that modernization of the RVNAF would not in itself guarantee combat effectiveness. The JCS saw value in

testing the South Vietnamese army's fighting capabilities, especially if other than elite ARVN units were used. They believed that the tests should be carried out by MACV and the JGS without undue political pressure to enlarge RVNAF responsibilities too quickly. The Chiefs also believed that the turnover of a larger part of the war to the RVNAF should proceed at a rate to be determined by COMUSMACV, with no "attempt to rush the process or to attempt at this point to draw up firm schedules." In sum, the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw grave risks in a policy that would turn over the main combat role to the RVNAF too rapidly.[23]

On 23 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted the plan requested by Mr. Nitze on 16 April. Drafted by MACV, the May Plan, as it came to be known, was designed to shift the conduct of the war gradually to Saigon's forces, completing the process by the end of FY 1973. The MACV planners assumed that the RVNAF, when enlarged and improved, could successfully cope with the Viet Cong in the absence of large-scale infiltration from the north. To support the South Vietnamese during a five-year buildup, the planners postulated a substantial US residual force, numbering more than 60,000 men at the outset and declining gradually to under 20,000 by June 1973.

Under the May Plan, the RVNAF would be expanded in three increments. The first phase would begin immediately and run through FY 1968. During this period, the RVNAF would grow to the newly authorized FY 1968 strength of 717,214 and would be provided with modern equipment. The second increment would be implemented during FY 1969, when the RVNAF would expand to 801,215 men, with additional modernization. The final phase would run from the close of FY 1969 through FY 1973. During this period, MACV planned to reduce the RVNAF's ground component by 20,500 men and use the freed manpower spaces to form new air and naval units. No detailed schedules for this period were offered, however, since, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out, it would take time to determine the rate at which the RVNAF could absorb modern equipment. However, the JCS did provide contingency measures for the third phase that would allow the RVNAF to take over equipment from US units if US and North Vietnamese forces withdrew from South Vietnam.

As to the ultimate results of the plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that Saigon's forces, "even though expanded and modernized, may continue to suffer from important deficiencies, such as training, leadership, and morale, which may limit RVNAF capability to achieve the objectives established for it." They added that the plan would require the diversion of equipment from US active and inactive units, with consequent adverse effects on US force readiness.[24]

On 24 May, Mr. Nitze approved the recommendations that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had submitted on 15 April to increase RVNAF strength during FY 1969 to 801,215 and to issue M2 carbines and M16 rifles to both regular units and the Regional and Popular Forces. Of the 84,001 personnel thus to be added, 39,810 would augment the regular services and 44,191 would go to the RF/PF. Mr. Nitze, however, withheld approval of funds to support the manpower expansion until he could study the long-range plan the JCS had submitted the previous day.[25]

A Two-Phase Modernization and Expansion Program

As the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the JCS considered the May Plan, it became increasingly clear that the Paris negotiations would be drawn out and would not produce an early settlement of the war. Accordingly, the administration, seeking to appease domestic opinion in this election year, shifted its focus from self-sufficiency for the RVNAF after a peace agreement to a rapid enlargement of Saigon's combat forces so they could begin to replace US troops in the ongoing fighting. Visiting Saigon in July, Secretary Clifford informed General Abrams, who had replaced Westmoreland as COMUSMACV in June, that the administration's immediate concern was increasing the number of South Vietnamese combat units rather than adding support units to enable the RVNAF to stand alone.[26]

Deputy Secretary Nitze emphasized the same theme on 25 June in his response to the MACV/JCS May Plan. Mr. Nitze approved the proposal to expand and modernize the RVNAF during FY 1968, except for certain portions dealing with the South Vietnamese navy. He also approved the proposed FY 1969 force structure for ARVN combat units, for ARVN and Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC) artillery battalions, and for the RF/PF, as well as the planned activation of two VNAF helicopter squadrons. While he did not approve the rest of the plan, he instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider RVNAF improvement in two phases. The Phase I plan would concentrate on maximizing the ground combat power of the RVNAF, rather than on building a balanced force. The JCS were to indicate the US actions needed to reach this goal, assuming that the United States would continue participating in the war at "presently approved levels." The Phase II plan should outline a program to build a RVNAF capable of coping with an internal insurgency if both North Vietnamese and US forces withdrew from South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs were to assume that South Vietnam would receive any necessary equipment as early as possible and that it would eventually acquire most of the facilities currently being used by US forces. Mr. Nitze asked for a preliminary report on Phase I by 15 August 1968.[27]

Throughout this planning, American officials used a very limited definition of South Vietnamese military self-sufficiency. At the most, they envisioned a RVNAF that could cope only with an insurgency in South Vietnam rather than counter by itself a combined Viet Cong and North Vietnamese threat. In addition, the JCS and MACV planners assumed continuation of the existing pattern of guerrilla and light infantry combat, not a full-dress conventional invasion from the north.[28]

In contrast, the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff drew up a proposal, called Plan Six, for a much more heavily armed and capable force. Saigon's defense minister presented Plan Six to General Wheeler on 19 July, at a conference in Honolulu. The JGS plan called for a balanced RVNAF of 816,655 regular and territorial troops. The ARVN would have much larger armor, mechanized infantry, and artillery components than envisioned in the May Plan; the navy would have more ocean-going warships, amphibious craft, and riverine squadrons; and the air

force would have the most modern US attack helicopters and jet fighter bombers. Plan Six also called for improved pay and living conditions for RVNAF personnel and generous assistance to war veterans. In new equipment alone, Plan Six would have cost the United States twice the price of the May Plan. However, for the money, Saigon could have deployed, in the words of a US Army historian, "a potentially powerful air-sea-land mobile striking force" capable of meeting a much larger North Vietnamese threat. General Wheeler promised to consider Plan Six, but he regarded it as "overambitious"—beyond Saigon's training and support capabilities and requiring so much American equipment that it would weaken US forces worldwide. Hence, Plan Six had no influence on subsequent US deliberations.[29]

While this planning was going on in Washington and Saigon, Mr. Nitze and the Joint Chiefs of Staff took steps to carry out the RVNAF expansion and modernization already approved for FY 1968. Owing to Mr. Nitze's temporary withholding of funds, COMUSMACV approved a somewhat lower strength objective than had been authorized in Washington—751,513 instead of 801,215. The mobilization process set in motion by the Thieu administration soon outstripped this goal. By the end of June 1968, RVNAF strength had reached 765,050.[30]

Saigon's mobilization efforts thus were outpacing US support. The JCS recommended that, as an interim measure, the Secretary of Defense authorize the military departments to program certain equipment for ARVN combat and support units due to be activated in FY 1969. Additionally, they requested the immediate activation of a number of South Vietnamese combat service support elements. On 30 July, Mr. Nitze approved these requests. He also instructed the service secretaries to make every effort to provide support to match South Vietnam's mobilization pace and to expedite delivery of the equipment.[31]

In August, for reasons of speed and efficiency, OSD and the JCS made organizational adjustments for support of the RVNAF. The Secretary of Defense appointed Mr. Richard Steadman, of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, to oversee those actions needed to improve the capabilities and performance of Saigon's forces. General Wheeler appointed Rear Admiral W. D. Houser, to perform the same task within the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Mr. Steadman was given the additional responsibility of managing all OSD matters dealing with US assistance to the RVNAF.[32]

Development of Phase I Plans

The Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted their preliminary report on Phase I of RVNAF improvement and modernization on 29 August and their second and final report on 2 October. Under the plan, Saigon's forces would reach a strength of 801,215, already approved as a final goal, in FY 1969. Subsequently, these forces would be modernized by the end of FY 1973, at an approximate cost of $8 billion, 66 percent

of which would be for ammunition. Phase I was designed to "maximize, for the indefinite future, ground combat capabilities within the RVNAF." The JCS assumed, as Secretary Clifford had indicated earlier, that US forces would continue operating at present levels and would provide the South Vietnamese with such logistic support as port terminal service, airlift, engineer construction, property disposal, and out-of-country maintenance. Since the plan emphasized ground combat strength, it called for only limited expansion of ARVN logistic units and of the South Vietnamese navy and air force. It was anticipated that later, during Phase II, the ARVN and territorials would be reduced to allow the building of support units needed for a balanced force and the expansion of the air force and navy.

The JCS schedule called for the Phase I ARVN forces to be trained and ready for activation by the end of the third quarter of FY 1970, and the navy and air force elements by the end of the second quarter of FY 1971. The limited expansion envisioned for the Vietnamese Navy would take place during 1969. The entire force structure could be modernized by the end of FY 1973, but achievement of the Phase I objectives would depend on the ability of the US armed services to provide equipment on schedule and on the capacity of the RVNAF to absorb and utilize the US materiel.

Turning to the potential results of the effort, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised Secretary Clifford that COMUSMACV believed the RVNAF capable of assuming an increased share of combat operations during FY 1969–70 if the Phase I plan was implemented. But they reiterated their earlier warning that even after expansion and modernization, the South Vietnamese forces might not be able to meet their objectives because of deficiencies in training, leadership, and morale. They warned also that if US troops were withdrawn without a reciprocal North Vietnamese withdrawal, the RVNAF would continue to require a US residual force for support. The Joint Chiefs also stressed that, if the Phase I plan were implemented at the expense of other US military assistance programs in Southeast Asia or elsewhere, it would cause a further deterioration of an already unsatisfactory US world-wide military posture.

With these caveats, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval of the Phase I plan along with the necessary additional funding and procurement authority. They also asked that COMUSMACV be given authority to make minor adjustments to RVNAF force structure as circumstances might require, within the service ceilings and materiel levels approved for Phase I.[33]

On 23 October, Mr. Nitze approved the Phase I plan with minor alterations in the ammunition levels requested and in the types of small arms to be distributed to RVNAF logistic support units. However, he indicated that the Secretary of Defense would have to request additional funds to acquire Phase I equipment beyond those items already programmed for FY 1969, and prepare a study of Phase I costs for FY 1970 to be included in that fiscal year's budget request. Therefore, Mr. Nitze instructed the service secretaries to review the net equipment requirements for the

FY 1969–70 Phase I program, and to submit their findings to him by 9 November as an addendum budget. The Deputy Secretary of Defense then gave General Abrams authority to adjust the RVNAF force structure within the limits specified by the JCS.[34]

The Phase I plan underwent three modifications in 1968. The first and most significant was an increase in force levels in response to the continued progress of Saigon's mobilization campaign, which surpassed US expectations. By 1 September, South Vietnam had placed more than 811,000 men under arms and appeared likely to reach 850,000 by 30 October. On 25 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that General Abrams, CINCPAC, and Ambassador Bunker all recommended that the authorized strength of the RVNAF be raised to 850,000. The officials in Saigon stated that the South Vietnamese proposed to use approximately 39,000 of the new personnel to expand the Regional Forces. This increase would permit the RF to cover more territory in support of an ambitious new pacification campaign that would begin in November. The rest of the proposed increase (9,875 men) would be assigned to long lead-time training programs, such as those for mechanics, communications-electronics technicians, and aviators, as a first step toward the RVNAF's transition to Phase II. The JCS expressed uncertainty that South Vietnam could sustain a force of 850,000 in the long run. However, they saw advantages in even a short-term increase in the RVNAF. Besides permitting expansion of the RF, the increase would reduce the supply of manpower available to the Viet Cong.[35]

On 1 November, Deputy Secretary of Defense Nitze approved the increase of the RVNAF force level to 850,000. The second and third modifications to Phase I were minor and dealt with changes in RVNAF equipment requirements. Mr. Nitze approved them on 14 November and 6 December respectively.[36]

From Phase II to Accelerated Phase II

On 15 November 1968, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense their plan for the second phase of RVNAF modernization. The plan was intended to provide a force capable of coping with a "residual" insurgency threat after the US, Free World, and North Vietnamese armies had withdrawn from South Vietnam. Such a threat, in the JCS estimation, would involve up to 130 Viet Cong maneuver battalions, possibly including some North Vietnamese fillers. These units would be capable of regimental-size combat operations on a scale approximating that of 1964–1965. To meet this threat, the plan envisioned a balanced, self-sufficient RVNAF, to be achieved by adding air, naval, and logistic units to the strong ground forces created in Phase I. The ultimate force structure, while not "optimum," was "considered reasonably attainable by the Government of Vietnam."

Phase II would go into execution at the start of FY 1970 (July 1969) and would be completed by the close of FY 1974 (June 1974). ARVN expansion would receive

priority and be completed by the end of FY 1971. The Vietnamese navy buildup would be scheduled for completion, with minor exceptions, by the end of FY 1973. The Vietnamese air force would reach full strength during the following year. The JCS estimated the cost of the plan at $3.1 billion, of which about 82 percent would be for ammunition. The transition from Phase I would be assisted by the long-term training programs undertaken under the recent modification of that phase.

According to the Joint Chiefs, a "key factor" in executing the plan was the availability of equipment. Materiel requirements could be met either through additional procurement action or by turnover of equipment from US units being deactivated or redeployed. The Joint Chiefs of Staff preferred the former alternative, since MACV still had under study proposals for transfer of equipment to the RVNAF. In any event, additional funds would be needed. Any attempt to meet the costs of Phase II by reducing other programs, the JCS declared, "would seriously erode the already inadequate capability of US military forces to respond to possible contingencies."

The Joint Chiefs warned against premature withdrawal of US and Free World troops from South Vietnam, pointing out that the Phase II plan would not enable the RVNAF alone to combat successfully large North Vietnamese forces. They noted also that, even if a mutual withdrawal occurred, US military personnel would need to remain in South Vietnam, first to provide various types of support to the RVNAF, then to dispose of US property, and finally to perform an advisory function. The Joint Chiefs foresaw that the negotiators in Paris might agree to a settlement that would prohibit or restrict further military assistance to South Vietnam. In view of this possibility, they urged that COMUSMACV be authorized to move as rapidly as possible toward Phase II goals.[37]

Developments in Paris led to further modification of the improvement and modernization plans. On 31 October, the United States ceased all bombing of North Vietnam in return for what the Americans thought was a reciprocal enemy promise of some de-escalation in the south. This apparent step forward raised the possibility of substantive negotiations leading to a mutual withdrawal of US and North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam in the near future.

Concerned about this possibility, General Abrams on 9 November recommended that the United States in effect abandon the distinction between Phases I and II by immediately beginning implementation of Phase II even as the first phase was still in progress. Abrams proposed an "Accelerated Phase II" that would permit its completion by FY 1972, two years ahead of the previously envisioned end date. The acceleration would require two actions. First, some equipment in the hands of US units would have to be turned over to the RVNAF (MACV proposed to deactivate these units and use their manpower spaces elsewhere within the command.) Second, the RVNAF Phase II force structure would be expanded to 877,090. The additional 27,090 personnel would be assigned to long lead-time training for the support units needed for RVNAF self-sufficiency and for the navy and air force

without drawing men from the ARVN or the RF as previously planned. This action would permit retention of the large ground combat force currently being built under Phase I. Once the new personnel were trained and the RVNAF was able to absorb the additional equipment, new units would be formed and issued materiel taken from selected US units.[38]

As the Secretary of Defense considered the Phase II plan and General Abrams's proposed accelerated version, officials in the Department of Defense became concerned with the costs of a RVNAF force structure of the size envisioned. Army officials pointed out that fulfilling the Phase II equipment requirements, especially under Abrams's accelerated plan, would entail reducing the readiness of US forces. They cited the fact that while supplemental funds had been requested to continue Phase I during FY 1969 and additional funds were being sought in the FY 1970 budget, there was no guarantee that Congress would act favorably. Thus funds might be unavailable to replace equipment turned over to the South Vietnamese. The Army officials recommended therefore that the RVNAF Phase II force structure be established on a temporary basis only, along with a smaller permanent "baseline" structure. The United States then could "loan" equipment to South Vietnam for the full Phase II force, to be returned to the US when the RVNAF receded to its "baseline" level.[39]

The force level issue also came up when the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed Phase II with Secretary of Defense Clifford and his Deputy, Mr. Nitze. The OSD officials believed that the Joint Chiefs had overestimated the enemy threat in preparing their Phase II plans. They declared that the United States would never agree to a settlement that would allow an enemy force of the size assumed in the plan to remain in South Vietnam. Clifford and Nitze expressed doubts that Congress would appropriate the additional funds for a RVNAF of the size called for in either Phase I or Phase II. Moreover, they did not believe that the Saigon government possessed the manpower and economic resources to sustain a force of the contemplated size over the long run. Adopting the suggestion of the Army planners, the Secretary of Defense and his Deputy proposed a much smaller "baseline" RVNAF structure—perhaps 250,000 ARVN regulars, with additional territorial, naval, and air forces as needed. Such a force should not be created in the image of the US military. With its primary mission being to combat guerrillas and light infantry, it could get along with less sophisticated equipment and less mobility than American troops would require.[40]

For their part, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that it was not possible to determine the proper size of the RVNAF until US civilian and military officials agreed on the conditions that should be assumed to exist following any termination of hostilities. They had in mind such things as the size and location of enemy forces and the prospect of continuing North Vietnamese infiltration. These conditions, of course, would be set by the terms of the peace agreement. On 12 December, the JCS forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a list of "essential conditions for the

cessation of hostilities" that included, among other terms, an effective ceasefire and a verified withdrawal from South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos of all North Vietnamese military personnel, as well as an end to infiltration. They recommended that US government officials agree on these conditions and make them the negotiating objectives of the diplomatic team in Paris. If the North Vietnamese accepted these terms, an "optimum" security situation would result. If they agreed to some of the conditions, an "intermediate" situation would remain. If the enemy rejected most of the terms, the "worst" security situation could be expected.

The Joint Chiefs informed the Secretary of Defense that the force structure in the Phase II plan was designed to cope with the "worst" security situation. They had instructed COMUSMACV and CINCPAC to develop plans for the "optimum" and "intermediate" situations. But they advised Secretary Clifford that, with the diplomatic outcome uncertain, it seemed wise to continue planning to establish a force structure capable of coping with the "worst" contingency. As a minimum, they recommended approval of the FY 1970–71 Phase II goals and General Abrams' accelerated plan.[41]

On 18 December, Mr. Nitze approved the Phase II force structure, except for portions dealing with the South Vietnamese navy and with ammunition requirements. He also approved acceleration of Phase II as General Abrams had proposed. Since Mr. Nitze had not approved the proposed navy force structure, the newly authorized RVNAF strength was 866,434, rather than the recommended 877,090. Mr. Nitze then requested a detailed activation schedule, equipment list, and turnover schedule for Phase II, together with a plan to withdraw US units that gave up their equipment to the RVNAF. The Deputy Secretary of Defense enjoined MACV and the service secretaries to do everything possible to accelerate training of the RVNAF with a view toward self-sufficiency. "The time available to implement Phase II may be short," he warned, "and the residual post-hostilities MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] may be small."

At the same time, Mr. Nitze called for planning to cover a postwar situation in South Vietnam short of the Joint Chiefs' "worst" contingency. He therefore requested that the JCS prepare a Phase III plan, designed only "to meet an internal insurgency threat from indigenous VC forces." This plan would be the same as that requested by the JCS for an "optimum" security situation.[42]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded a plan for an accelerated Phase II to the Secretary of Defense on 4 January 1969. It included schedules for activation of additional RVNAF units and set forth plans for the redeployment of US units and for turnover of their equipment to the South Vietnamese. All the new ARVN elements would be activated by the second quarter of FY 1970; the air force and navy units would be fully activated by the close of FY 1972. The new program would cost slightly more than the original Phase II plan, to provide for a minor expansion of ARVN logistic units and some additional naval craft.[43]

T-Day Planning

Parallel to the planning for RVNAF improvement and modernization, the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff developed schedules for withdrawal of US and Free World forces from South Vietnam after a termination of hostilities (T-Day). During 1967, the JCS approved CINCPAC OPLAN 67–69, which provided for the departure of US and third country allied troops (except for a MAAG which might include as many as 13,425 men) within six months after fulfillment of the condition set forth in President Johnson's 1966 Manila Communiqué—a US-North Vietnamese agreement for mutual withdrawal.[44]

In October 1967, Secretary McNamara circulated draft memorandums establishing guidelines for the preparation of detailed T-Day plans by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Services. Following review and revision, the Office of the Secretary of Defense published these directives on 25 July 1968. Under them, the JCS were responsible for preparing redeployment plans based on three alternative assumptions. The first was that withdrawal would be completed within six months, leaving behind approximately 30,000 US and Free World troops including both a MAAG and a small combat force. The other two plans provided for withdrawal over twelve months, with retention of either 30,000 men or a larger force of two full divisions plus an advisory group. All three alternatives assumed a "six month period of uncertainty" between T-Day and the beginning of withdrawal (R-Day).[45]

Discussion of T-Day planning continued through 1968, in the context of increasing administration interest in turning the war over to the South Vietnamese. On 3 September, the Joint Chiefs sent the Secretary of Defense initial redeployment schedules, limited to major combat forces, to cover the three assumed contingencies. In reply, Deputy Secretary of Defense Nitze suggested some minor changes to be incorporated in final, more complete, draft plans. He also asked the JCS to prepare a revised version of CINCPAC's 1967 plan that would provide for removal of *all* US forces, including military advisers, six months after the Manila Communique conditions were met.[46]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff delegated to CINCPAC the preparation of detailed redeployment schedules for Mr. Nitze's three alternative possibilities. On 30 December, CINCPAC submitted these schedules as OPLAN 69–69. Meanwhile, on 13 December, the Joint Chiefs promised Mr. Nitze that the revision of CINCPAC's 1967 plan to provide for total US withdrawal would be forthcoming at the earliest opportunity. They reiterated, however, their previous assertion that some American military personnel must remain in South Vietnam for more than six months after T-Day, to advise and assist the RVNAF and to "roll up" US facilities. There the matter rested as the year, and the Johnson administration, drew to a close.[47]

RVNAF Development in 1968

While the planning went on in Washington and Honolulu, MACV continued its efforts to enlarge and improve Saigon's forces. Numerically, progress appeared impressive. At the end of CY 1968, MACV reported that the RVNAF had grown to an estimated total strength of 826,500 men. Some 433,500 of these were in the regular forces, including 387,250 in the ARVN. The Regional and Popular Forces between them amounted to 393,000 men. Total RVNAF strength was approximately 220,000 greater than it had been a year earlier. Of this increase, 160,000 reportedly were volunteers and the rest draftees. Saigon had also expanded its paramilitary forces to 127,000 (45,000 in the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups and 82,000 in the National Police). In addition, the government, in the aftermath of the Tet offensive, had organized a mass local militia, the People's Self Defense Force, with over 1,000,000 men and women enrolled. More than half of these had received some military training, and over 100,000 were armed.[48]

In the judgment of US officials in Saigon and Honolulu, this expansion in size was accompanied by an improvement in quality. According to CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and Ambassador Bunker, the South Vietnamese during 1968 had shown improved aggressiveness, self-confidence, and quality of leadership. The South Vietnamese, for example, had enlarged the number of their battalion size operations in the last quarter of the year, even though the general level of hostilities had declined. The RVNAF had increased its ratio of weapons captured to weapons lost during the year. Whereas Saigon's troops had maintained a kill ratio of 2.9 to 1 during the period April through November 1967, they had improved that ratio to 4.0 to 1 during the same months of 1968.[49]

Despite these improvements, the chronic problems that had hampered the effectiveness of the RVNAF throughout the war remained unsolved at the close of 1968. Of much concern to American officials was the RVNAF's high desertion rate, which had actually increased during the year, beginning after the Tet offensive. By the end of November, the "gross" desertion rate (which made no allowance for returnees) had reached 15.5 percent of strength, only 2.3 percent lower than it had been in 1965 when enemy pressure had been at a high point. Even more alarming, most deserters came from ground combat units, which had a desertion rate of 40 percent for the entire year. In large part, the increase resulted from Saigon's rapid post-Tet mobilization; 80 percent of deserters were men who had been in service less than six months. In the light of these statistics, the achievements of South Vietnamese mobilization appeared less impressive. US and South Vietnamese officials identified numerous reasons for desertion—fear and confusion on the part of servicemen, concern for the welfare of dependents, excessive periods of exposure to combat, inadequate pay, expectation of an imminent peace settlement, and lax enforcement of punitive measures.

As of the end of the year, the Joint General Staff had remedial actions under way. These included tighter law enforcement, larger rewards to those who "informed" on deserters, establishment of maximum "desertion quotas" for each command (with a promise to remove commanders whose rates exceeded their specified figures—an incentive either to action or creative reporting), intensive troop indoctrination programs, and improved living conditions for soldiers. US officials anticipated that these actions, together with the completion of Saigon's general mobilization effort, would produce a substantial drop in the desertion rate in 1969. Ambassador Bunker, however, was less optimistic. He noted that intelligence sources indicated that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese were having similar desertion problems and suspected that much of the manpower leakage was the result of underlying social factors, such as localism and ethnic and religious antagonisms. In fact, high desertion rates have characterized most civil wars, where men fighting in their own country easily can depart for their homes when they tire of soldiering.[50]

Throughout 1968, the problem of inadequate RVNAF leadership also troubled US officials. The Joint Chiefs of Staff repeatedly warned the Secretary of Defense that leadership shortcomings might prevent Saigon's forces from accomplishing what Americans expected of them regardless of how much equipment they were given. Expansion of the force structure to 850,000 men would magnify the problem of acquiring additional competent officers and noncommissioned officers. At American urging, the Joint General Staff developed a three-year program to increase the number of officers and NCOs to staff the 850,000-man force. Ninety percent of these men were to be made available by the close of CY 1968. The JGS also made plans to improve the RVNAF promotion regulations.[51]

OSD officials, who received monthly RVNAF officer/NCO strength reports from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were skeptical that the South Vietnamese were doing all that should be done to remedy the RVNAF's leadership deficiencies. They doubted that the JGS programs would provide the leadership required for the enlarged force structure and saw no sign that Saigon was ready to make a serious attack on corruption, prejudice, and ineptitude among its commanders. General Wheeler, however, reassured the Secretary of Defense that he agreed with General Abrams's view that the JGS promotion program was moving as rapidly as South Vietnam's resources allowed and would supply the RVNAF with the needed leadership at the proper rate. In December, the Chairman reported that, according to projected estimates, RVNAF officer/NCO quotas for CY 1968 actually would be exceeded.[52]

As to the quality of RVNAF leadership, General Abrams assured the Joint Chiefs of Staff that MACV was doing everything possible to improve it. The command was pushing aggressively to secure more battlefield promotions for outstanding officers and NCOs. The South Vietnamese were reviewing selection criteria, improving the quality of their training schools and senior service academies, and

revising policies governing the assignment of war college graduates. They also were maintaining education requirements for officers despite the rapid mobilization effort. It remained to be seen, however, whether all this activity could break up the networks of class, politics, and patronage that stood in the way of creating a dynamic, truly professional RVNAF leadership.[53]

Despite continuing problems, as 1968 drew to a close, American officials in Washington and Saigon had reason to believe that their attempt to upgrade Saigon's armed forces was off to a promising start. South Vietnam's military and civilian institutions had been subjected to a severe test early in the year and had survived to emerge stronger than before. According to Ambassador Bunker, after the Tet offensive the South Vietnamese people for the first time were experiencing a sense of pride in the performance of their army, just as they were rallying to support the government in its hour of crisis. If the RVNAF continued to improve their combat record, there was room for hope that they might constitute a major symbol of national unity around which the democratic elements in South Vietnam might rally. In that case, the South Vietnamese armed forces might contribute to the successful resolution of the political conflict even as they prepared themselves for their primary task—assuming responsibility for the nation's security after the United States withdrew its forces.

The Emerging Contours of Vietnamization

By the end of 1968, the Accelerated Improvement and Modernization Plan had assumed the basic outlines of what the incoming administration of President Richard M. Nixon would call "Vietnamization." The program was aimed at developing the South Vietnamese armed forces so that they could gradually take over from US troops the burden of their country's defense, either during continuing hostilities or under a peace agreement. To accomplish this, the United States would add more men and equipment to the existing RVNAF force structure while trying to improve its ally's training and leadership.

The American planners in MACV and the JCS were working on two fundamental assumptions that would prevail throughout the life of the program. First, they assumed that the conflict in South Vietnam would remain basically a guerrilla and light infantry war at a level of intensity no greater than that of 1965–68, possibly de-escalated by a diplomatic agreement. Hence, the task of Saigon's forces would be primarily territorial security. Washington accordingly rejected the Joint General Staff's Plan Six on grounds that South Vietnam did not need and could not maintain such mobile, heavily armed forces. Second, the planners assumed that the United States, even if it withdrew most of its combat troops, would maintain a significant advisory and support presence in South Vietnam and heavily subsidize Saigon's war effort, as long as hostilities continued and even after a peace agreement was

signed. If the peace settlement allowed North Vietnamese troops to stay in the south, the United States would keep forces in place to compensate. If either or both of these assumptions were invalidated by events, the improvement and modification program—and South Vietnam itself—likely would be doomed to collapse. As of the end of 1968, however, the level of combat in South Vietnam was declining and the allied military position showed signs of improvement. Thus the planners' assumptions appeared to be justified.

14

After TET: The May and August Offensives

After the Tet offensive, fighting in South Vietnam continued at a high tempo during the first eight months of 1968. The enemy launched two more nation-wide offensives, one in May and the other in August, each weaker than the last. The allies responded with large-scale counteroffensives, along with intensified territorial security and pacification efforts. By the end of August, exhausted and bloodied North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units were pulling back into remote bases and cross-border sanctuaries as the allies prepared for offensives of their own.

Changes in Command: Washington, Saigon, Honolulu

The early months of 1968 saw extensive changes in the ranks of officials who directed the US war effort in Southeast Asia. Perhaps the most important development was the departure of Robert S. McNamara, who had held the position of Secretary of Defense longer than any other incumbent. From the early advisory period, McNamara had been the administration's principal overseer of the war; but he had come to doubt the validity of America's course in Vietnam. McNamara's pending departure to head the World Bank had been announced in late 1967. His successor, Clark M. Clifford, was sworn in on 1 March 1968.[1]

Impending retirements of several high ranking military officers led to additional command changes. The tour of duty of the Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, was scheduled to end on 30 June 1968. On 23 March, formally taking a step contemplated since late in the previous year, President Johnson announced his intention to appoint General Westmoreland to this position. At the same time, the President asked General Wheeler, who would complete his statutory four-year

term as JCS Chairman in July 1968, to remain in office for another year. Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Commander in Chief, Pacific, also was due to retire. On 10 April, President Johnson nominated Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., then CINCNAVEUR, as his successor. At the same time, he selected Westmoreland's deputy, General Creighton W. Abrams, USA, as the next COMUSMACV.[2]

These appointments became effective over the next several months. General Westmoreland relinquished command in Saigon on 11 June and was sworn in as Army Chief of Staff on 3 July. General Abrams, who had assumed duties as acting COMUSMACV on 29 May, then was formally installed in command. Besides confirming Westmoreland as Army Chief of Staff, the Senate also confirmed General Wheeler's extension as Chairman for another year. Admiral McCain assumed the position of CINCPAC on 31 July.[3]

The Allies Resume the Offensive

None of the changes in command had any immediate effect upon the tactical situation in South Vietnam. There, allied forces recovered quickly from the shock of Tet and seized the opportunity to hunt down and destroy enemy troops and political cadres that had come out into the open in the recent attacks. General Westmoreland planned to clear the five provinces around Saigon and to conduct a major offensive in IV CTZ while at the same time launching a thrust in I CTZ to relieve the Marines besieged at Khe Sanh. Explaining these plans to his subordinates on 2 March, General Westmoreland stressed the importance of an aggressive attitude. "We must stop thinking about the next VC attack," he declared, "and start thinking, all of us, of continuing to carry the attack to the enemy."[4]

Westmoreland lost no time in putting these operations in motion. On 6 March, elements of the US 9th and ARVN 7th Divisions launched an offensive in IV Corps. Four days later, Operation QUYET THANG began in the vicinity of Saigon with units from four US and three ARVN divisions involved, along with South Vietnamese Marine, Ranger, and National Police units. Targeting enemy forces in the capital's environs, the operation continued until 7 April. At its end, the allies claimed to have killed more than 1,400 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong and detained more than 400 suspected enemy guerrillas and cadres. US losses amounted to 105 dead and 920 wounded. The allies followed up QUYET THANG immediately with a new and expanded operation, TOAN THANG (Final Victory), with additional US and ARVN units, again aimed at clearing the enemy from the Capital Military District. The *New York Times* characterized this action as the "largest allied offensive of the war in Vietnam, involving the use of more than 100,000 troops."[5]

Farther north, in Operation PEGASUS, US Army and Marine units by mid-April broke the enemy encirclement of Khe Sanh. Following up PEGASUS, US and ARVN units launched Operation DELAWARE/LAM SON 216, an attack on the important

enemy bases and supply routes in the nearby A Shau Valley. Preceded by B–52 and tactical air strikes, American and South Vietnamese troops on 19 April began a ground and helicopter-borne incursion into the base area. For about a month, against relatively light opposition, they swept the length and breadth of the A Shau. When the operation ended on 17 May, the allies reported killing more than 860 enemies at a cost of 168 US and South Vietnamese dead. Equally if not more important, they had captured major caches of Communist weapons, equipment, ammunition, food, and other military supplies and had temporarily disrupted a key North Vietnamese logistical complex that threatened both Hue and Da Nang.[6]

While the administration fully approved of these offensives, the President and his advisers became concerned that the size of the operations, especially of TOAN THANG with its bellicose name, offered ground for suspicions that the allies were escalating the war just when the United States was proclaiming a search for peace. Informed of this fact by General Wheeler, General Westmoreland explained that the South Vietnamese had selected the name for the big Saigon operation and that he had concurred, not wishing to do anything that would dampen their enthusiasm. MACV had tried to keep its announcements in "low key," he continued; but reporters had found out the size of the forces involved and press sensationalism had done the rest. In response to administration concerns, Westmoreland instructed his subordinates to play at low key public affairs presentation of their offensives. In addition, with the approval of General Wheeler and Admiral Sharp, he directed his commanders to stop using the term "search and destroy" to denote attacks on enemy units and base areas. To replace that phrase, which was "over-used and often misunderstood particularly in lay circles," commanders were to substitute in their reports such standard military terms as "spoiling attack" and "reconnaissance in force." These terms, the MACV commander hoped, would sound less violent in the public arena.[7]

Military activity in South Vietnam gradually settled back into its pre-Tet pattern. US and South Vietnamese forces sought the enemy, who attempted to avoid contact while bringing in supplies and reinforcements. Encouraged by developments, General Westmoreland reported that "Allied operations during April were highlighted by an unparalleled display of aggressiveness and cooperation by US, ARVN, FW forces and governmental agencies." The MACV commander pressed his subordinates to even greater efforts. "Commencing immediately," he told them in a directive on 6 May, "our objective will be to make a major breakthrough toward military victory in South Vietnam. . . . The fighting will be characterized by an aggressive, unremitting, twenty-four hour application of pressure on all enemy elements throughout RVN." The enemy was to be hounded relentlessly, day and night, in all weather; loss of contact would be considered a tactical error. The RVNAF would be assigned a "full role." Commanders were to give pacification support operations, which were "inseparable from the main offensive," as much attention as any other of their responsibilities.[8]

Along with ground operations, air and naval operations continued unabated. Following the President's curtailment of ROLLING THUNDER on 31 March, allied aircraft concentrated their attacks on North Vietnam on targets south of the 19th parallel, hitting roads, waterways, truck parks, and storage facilities. The number of attack sorties against the north increased from 5,142 in March to 7,262 in April, and 10,000 each in May and June. The monthly average for the second quarter of CY 1968 was 9,149, as compared with 4,932 per month for the preceding quarter. The stepped-up air effort kept pace with an increase in enemy truck traffic. The monthly average of trucks reported destroyed rose from 896 during the first quarter to 1,101 in the second.[9]

Allied bombing in southern Laos also intensified. On 1 April, in the hope of choking off the flow of men and supplies, the US 7th Air Force initiated a southwest monsoon interdiction campaign against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The campaign exploited the target-finding capabilities of the new MUSCLE SHOALS sensor system (later renamed IGLOO WHITE). Beginning on 19 April, 50 percent of the ARC LIGHT force (30 B–52 sorties per day) was allocated to this operation. The monthly average of sorties against Laos, however, dropped from 7,292 for the first quarter of 1968 to 4,596 for the second, reflecting deteriorating weather as the monsoon set in.[10]

Early in 1968, the US Navy had shifted its vessels from their operations against North Vietnam's coast (SEA DRAGON) southward to provide gunfire support for allied forces in northern I CTZ. After 31 March, this campaign, like ROLLING THUNDER, was restricted wholly to the coast south of 19 degrees, but its intensity did not diminish.[11]

The Second Enemy Offensive, May 1968

Even as the allies pressed their offensives, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong—under the direction of the Central Party Military Committee and High Command in Hanoi—prepared for a second round of attacks on South Vietnam's cities. Immediately after the subsidence of the Tet offensive, the enemy set to work repairing his losses. Increasing numbers of trucks loaded with supplies rolled down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. To replace the heavy casualties of the first offensive, the enemy stepped up both recruiting in the south and infiltration from the north. According to US estimates, infiltration had increased from approximately 7,500 in December 1967 (about the monthly average for that year) to 24,000 in January 1968. In February, the number dropped to 12,000, but immediately thereafter it soared to record numbers: 30,000 in March, 25,000 in April, and 30,000 again in May.[12]

The second Communist general offensive of 1968 began on the night of 4–5 May with widespread mortar and rocket attacks on cities and towns, followed in some places by ground assaults. It soon became evident that no replay of Tet was in the offing. In spite of the enemy's massive logistic effort, his forces had not

fully recovered from Tet; hence the scope and intensity of the May attacks fell far short of those of February. Even worse from the enemy's point of view, the May offensive lacked the element of surprise. MACV and the Joint General Staff had received ample advance warning from prisoner interrogations, agent reports, analysis of enemy troop concentration patterns, and revelations by a high-ranking enemy defector that the enemy would attack nationwide with a focus on Saigon. As a result, the Americans and South Vietnamese pre-empted some Communist ground assaults and intercepted and broke up other attack units before they reached their objectives.[13]

As US intelligence had predicted, the heaviest ground attack came against Saigon. Allied forces in Operation TOAN THANG prevented most of the multi-battalion assault force from entering the capital. Only small units—none of battalion size—penetrated the city. Those elements, however, fought stubbornly, exploiting to the utmost the disruptive capacity of even a small force in an urban environment. They were aided by VC terrorists who attacked police stations, power plants, and other key installations. Allied troops, including US reaction forces, required several days to eject the enemy from Saigon in fighting that did much property damage and left thousands of civilians homeless. On 11 May, General Westmoreland reported that there had been no significant contacts within the city during the previous day and night. Fighting continued outside Saigon, however, as US and ARVN units sought to block the enemy's withdrawal routes. On 13 May, the American and South Vietnamese commands formally announced that the attack had been crushed.[14]

Officials in Washington closely followed the course of events in South Vietnam. "What can we do to get additional help to Westmoreland, if he becomes involved in another enemy offensive" Secretary Clifford asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 May, before it was clear that the offensive was over. "Very little" was the substance of the JCS reply, delivered on 21 May. Four Army brigades could be made available during July and August, the Joint Chiefs indicated; but their deployment would leave STRAC (Strategic Army Corps) wholly devoid of combat-ready forces. To send Marine reinforcements would require further mobilization plus involuntary extension of terms of service. Fortunately, the ebbing of the attack spared the administration from having to face the political ramifications of another call for reinforcements from COMUSMACV.[15]

The relatively small scale of the so-called "Mini-Tet" offensive, together with its coincidence in time with President Johnson's agreement to negotiations in Paris, suggested that the attack's purpose was as much political and psychological as military and that the enemy intended it as a show of continuing strength on the eve of the talks. Ambassador Bunker held this opinion. Seizure and occupation of all or part of South Vietnam's capital would undoubtedly have constituted a powerful bargaining counter. But the enemy had failed to achieve this goal and had suffered losses that were quite high in relation to the size of the forces engaged, though well

below those of Tet. As of midnight 8–9 May, Mr. Bunker estimated, the enemy had lost more than 5,700 men killed in action since the offensive began, as opposed to 804 US and allied troops killed. A later estimate put the number of enemy dead at approximately 12,500 for the first two weeks of May. Nevertheless, in retrospect, a Communist official history claimed a moral victory: "Carried out in a situation in which the enemy had brought in a large force, had organized a defense in depth, and was striking back at our forces in the outskirts of the city, this second wave of attacks by our armed forces against Saigon, and especially by our main force troops, demonstrated the tremendous resolve of our soldiers and civilians."[16]

For his fresh expenditure of blood, the enemy had two tangible gains to show. On 10 May, a North Vietnamese division surrounded and assaulted a Special Forces camp at Kham Duc in central I CTZ. With the base under mortar and machine gun fire, General Westmoreland, after consultation with Generals Abrams and Cushman, ordered Kham Duc evacuated. The MACV commander explained that the forces required to hold and relieve the camp could be better employed elsewhere. Unacknowledged publicly but equally or more important was a second reason: reluctance to become involved in another controversial Khe Sanh type siege in a place of limited importance. Under cover of round-the-clock B–52 and tactical air strikes, MACV successfully extracted the beleaguered garrison, but at the cost of significant losses in men, equipment, and aircraft.[17]

The second success, from the enemy's perspective, was the amount of destruction wrought in Saigon, partly by Communist troops and terrorists, and more by the firepower the allies used in expelling the attackers. According to Ambassador Bunker, the scale of damage approached that of Tet. Preliminary estimates were that 20,000 houses had been destroyed in Saigon and its surrounding Gia Dinh Province, as compared to 27,000 in the original attack. At least 107,000 people were refugees. MACV and the South Vietnamese government, using the organization set up to repair Tet damage, promptly took steps to rebuild housing and care for the homeless. Nevertheless, Mr. Bunker expressed concern about the effects of this destruction upon civilian morale. He warned, "If repeated enemy attacks on Saigon continue to produce this kind of devastation . . . , I wonder how long this can be borne without threatening to undermine all that has been achieved here."[18]

The Harassment of Saigon, May–June 1968

Ambassador Bunker's concern was well-founded. Following the May offensive, the enemy undertook a persistent siege of Saigon. The siege consisted of two types of operation. Starting on 18 May, Communist forces around the city subjected the capital to intermittent nighttime bombardment by mortars and 122mm rockets. At the same time, small bands of 5 to 30 infiltrators slipped into the city to carry out assassinations and sabotage. Although inflicting relatively few casualties and

little damage, these activities were intended to increase the strain on South Vietnam's economy, to intimidate the populace, and to demonstrate that the Saigon government could not protect its citizens even in its own capital.[19]

MACV and the JGS moved swiftly to counter this latest enemy threat. The allies placed the broad "rocket belt" surrounding Saigon—an area of roughly 300 square miles within which the enemy could fire upon the capital—under 24-hour aerial surveillance. They constructed radar-equipped observation towers to detect enemy firing positions and direct counter fire by artillery, helicopters, and fixed-wing gunships. They reviewed counter fire procedures to reduce response time. Both to block infiltration and disrupt the bombardment, US and ARVN infantry conducted continuous operations around the city. To ensure security of the capital, MACV and the JGS assigned additional troops to Saigon's defense. By late June, 27 US and ARVN maneuver battalions were concentrated in Gia Dinh Province and still more battalions interdicted infiltration routes and attacked enemy base areas farther from the capital. On 3 June, after prolonged American urging, President Thieu unified the command of all his forces protecting the capital under a Military Governor of Saigon and Gia Dinh Province. As a counterpart, MACV set up a Capital Military Assistance Command, headed by the deputy commander of II Field Force, with operational control over all US units and advisory teams in Saigon/Gia Dinh. These measures were effective. The last rocket attack on Saigon took place on 21 June; the infiltration attempts had ceased earlier. Nevertheless, defense of the capital and its approaches continued to absorb, by General Abrams's estimate, over 50 percent of total allied maneuver battalion assets.[20]

Of increasing concern to US officials in Saigon and Washington was the damage that allied forces were inflicting in the cities by their use of indirect artillery fire and airpower in their efforts to drive out the enemy. An incident in Saigon on 2 June dramatized the issue. On that day, a US helicopter, flying a strike mission requested by the ARVN III Corps commander, accidentally fired a rocket into a group of high-ranking South Vietnamese officials who were observing an attack on some infiltrators. Seven men, including Saigon's chief of police, were killed; the mayor of Saigon and four others were wounded.[21]

This accident, along with reports of the destruction from the Saigon embassy and the American news correspondents in Vietnam, deepened high-level concern in Washington. On 4 June, General Wheeler told General Abrams that Secretary Clifford had asked the military to find less destructive ways of combating infiltrators. "I ask that this action be done urgently," said the Chairman, "because of the very real concern here in Administration circles and the bad play we are receiving in the news media."[22]

The Military Assistance Command and the US embassy had been aware of the collateral damage problem since the Tet offensive. In mid-May, as one of his last official actions, General Westmoreland had instituted a combined MACV/JGS review of urban combat tactics, aimed at finding ways to eliminate the enemy while

minimizing civilian casualties and property damage. General Abrams continued this effort and also confined to field force commanders the authority to call for artillery fire and air strikes in urban areas.

In their study, completed on 14 June, the officers from MACV and the JGS put forward a number of changes in city-fighting tactics, equipment, and training. They recommended that allied forces rely on direct-fire weapons and tank/infantry teams in urban combat, in preference to air and artillery delivered ordnance. To this end, the RVNAF should be furnished with its own 90mm and 106mm recoilless rifles for fire support. The study endorsed extensive use of helicopters to maneuver troops and weapons so as to cordon and isolate enemy forces. Its authors declared that the decision to use napalm, indirect artillery fire, helicopter gunships, and tactical air for close support in urban areas should be retained at corps/field force level. General Abrams told the Chairman that he had approved these recommendations and directed his forces to implement them. General Wheeler passed the study's conclusions on to Secretary Clifford with the observation that he believed they would have the desired effect. Worthy though these proposals were, however, General Abrams and the authors of the MACV/JGS study realized that if the enemy got into the cities in force, extensive destruction would inevitably result. Hence, the "key objective" in city defense must remain "to intercept and engage the enemy prior to his reaching major urban areas."[23]

Interlude, June–August 1968

Following the May offensive, enemy combat activity declined sharply in South Vietnam. Aside from the continued pressure on Saigon, the most notable enemy action after mid-May was an abortive attack on Kontum City in II Corps. By the first week of June, the number of enemy-initiated attacks, which had soared to 277 for the week of 5–11 May, had dropped to 50. The figure declined further in July, reaching a low of 27 for the week of 28 July–3 August. During May, the enemy had made 17 battalion-size attacks; he made only 6 in June and 2 in July. There were indications of declining enemy morale, notably a number of small group surrenders by Communist personnel. Unfortunately, these isolated events did not presage a general collapse of enemy forces. To the contrary, there was ample evidence that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had simply paused to replace losses, refit units, and prepare for a new offensive. Most administration officials took this view of the meaning of the lull.[24]

During the lull, officials in Washington and Saigon confronted the militarily and politically delicate question of evacuating Khe Sanh. Disengagement from that isolated position had been under discussion at MACV, Provincial Corps-Vietnam (ProvCorps), and III MAF since early April. By that time, Generals Abrams and Cushman, supported by General William W. Momyer, the 7th Air Force commander,

all favored abandoning the fixed position at Khe Sanh after the Communist siege was lifted. Instead, they advocated defending the northwestern corner of Quang Tri Province by mobile operations from other bases less vulnerable to North Vietnamese attack. Initially reluctant to give up the base, General Westmoreland finally agreed to a gradual drawdown of the Khe Sanh garrison with a view to closing the base by early September.[25]

Evacuation came sooner. In June, intelligence indicated that the enemy again was building up his forces in northern I CTZ, presumably in preparation for another offensive. To disrupt this buildup, General Abrams, now in command of MACV, decided to adopt a fully mobile posture in northwest Quang Tri. Among other measures, he proposed evacuating Khe Sanh on or about 1 July and using its garrison (then only one battalion) for offensive action. The base would remain within the operating area of US forces.

Execution of this plan would have been routine except for the attention and controversy that the defense of Khe Sanh had drawn a few months earlier. It was easy to foresee that those who had criticized retention of Khe Sanh during the siege would seize upon its abandonment as evidence that the lives lost in defense of the base had been wasted. Recognizing this prospect, General Abrams submitted the plan to General Wheeler. With Ambassador Bunker and Admiral Sharp concurring, Abrams declared that the military advantages of evacuating Khe Sanh now outweighed any political or psychological costs.[26]

After obtaining approval of Abrams's plan by his JCS colleagues and by Secretary Clifford, General Wheeler submitted it to the President. When he did so, he told General Abrams, he "ran into headwinds associated primarily with the public affairs aspects." President Johnson approved the evacuation, but he stipulated that the public announcement be carefully planned in order to minimize adverse publicity and triumphant enemy propaganda.[27]

While General Abrams imposed a news embargo on all stories of plans and operations around Khe Sanh, officials in Washington, Saigon, and Honolulu argued about the wording of a suitable press release. At General Abrams's urging, the version finally approved stuck closely to the facts. It declared that enemy now had at least eight divisions in I CTZ—two more than in January—and was therefore capable of mounting "several sizeable attacks concurrently." Hence, "mobile forces, tied to no specific terrain, must be used to the utmost to attack, intercept, reinforce, or take whatever action is most appropriate to meet the enemy threats." To secure such mobility, MACV was closing the Khe Sanh base. By the time MACV headquarters released this announcement on 27 June (Saigon time), news of the withdrawal already had been published, in violation of the embargo, by a *Baltimore Sun* reporter. As feared, the US press interpreted the abandonment of Khe Sanh as an American defeat and questioned the wisdom of holding the base in the first place. The withdrawal itself began several days later and was completed without incident on 7 July.[28]

The evacuation of Khe Sanh was connected with a change in MACV's overall concept of defense against infiltration through the DMZ. The anti-infiltration barrier, approved in late 1966 and under construction during 1967, was to have consisted of a line of strong points along the border of the DMZ near the coast, linked by sensors and observation towers, with additional sensors clustered in the mountain defiles farther west. Construction of the strong points, however, had been seriously hindered by enemy artillery and mortar fire, as well as infantry attacks, from the Demilitarized Zone. When the siege of Khe Sanh began, MACV suspended work on the barrier. After the Tet offensive, General Abrams instituted a new plan that stressed the use of mobile forces for defense. Except for the bases already completed, work on the strong-point obstacle system was again deferred, for all practical purposes permanently.[29]

The attack on Khe Sanh also had disrupted plans for a sensor-based antipersonnel barrier (DUMP TRUCK) on the infiltration trails in eastern Laos and the western DMZ. Enemy forces overran the area while the system was undergoing operational tests. MACV diverted the available sensors to the defense of Khe Sanh, where the devices provided valuable tactical intelligence during the siege. Used again in the A Shau Valley operation, the sensors helped to locate targets for artillery fire and then for air strikes after US forces had left the area. In the light of the successful applications of sensors in situations for which they had not been designed, the JCS directed COMUSMACV to draft a proposal for their use in combat sweeps, ambushes, surveillance of enemy routes and base areas, convoy protection, and for other purposes. MACV proposed eight operational tests in May, June, and July; if they proved successful, operations would then be expanded as rapidly as resources permitted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved this plan (DUCK BLIND) subject to further evaluation after the tests.[30]

The air campaign continued in North Vietnam and Laos. During July, US Air Force and Navy planes flew 14,647 attack sorties over North Vietnam below the 19th parallel, as compared with a monthly average of 9,149 in the entire preceding quarter. For the period July through September 1968, the number totaled 38,334, as compared with 27,447 flown during the three previous months. In the Laotian panhandle, where unfavorable monsoon weather prevailed, allied aircraft flew approximately 3,000 sorties per month during the third quarter, as opposed to an average of 4,596 for the second. MACV discontinued Operation TURNPIKE, the regular employment of B–52s in the interdiction campaign in Laos, on 15 June; but ARC LIGHT strikes continued to be available on a case-by-case basis. Meanwhile, tests of the anti-truck sensor system (MUD RIVER) in Laos, and of the Project Alpha intelligence center at Nakhon Phanom, proved successful; and planning was under way for a systematic interdiction campaign against the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[31]

None of these efforts stemmed the flow of personnel reinforcements from North Vietnam. During June, July, and August, enemy troops continued to flow southward at a rate of 30,000 or more each month. These men made up most of the

losses the enemy had suffered in his two sanguinary offensives of February and May. In June, according to MACV estimates, enemy military strength in South Vietnam totaled approximately 215,000—not much less than the peak figure of 222,000 in October 1965. But there had been a significant change in the composition of this force since the earlier date. In October 1965, North Vietnamese troops had accounted for only 26 percent of enemy strength; by June 1968, they made up about 70 percent of the total. A decline in the quality of enemy units also was noticeable. Many of the new North Vietnamese recruits had been sent forward with inadequate training. Furthermore, as northerners, they lacked the Viet Cong's rapport with the people and knowledge of the terrain.[32]

Evaluation of the ARC LIGHT Campaign

The powerful B–52, designed originally for strategic nuclear warfare, had come into its own as a tactical weapon by the middle of 1968. MACV used the B–52's capacity for delivering heavy conventional bomb loads in close support of ground troops to great effect during the siege of Khe Sanh. Along with tactical air and artillery, the big bombers broke up enemy troop concentrations massing for assault. Prisoners captured around Khe Sanh testified to the devastating physical and psychological effectiveness of the rain of high explosive from the B–52s. COMUSMACV credited intensive B–52 strikes with a major role in blunting the assault on Saigon in early May as well as an offensive in Kontum Province later that month.[33]

MACV received its B–52 resources from CINCSAC as authorized by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, subject to sortie limitations established by the Secretary of Defense. Late in 1967, Mr. McNamara had approved an increase in the number of B–52 sorties in Vietnam from 800 to 1,200 per month, effective 1 February 1968. On 10 February, with Khe Sanh under siege and the Tet offensive under way, COMUSMACV requested an increase of an additional 40 sorties per day. After obtaining informal approval from OSD, the Joint Chiefs on 13 February authorized CINCSAC temporarily to exceed the 1,200 limit in order to meet emergency requirements for Khe Sanh and the DMZ. They did not specify a new maximum figure. By the end of the month, B–52s were flying in Vietnam at a rate of approximately 60 sorties per day, or 1,800 per month—just about the maximum that could be sustained with the available resources.[34]

On 22 March, COMUSMACV asked that the 1,800 rate be continued indefinitely. J–3 studied the problem and concluded that the request was justified and that aircraft and bomb resources were sufficient to maintain this rate through December. Deputy Secretary Nitze, however, approved the 1,800 per month figure only through June, stipulating that it should drop to 1,400 thereafter. His decision was part of the Program 6 reinforcement package.[35]

Nitze was concerned about the expense of sustaining the high B–52 sortie rate. He pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 15 April that the reduced monthly rate of 1,400 sorties would cost about $1 billion. A further reduction to 800, he continued, would cut this cost almost in half. He therefore asked the Joint Chiefs to study the ARC LIGHT program and to send him their assessment of the relative effectiveness of monthly rates of 800, 1,200, and 1,400 sorties.[36]

In an interim reply on 23 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued strongly against any reduction in the 1,800 rate. The full rate would be needed, they declared, to support offensive operations then under way and to sustain the expanded interdiction campaign that had become essential now that most of North Vietnam was off limits to bombing. Secretary Clifford in response reaffirmed for the time being the existing 1,800 monthly rate.[37]

On 29 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded the results of a more careful study of the effectiveness of ARC LIGHT. They reported that field force commanders in South Vietnam testified unanimously that the program "makes a valuable contribution to achievement of US objectives in Southeast Asia and is a major factor in preventing the enemy from pressing his offensive plans." It was impossible statistically to evaluate its effectiveness or to compare various monthly rates. Even the maximum allocation of 1,800 sorties, the JCS noted, was insufficient to strike all available targets in Vietnam that were judged profitable in a careful screening process at various levels of command. The Joint Chiefs, therefore, urged that the 1,800 sortie rate be continued through December. They recommended further that 10 more B–52s be deployed to U Tapao Air Base, Thailand, making a total of 35 in that country. This move would reduce the cost of the ARC LIGHT program and also partially ensure against the possibility that political pressure might deny the use of Kadena Air Force Base on Okinawa. It would be possible to sustain a monthly rate of 1,710 sorties with the 35 B–52s in Thailand plus the 70 on Guam.[38]

On 22 June, Mr. Nitze approved for planning purposes the request to fly up to 1,800 B–52 sorties monthly through December. The decision, however, would be reviewed within the next 60 days and at intervals thereafter. He also accepted the recommendation to increase the B–52 force in Thailand, subject to approval of the Thai government.[39]

Secretary Clifford and General Wheeler Visit South Vietnam, July 1968

In July, General Wheeler and Secretary of Defense Clifford made a quick journey to South Vietnam to appraise the progress of the war. The trip immediately preceded a meeting between President Johnson and President Thieu at Honolulu. Briefing President Johnson at Honolulu on 18 July, both the Defense Secretary and the Chairman reported the situation much improved. South Vietnam's forces had

recovered from the Tet offensive and were steadily expanding and gaining in effectiveness under the stimulus of the US assistance program. Clifford noted, however, that the RVNAF was still short of being able "to assume as rapidly as possible the amount of the total burden which they should be carrying."

Progress was evident on other fronts as well. MACV and the JGS had strengthened the security of urban areas, notably around Saigon, where the new measures of defense and counterattack instituted in June were proving effective. Allied "spoiling" actions, carried out by ground troops and aircraft, were seriously disrupting enemy plans; and the enemy's recent losses had impaired his capability to mount widespread offensives. In the hope of obtaining an exploitable success, the Communists were staggering or rotating their local attacks, both in time and space, so as to maintain maximum pressure on allied forces. Nevertheless, Clifford and Wheeler warned Mr. Johnson that the enemy was massing troops and supplies for another large effort in I CTZ and around Saigon, probably during August. It appeared, however, that General Abrams possessed enough forces to cope with any offensive.[40]

After briefing the President in Honolulu and returning to Washington, General Wheeler told General Abrams that the trip "was a great success insofar as Secretary Clifford and I are concerned." The Chairman reported that Mr. Clifford had praised Abrams and his subordinates "in the highest terms," both in Honolulu and at a White House luncheon. "I hope," concluded the Chairman, "that his report and mine have damped some of the anxieties existent earlier here in Washington."[41]

The trip, however, had not dampened Secretary Clifford's anxieties or weakened his conviction that the war could not be won and the United States must extricate itself from it as rapidly as possible. At a meeting with his senior staff on 22 July, according to notes taken by Mr. Nitze, the Secretary declared simply, "[We] must get out of there." Mr. Clifford stated his conviction that "No way can we terminate the war militarily." He expressed suspicion that the South Vietnamese government "doesn't want war to stop now" as long as the money kept flowing. "Corruption runs through everything." He saw a need to "convey to our representatives in Saigon they [are] seeing it too narrowly, from GVN pt. of view" and that they should "look at it from interest of U.S."[42]

Evidently unaware of Secretary Clifford's views, General Wheeler discussed with COMUSMACV the impending enemy attack. Reviewing evidence of hostile dispositions available in Washington, the Chairman observed that the Communists appeared to be in a position to strike with division-size forces along the border and simultaneously with smaller units around Saigon. Such a pattern of attack, he suggested to General Abrams, "would pose the greatest problems to you and your subordinate commanders."[43]

General Abrams' reply struck a tone of reassurance and determination. He expressed doubt that the regimental-size enemy units around Saigon were strong enough to attack, although he thought it probable that at least one division would

move against the capital after diversionary actions had been launched elsewhere. Abrams declared that he intended "to accommodate the enemy in seeking battle and in fact to anticipate him wherever possible." He had directed his commanders to make every effort to find, fix, and destroy enemy forces before they could attack. General Wheeler showed this message to the President, who requested that COMUSMACV be notified of his hearty approval of this aggressive plan of action.[44]

Mr. Johnson was intensely concerned about the prospect of a fresh enemy attack on South Vietnam's cities. On two occasions, 30 July and 2 August, the President discussed with General Wheeler the possibility of resuming air and naval operations between 19 and 20 degrees if such an attack occurred. At the meeting on the 30th, Mr. Johnson indicated that he wanted to "get back up to the 20th parallel" if the enemy "hit us." In the end, the matter was dropped; but the President expressed his alarm in public. In a news conference on 31 July, he cited intelligence reports of record levels of infiltration and of a sharp increase in truck traffic since the bombing restriction. So long as such massive preparations for a new attack continued, he said, it would be unthinkable to contemplate any further restrictions on the US military effort in Vietnam.[45]

The Enemy's Third Offensive, August 1968

As July passed into August, evidence of enemy attack preparations accumulated in volume and detail. On 12 August, in a memorandum for Secretary Clifford, General McConnell, as Acting Chairman, summarized General Abrams's most recent forecast. The MACV commander expected an offensive on or about 15 August. Probable targets were the central DMZ, Da Nang and other cities in I CTZ, Ban Me Thuot (II CTZ), and Tay Ninh and other cities on the fringes of III CTZ. An assault on Saigon would probably occur several days after the offensive had begun.[46]

Seeking to avoid a repetition of the Tet public relations disaster, the administration prepared a plan for announcing news of the attack so as to minimize any shock to domestic opinion. Secretary Clifford and General Wheeler had discussed the general outline of such an arrangement during their July visit to Saigon. The concerned officials agreed that, as soon as the attack was manifestly under way, the United States would make clear through briefings, press conferences, and other announcements that the action had been fully expected. Administration spokesmen would point out that US public opinion was one of the enemy's targets and that there was every prospect of another North Vietnamese and Viet Cong defeat. As the attack developed, successful US and ARVN actions would be emphasized, but excessive optimism would at all times be carefully avoided.[47]

The third nationwide offensive, which began on the night of 17–18 August and ran for about a week, proved to be something of an anti-climax. As had been true in May, the enemy did not achieve surprise. Aside from significant ground

incursions into Tay Ninh and Ban Me Thuot, the offensive consisted mostly of widespread attacks by fire. The allies successfully pre-empted major assaults on Da Nang and Saigon. Viet Cong local forces conducted the majority of attacks; the larger VC and NVA units were held back to exploit initial successes that did not materialize. Evidently trying to hold down casualties, the enemy did not fling his men into assaults as aggressively as he had in the earlier offensives. This caution was reflected in a somewhat lower casualty rate. According to MACV's estimate, approximately 8,500 hostile troops were killed in action between 18 and 29 August, compared with 12,000 between 5 and 16 May. Although lower in its cost in blood, the August offensive, like that of May, brought the enemy no commensurate military or political gain.[48]

The failure of the attack was even more obvious than in May. Ambassador Bunker ascribed this result primarily to

> the steady improvement which has taken place in the allied forces: improved intelligence, better all around performance, especially by the ARVN, RF/PF and paramilitary forces, better coordination of all units, the very effective interdiction and spoiling efforts of our forces and skillful and effective application of airpower, especially the B–52s. Confidence in their ability to cope with the enemy prevails throughout the Vietnamese and allied forces to a greater degree than ever before.[49]

Part of the explanation for the enemy's weak showing probably lay in the declining quality of his forces, caused by the replacement of casualties with poorly trained recruits under inexperienced leaders. Senior US commanders, when queried by General Abrams, agreed that North Vietnamese troops were deteriorating in training, leadership, and morale. Replacements were being sent in with only one to three months' training instead of the previous six or eight. Prisoners and defectors testified to the effects of homesickness, fear of allied firepower, food shortages, and disease. No longer was the enemy policing the battlefield as vigorously as before; the number of weapons found abandoned had significantly increased. This decline in quality was uneven, however, according to US commanders. It was most pronounced in units that had suffered the heaviest allied pressure; units located adjacent to the enemy sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia were in much better condition. Viet Cong units had held up better than North Vietnamese ones; but the offensives, which the indigenous southerners had usually spearheaded, had hit them hard. Some VC units now were being filled up with men from the north, and others were recruiting females or males above or below the optimum age. But none of General Abrams's commanders had any illusion that the Communist forces were disintegrating. "The enemy may not fight as well as he once did," the MACV commander remarked, "but he can still prove to be a troublesome foe."[50]

Evidence steadily accumulated of the enemy's increasing reliance on North Vietnamese manpower to compensate for shrinking Viet Cong strength. General Wheeler had noted this trend after his visit to South Vietnam in July. A Central

Intelligence Agency assessment, prepared two months later on the basis of MACV estimates, indicated that 46 of 58 known enemy main force regiments consisted entirely of men from the north, while 9 of the remaining 12 were believed to be over 50 percent North Vietnamese in composition. Even the two regiments known to exist in IV Corps, the Mekong Delta contained some men from the north.[51]

Although they proclaimed the initial Tet offensive to have been a great strategic victory, the Vietnamese Communists, at the time and in retrospect, identified many errors and failures by their side in the May and August attacks. According to defector reports and captured documents, enemy field commanders in the south complained during the summer of 1968 that the two follow-on offensives had been poorly planned on the basis of inaccurate information, sloppily executed, and unproductive in results in the light of the casualties sustained. The assault on the cities had been pressed far beyond the point of diminishing returns. Because of this error, the Communist command, by expending Viet Cong local forces and guerrillas in constant fighting around the cities, had dangerously weakened revolutionary control in the villages and hamlets, leaving the party's rural base vulnerable to allied counterattacks. The official historians of the People's Army of Vietnam later concluded:

> Because we did not reassess the situation in a timely fashion, especially after the development of a number of unfavorable factors in the balance of forces and the progress of the war, we did not move quickly enough to shift the direction of our attacks. We continued to attack the cities, leaving the rural areas open and undefended.... The follow-up offensives launched by our soldiers and civilians did not have the strength of our first offensive and did not achieve the results our first wave of attacks had. Beginning in mid-1968, the lowlands of [South Vietnam] encountered problems. After participating in a series of fierce, continuous combat operations, our main force units in South Vietnam had suffered losses and their combat power had declined.[52]

Aftermath of the Offensives

Despite the failure of his August offensive, the enemy maintained a fairly high level of activity during the month of September. Attacks initiated by his forces averaged slightly more than 46 per week in that month, as compared with 31 during July and the first half of August. Eleven of the September actions involved forces of battalion size or larger—almost as many as the 12 such attacks recorded in August. Most of the September targets were US Special Forces camps, none of which was captured.[53]

This, however, was a final flurry. Beginning in October, enemy initiatives declined to small-scale local probes, terrorism, and other annoying but relatively minor actions. For the final quarter of 1968, the weekly average rate of enemy attacks dropped to 32, and only one attack during this three-month period involved

a battalion size force. The flow of enemy replacements from North Vietnam also diminished. US estimates of the infiltration rate showed a drop from about 33,000 in August to 15,000 in September, with a further decline to 10,000–12,000 in each of the succeeding months. Enemy weakness was the cause of these reductions. North Vietnamese historians wrote of this period: "Beginning in the latter half of 1968, our offensive posture began to weaken and our three types of armed forces suffered attrition. The political and military struggle in the rural areas declined and our liberated area shrank." Enemy main forces, the historians continued, were able to maintain only a portion of their strength in "our scattered lowland base areas." Most of the troops "were forced back to the border or to bases in the mountains."[54]

In South Vietnam, military events seemed to be taking a favorable trend for the allies; but there was no indication that the enemy was preparing to abandon the struggle. MACV's J–2 concluded late in September that the enemy, far from being discouraged, considered that his losses so far had been fully justified by indications that the United States was losing its will to fight. The resignation of Secretary McNamara, the reassignment of General Westmoreland, President Johnson's withdrawal from the 1968 election, the noisy controversy in the United States between "hawks" and "doves," the threatened instability of the dollar, and incessant foreign criticism of US policy—all these developments, as seen from Hanoi, yielded a picture of a nation and its leaders similar to that of France in 1954. From this viewpoint, it would be unthinkable for the enemy to weaken his resolve or to lower his objectives. The course of the negotiations in Paris during the summer and autumn indicated sustained North Vietnamese determination and wavering US resolve.[55]

15

The Paris Talks through the Bombing Halt

Establishing the US Negotiating Position

Following President Johnson's 31 March speech, in which he announced a curtailment of ROLLING THUNDER and issued a call for negotiations, Washington and Hanoi engaged in a month of discussions, ending with an agreement to open formal talks in Paris on 10 May. The primary purpose of these bilateral talks was to consider the possibility of further restrictions upon the bombing of North Vietnam. The administration hoped that in addition these discussions might move on to general peace negotiations.

The United States had shut off bombing above the 20th parallel as a unilateral act. In announcing it, the President had held out the hope of further restrictions on a quid pro quo basis. "Even this very limited bombing of the North could come to an early end," he said, "if our restraint is matched by restraint in Hanoi." This statement was in line with the so-called "San Antonio formula," announced by Mr. Johnson on 29 September 1967, in which the President had expressed a willingness to stop all air and naval bombardment of North Vietnam if such action would "lead promptly to productive discussions." The United States, of course, would assume, the President had continued, "that while discussions proceed, North Vietnam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation."[1]

What kind of "restraint" the United States should look for in return for an end to ROLLING THUNDER was the key issue as the administration developed its opening position for the Paris talks. What North Vietnamese actions would constitute "taking advantage" of US concessions? Should the enemy be required

to agree in advance to abjure such actions, or should the US ask only for a promise to enter substantive negotiations on the understanding that Hanoi would do nothing to endanger the chances of a settlement? In discussion of these issues, the Joint Chiefs of Staff generally urged that the United States seek the highest possible price from North Vietnam in exchange for any further restriction on American actions.

An interdepartmental Contingency Study Group/Vietnam, set up in January 1968 and chaired by Assistant Secretary William Bundy of the State Department, was the forum for debating this issue. Members of this Group settled upon a list of three actions by the other side that would constitute violation of the "no advantage" formula in the President's San Antonio speech. These were: (1) artillery fire on US forces across the DMZ; (2) ground attack across the DMZ or a massing of troops in North Vietnam so as to directly threaten allied forces; and (3) increase in the movement of northern troops and supplies into South Vietnam. Representatives of different agencies, however, disagreed on whether these demands should be presented as preconditions for additional restriction of US bombing, or whether the US should simply end the bombing while simultaneously warning North Vietnam that attacks would be resumed if it committed any of the specified actions. The Joint Staff representative advocated the first approach; those from the State Department and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) favored the second.[2]

On 6 April, the Study Group adopted a set of draft instructions for the US negotiating team that included the three actions. The draft defined the "basic" US objective at Paris as making arrangements with the North Vietnamese representatives for "prompt and serious substantive talks looking towards peace in Vietnam." In the course of these talks, "an understanding may be reached on a cessation of bombing in the North under circumstances which would not be militarily disadvantageous." There followed a set of "specific objectives." The first of these stated that the United States was "prepared to agree to a cessation of naval, air, and artillery bombardment of North Vietnam" on the understanding that "such action on our part will lead promptly to talks in which both sides would be free to raise any elements which they believe would lead to a peaceful settlement."

The second and third points defined "prompt and serious" talks. "Prompt" meant that "substantive talks should be held within 3 to 7 days following the cessation of bombing." "Serious" denoted that the US "should seek explicit confirmation by the North Vietnamese that any topic relevant to the substance of peace could be raised in the substantive talks." A fourth point dealt with who should participate in the negotiations, stating that "in any substantive discussions we expect to take account of the interests of the South Vietnamese Government and of our... allies. Participation in any... discussions affecting South Vietnam must not exclude the Government of the Republic of South Vietnam."

The fifth point attempted to define "not taking advantage." The US negotiators "should provide an adequate basis for the expectation that North Vietnam would not attempt to improve its military position as a result of the US [bombing] cessation." North Vietnam should "understand that the US would regard as acts of bad faith inconsistent with its restraints any such attempts." The United States would consider as "examples of bad faith"

> a) Artillery or other fire from or across the DMZ.
> b) Ground attacks across the DMZ or the massing of additional forces or supplies in North Vietnam or the DMZ in a manner which poses a direct threat to Allied forces in South Vietnam.
> c) An increase in the movement of North Vietnamese troops and supplies into South Vietnam.

Finally, the sixth point specified that the US "intends to continue certain reconnaissance flights, and the record should not preclude such flights."[3]

The wording of these draft instructions indicated that the members of the Study Group had been unable or unwilling to settle the issue between "hardliners" and "softliners." The instructions in effect set a deadline—three to seven days after a total bombing halt—for beginning substantive negotiations. However, the wording used in the "not take advantage" paragraph—that North Vietnam should "understand" the consequences of certain actions—failed to resolve the key question: whether or not to require from North Vietnam an advance agreement to de-escalate before bombardment was stopped.

On 2 April, while the instructions for the US negotiators were being drafted, General Wheeler conferred with Ambassador W. Averell Harriman, who had been named to head the US negotiating team. Ambassador Harriman asked the Chairman for a list of quid pro quo actions, over and above the minimum US demands, with which to enter the negotiations. At General Wheeler's direction, J–5 drew up a list of seven possible preconditions that might be specified for a complete cessation of air attacks. The minimum demand was enemy abstention from the three actions in the Study Group's "no advantage" list. In increasing order of severity, J–5 listed other demands, ranging from de-escalation of acts of violence against South Vietnamese civilians to withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from Quang Tri Province. After considering these J–5 proposals, the Joint Chiefs decided to strengthen them by adding other demands—notably a "conclusive demonstration" that North Vietnam had begun withdrawing its forces and supplies from the South—which admittedly would amount to "virtual surrender" by Hanoi. The Joint Chiefs ordered the paper sent back to J–5 for revision. Meanwhile, they informally transmitted their views to Harriman and to Lieutenant General Andrew J. Goodpaster, USA, who would serve as chief military adviser to the Paris delegation. Subsequently, however, the Joint Chiefs allowed the matter to drop, probably because it had been overtaken by events.[4]

President Johnson and his advisers discussed the Study Group's draft instructions to Ambassador Harriman at two meetings, one at the White House on 6 April and a second session at Camp David on the 9th. General Wheeler was present at both meetings, together with Secretary of Defense Clifford and other officials. General Westmoreland attended the White House meeting, and Ambassador Bunker participated at Camp David. Both men emphasized the improving allied military position in South Vietnam and urged the administration to approach the negotiations from a position of strength. Harriman, however, observed in his personal notes of the 9 April meeting, "Bunker seems to lack an understanding that President Johnson has the balance of this year to carry out his policies, and that there is little chance that American opinion will support a 30-billion dollar war in Vietnam, with the present rate of losses, for much longer."[5]

At the 9 April meeting, the President and his advisers approved the draft instructions without major change. They added, however, two supplementary understandings regarding the "not take advantage" paragraph. The first stated that North Vietnamese failure to agree to demilitarization of the DMZ or to comply with the Laos Accords would not be considered "taking advantage" of a bombing cessation, although these objectives would be presented during the course of the talks. The second defined an "increase" in infiltration as a rate in excess of that which had prevailed in August 1967 when the San Antonio formula had been communicated to Hanoi. In addition, the participants agreed that the United States would seek to include the South Vietnamese government in substantive negotiations on an "our side/your side" basis. This would allow both the Thieu regime and the National Liberation Front to participate without any implication of mutual diplomatic recognition. At the end of the meeting, President Johnson asked those present, including Secretary Clifford and General Wheeler, whether they all agreed on the draft instructions. Along with everyone else, both Clifford and Wheeler replied in the affirmative.[6]

Whatever the terms of the written instructions, President Johnson made it clear that he himself would be the "number one negotiator" for the US team. In a meeting with the US delegation on 6 May, just before its departure for Paris, Johnson instructed the members to concentrate on protecting the national interest and not to worry about domestic public opinion, which would be his responsibility. The President told the delegates that there was no election year deadline for a settlement. "Don't yield anything on that impression." He had removed himself from the presidential race to free his government from those constraints. Johnson instructed his negotiators to seek an agreement on terms more favorable than the bare-minimum San Antonio formula; if they were unable to do so, he would make the decision when to fall back from the opening position. He added that he expected that the United States would end by stopping ROLLING THUNDER under the San Antonio terms. The President believed, however, that the subsequent negotiations would fail; and that it would be necessary eventually to resume the air offensive in order to secure a settlement of the war.[7]

Opening of the Paris Talks

President Johnson selected a six-man team to represent the United States in Paris. Ambassador Harriman, a seasoned diplomat with a reputation for skill and tenacity, led the delegation as senior member. His deputy, Cyrus R. Vance, formerly Deputy Secretary of Defense, also held the rank of ambassador. Lieutenant General Goodpaster, newly appointed Deputy COMUSMACV, served initially as the military adviser. Other delegation members were Philip C. Habib of the State Department and William J. Jorden of the National Security Council (NSC) Staff. The final member, Daniel J. Davidson, special assistant to Ambassador Harriman, also acted as Secretary to the Delegation.[8]

In order to provide the delegation with up-to-date military information, the Joint Chiefs of Staff arranged to furnish to General Goodpaster current reports of the situation in Vietnam and also monthly forecasts of COMUSMACV's operational plans, updated as necessary. They also approved a suggestion by Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland that liaison officers from the MACV staff be assigned to Paris for two-week tours of duty, to brief the delegates on the current situation and collect information requests to take back to Saigon. The latter arrangement would continue throughout the duration of the negotiations.[9]

Although the Paris talks initially were to involve only the United States and North Vietnam, America's allies sent observers and made liaison arrangements to keep track of developments. The South Vietnamese government appointed its ambassador to the United States and its consul general in Paris to monitor the talks, but the principal channel of communication on the negotiations ran through the US Embassy in Saigon. Five of the troop-contributing countries—Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, the Republic of the Philippines, and Thailand—designated their ambassadors in Paris as observers. The State Department, however, consulted with these nations primarily through the usual diplomatic channels, on the basis of information transmitted from Paris to Washington.[10]

The US and North Vietnamese delegations both reached Paris on 9 May. After the second-ranking members worked out procedural arrangements, the first substantive negotiating session took place on schedule on 13 May at the International Conference Center in the Majestic Hotel. It was evident at once that the two sides were far apart. North Vietnam's lead negotiator, former foreign minister Nguyen Xuan Thuy, opened by repeating Hanoi's four long-standing demands: withdrawal of US forces, temporary restoration of the two zones of Vietnam under the terms of the 1954 Geneva Agreement, self-determination for South Vietnam in accord with the program of the National Liberation Front, and peaceful reunification of North and South. The primary purpose of the present talks, Xuan Thuy declared, was to arrange for the "unconditional cessation of the bombing and other acts of war against the DRV."

In rebuttal, Ambassador Harriman affirmed that the sole US objective in Vietnam was to preserve the right of the South Vietnamese people "to determine their own future without outside interference or coercion." He called for restoration of the DMZ and an end to North Vietnamese infiltration into the south. Following these steps, both the United States and North Vietnam should withdraw their forces from South Vietnam, leaving the region's people free to settle their own future, including the issue of reunification. With regard to the basis for a total bombing halt, Ambassador Harriman noted the President's actions of 31 March and asked the North Vietnamese, "What restraints will you take for your part to contribute to peace?"[11]

At this and subsequent sessions on 15, 18, and 22 May, the North Vietnamese declined to answer Mr. Harriman's question. They refused to discuss concessions on their part in exchange for a bombing cessation, and they would not admit to the presence of their troops in South Vietnam. They had come to Paris for just one purpose: to arrange the unconditional cessation of the US air campaign against the north. In the estimation of the American representatives, this unyielding stance resulted from the Communists' belief that the United States had entered the talks merely to find a face-saving formula for surrender. Ambassador Harriman sought Soviet diplomatic intercession to soften North Vietnam's position, but Moscow's ambassador to Paris, Valerian Zorin, claimed to be unable to assist.[12]

Impact of the May Offensive

The enemy's "mini-Tet" offensive, which opened just as the Paris talks were beginning, caused the administration to reconsider its diplomatic and military strategies. In the light of the stalemate in Paris, President Johnson and his advisers considered the possibility of a US "re-escalation" that might have abruptly terminated the diplomatic contacts so recently begun.

In response to the May offensive and the subsequent bombardment of Saigon, Ambassador Bunker pressed for US retaliation. As early as 10 May, he recommended resumption of bombing up to the 20th parallel in order to put pressure on the enemy. Secretary Rusk replied that this and other Bunker suggestions would "raise serious issues" and would require careful study. However, he recognized that any further concessions to Hanoi during the current attacks would adversely affect South Vietnamese morale. This consideration reinforced the "go slow" attitude toward a total bombing cessation upon which the administration had already decided.[13]

The Joint Chiefs agreed with Ambassador Bunker's suggestion for an extension of the limited bombing campaign. They recommended that the United States conduct armed reconnaissance and naval bombardment up to 19 degrees 50 minutes, allowing a buffer zone of ten nautical miles to prevent any inadvertent violation of the 20 degree boundary. However, the Joint Chiefs favored strikes on two

fixed targets within the buffer—Bai Thong airfield and the Thanh Hoa rail/highway bridge—if weather conditions permitted. On 15 May, General Wheeler submitted this plan to the President, who rejected it for the time being. However, he promised to reconsider it within a week or so. Meanwhile, Secretary Rusk had referred it to Ambassador Harriman for comment.[14]

As enemy rockets and mortar shells continued to fall on Saigon, Ambassador Bunker reported to Washington President Thieu's fear that these assaults would undermine confidence in his government. How long, Thieu wondered, did the United States intend to restrain its air campaign in the absence of reciprocity from the enemy? President Johnson took note of Thieu's fears in a public statement on 23 May. Addressing himself to the attacks on South Vietnamese cities, Mr. Johnson declared that he would "not permit the enemy's mortars and rockets to go unanswered."[15]

Privately, the President confronted the grim possibility that the Paris negotiations might end in utter failure, and he asked the Departments of Defense and State to examine the possible consequences. On 24 May, Secretary of Defense Clifford asked the Joint Chiefs these questions:

> A. What policy should we follow if North Vietnam continues to remain unresponsive in the Paris talks by refusing reciprocity and refusing to negotiate on other issues until we stop the bombing?
> B. If the Paris talks break down completely or are abandoned, what plan or plans should we follow to achieve a resolution of the conflict?[16]

The Joint Chiefs replied on 29 May. Answering the first question, they recommended a greatly expanded bombing campaign, to embrace all of North Vietnam except areas close to the Chinese border. This campaign should be "continued until Hanoi begins prompt and productive talks." A decision concerning the beginning of the campaign should be made soon, in order to take advantage of the favorable weather from May to November. The Joint Chiefs emphatically rejected any mere extension of bombardment from 19 to 20 degrees, claiming it "would not bring significantly increased pressure on NVN nor seriously restrict the flow of men and materiel." They also ruled out as ineffective a "one-time, large-scale" air strike north of the 20th parallel.

Should negotiations be broken off, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended essentially a continuation of the existing military strategy unhindered by "the militarily confining restraints which have characterized the conduct of the war in the North to date." Specifically, the military should be permitted to close North Vietnam's ports by mining, to wage unrestricted air warfare against all significant military and economic targets except those within two miles of the Chinese border, and to extend naval surface operations effectively to the entire coast of North Vietnam.[17]

Predictably, the diplomats in Paris advocated a more restrained approach. In a statement of their views transmitted on 25 May, Ambassadors Harriman and Vance

doubted that North Vietnam would break off the talks, but also believed that Hanoi would "undertake no restraint," at least until after the US presidential nominating conventions. They forecast also that the enemy in South Vietnam would continue attacking allied forces and cities. Nevertheless, they opposed any immediate, drastic action. "We strongly believe," they declared, "that we should be patient and should not bomb north of 20 degrees and should continue talks, searching for progress." Harriman and Vance suggested the possibility of striking "a few carefully selected targets between 19 and 20 degrees," but expressed doubt whether such action would affect the negotiations. In any event, no such strikes should be ordered at least until 29 May, to give the Paris delegation time to warn the North Vietnamese about the consequences of continued intransigence and intensified military activity.[18]

President Johnson and his senior advisers considered the possibility of a renewed bombing campaign at a White House meeting on 29 May. Ambassador Vance, returned from Paris, presented the case for a restrained course of action. He expressed the view that any bombing beyond the 20th parallel would be certain to lead to a rupture in the talks and reaffirmed his doubts that bombing between 19 and 20 degrees would influence Hanoi's stance in the negotiations. Vance's views carried the day; the President ordered no change in military operations in the North for the time being. Strengthening the case for restraint, on 3 June, Le Duc Tho, a ranking member of the Hanoi politburo, suddenly arrived in Paris. In view of the possibility that Tho's appearance might presage a change in the enemy's position, Ambassador Harriman recommended that consideration of renewed bombing between 19 and 20 degrees be further deferred.[19]

Although the administration had decided against military escalation, it seemed necessary to take some action in response to the continuing enemy harassment of Saigon. Accordingly, on 12 June, at the eighth meeting of the negotiators in Paris, Ambassador Harriman condemned the attacks on Saigon and warned that their continuation could have "most serious consequences" for the negotiations. He followed up this statement on 19 June by calling attention to criticism of these attacks by other nations. Two days later, the attacks ceased. Whether this termination resulted from Harriman's *demarche* or from effective allied military operations or a combination of both is unknown.[20]

Deadlock in Paris

During June and July, the Paris talks continued without result. The weekly public sessions turned into an exchange of polemics aimed at international public opinion rather than substantive discussions and would go on in that vein for the next five years. With some help from the Soviets, the US delegates attempted to open private discussions with the North Vietnamese, but only tentative feelers resulted. Both publicly and privately, the Americans in late June floated a pro-

posal drafted in the State Department for a "two phase" approach to the combined issues of bombing and de-escalation. Based on a Soviet suggestion, the proposal envisioned that the United States would commit itself to stop all bombing of North Vietnam at a specified date in the near future, subject to a private understanding regarding actions by Hanoi that would follow the cessation. Thus, the bombing halt could be presented as unconditional, as the North Vietnamese had demanded, and yet contain an implied quid pro quo. The North Vietnamese displayed some interest in this approach, but still objected that it demanded concessions as a price for an end to the air attacks.[21]

At the end of July, with the North Vietnamese still noncommittal on the two-phase proposal and clearly preparing for another large-scale offensive in South Vietnam, Ambassadors Harriman and Vance recommended an additional US concession. In a message to Washington on 29 July, they expressed doubt that they could make significant progress in the talks so long as the United States continued on its present track. They suspected that Hanoi was anticipating that the forthcoming Democratic Party nominating convention would produce an irreparable cleavage in public opinion—one that might fatally undermine the US negotiating position and stampede the next administration into a "precipitous withdrawal." At the same time, the impending enemy offensive might inflict high casualties on US forces and thus strengthen the domestic public demand for withdrawal from Vietnam.

As Harriman and Vance saw it, the only hope for an early break in the stalemate was for the United States to move as far as possible toward accepting the enemy's demand for an "unconditional" bombing halt. They laid out a definite proposal to that end. Under their plan, the United States would tell Hanoi privately that it would stop the bombing on a certain date in the near future. The United States would demand no compensating concessions but would make clear its assumption that: (1) substantive talks would begin soon after the specified date; (2) the status of the DMZ would be fully respected, and North Vietnam would not move forces through it or mass them nearby; (3) there would be no indiscriminate attacks against major cities; and (4) North Vietnamese force levels in South Vietnam would not be increased. While not making a specific threat to Hanoi, the United States and its allies must be fully prepared to resume the bombing if North Vietnam violated these "assumptions."

Besides moving the negotiations forward, Harriman and Vance argued, this course of action possibly would prevent the imminent North Vietnamese offensive, thereby saving American lives and preventing enemy political and psychological gains. At the same time, if Hanoi launched major attacks after a bombing halt, it would have demonstrated for the entire world its lack of good faith in seeking peace. In the United States, "the public would close ranks behind the administration and a resumption of the bombing program would meet with general understanding."[22]

President Johnson emphatically rejected this suggestion. Privately, he expressed to Secretary Rusk his suspicion that "doves" in the State and Defense

Departments were ganging up to force a unilateral bombing halt action upon him and declared his determination to meet the pressure and head it off. On 30 July, in a personal message, Rusk informed Harriman and Vance that the administration wished "to stay firmly on our present course and press for a constructive Hanoi response to the proposals we have already made." In a public statement the following day, Johnson ruled out any further concessions for the time being in view of the recent massive enemy movements of troops and supplies into South Vietnam. On the other hand, when the enemy attack began on 18 August, he also rejected, after some discussion, any resumption of the bombing up to the 20th parallel. Still, in a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars the day of the offensive, the President set forth his resolution in unmistakable terms:

> . . . We have made a reasonable offer, and we have taken a major first step. That offer has not been accepted. This administration does not intend to move further until it has good reason to believe that the other side intends seriously to join us in deescalating the war and moving seriously toward peace. We are willing to take chances for peace, but we cannot make foolhardy gestures for which our fighting men will pay the price by giving their lives.[23]

Toward the Bombing Halt

Despite the President's firm words, the United States during September and October moved toward essentially the position Harriman and Vance had proposed—an unconditional halt to what was left of ROLLING THUNDER accompanied by unilateral American statements of understanding of what North Vietnam must not do if the stoppage was to be sustained. With the Soviet Union playing a mediator's role, by mid-October the two sides at Paris had reached a tentative agreement on this basis. The United States would end the bombing without conditions but with an understanding that for the halt to continue North Vietnam must not abuse the DMZ or attack major South Vietnamese cities and provincial capitals. In addition, Hanoi would enter promptly into substantive negotiations in which the Saigon government would be included. On 27 October, after much haggling over how soon after the bombing halt substantive talks must begin and over inclusion of the South Vietnamese, the two parties agreed that the bombardment would end at 1900 EST on 29 October and substantive talks would begin in Paris on 2 November.[24]

With an agreement in prospect, the President in mid-October began seeking concurrence with his course from his civilian and military advisers. When asked for their opinions, Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams interpreted the diplomatic developments as an indication that Hanoi was "ready for a tactical shift from the battlefield to the conference table." They agreed that a bombing cessation on the basis of the President's three "understandings" would be politically and militarily acceptable from their point of view. On 14 October, Mr.

Johnson consulted his key advisers: Secretaries Rusk and Clifford, the Chairman and the other members of the JCS, the CIA Director, and other officials. They all concurred that Hanoi was serious about negotiations and that the military risks involved in a bombing halt on the proposed terms were "low and manageable." The President "polled the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff individually. They concurred unanimously."[25]

Reflecting the caution that he had consistently shown, President Johnson continued to weigh his course of action up to the last minute. In this process, as was his practice, he used consultations with various advisers both to seek their views and to secure their assent to his decisions. After the bargain was struck with North Vietnam on 27 October, the President decided once more to seek the advice (and assent) of the man most responsible for the safety of the soldiers under fire—General Abrams. As Mr. Rostow later put it, Mr. Johnson wished to "look his commanding general in the field in the eye" and ask him about the possible dangers involved in the agreement. Accordingly, the President ordered General Abrams to come to Washington. The MACV commander made a hasty flight back to the United States and hurried to the White House in the small hours of 29 October.[26]

At 0230 (Washington time) on the 29th, the President convened the critical decision meeting at the White House. General Abrams attended, along with Secretaries Rusk and Clifford, Generals Wheeler and Maxwell Taylor (acting as a special consultant to the President), CIA Director Richard Helms, and Walt Rostow. President Johnson opened the meeting by narrating the course of the negotiations up to that point. He then summarized the substance of the "understanding" reached with North Vietnam on 27 October:

> — Hanoi has agreed in a secret minute and in our discussions to begin serious talks toward peace in Vietnam—talks which would include representatives of the Government of South Vietnam.
> — We have made it clear to them that a continuation of the bombing cessation was dependent, first, on respect for the DMZ, and second, upon there being no attacks on the cities.
> — The Soviet Union, which has played a part in this negotiation, knows these circumstances intimately. Their understanding has been reaffirmed at the highest level in the last few days.
> — Both Hanoi and Moscow are clear that we shall continue reconnaissance of North Vietnam. That is why we agreed to stop only *acts of force* and not *acts of war*.[27]

The President declared that it was "the universal judgment of our diplomatic authorities" that North Vietnam's acceptance of Saigon's participation in the negotiations was "a major event—potentially setting the stage for an honorable settlement of the war." He cautioned his hearers against public reference to "conditions" for ending the bombing, but indicated his belief that Hanoi realized that the bombing would be resumed if the "understanding" were violated.

After some further remarks, Johnson began an intensive cross-examination of General Abrams, during which he made it clear that Abrams's judgment would carry more weight than that of anyone else. Asked about probable enemy intentions, the MACV commander replied that he believed the enemy would abide by the agreement to respect the DMZ, but that another attack on Saigon could eventually be expected. "If the enemy honors our agreement, will this be an advantage militarily?" asked the President. Would it compensate for a lack of bombing up to the 19th parallel? General Abrams answered both questions affirmatively. In response to additional direct questions, the General stated that a bombing halt would not increase US casualties or measurably affect US and allied troop morale.

The President asked General Abrams how the current situation in South Vietnam differed from that two months earlier, when Abrams had given contrary opinions on many of these points. Abrams replied in substance that the enemy had withdrawn major forces from I CTZ and could not reintroduce them without violating the DMZ. The interdiction campaign in Laos, exploiting the capabilities of the new sensor system, had proven highly successful. The enemy in the south was no longer capable of the "mischief" of which he had been capable in August. Continued aerial reconnaissance would permit the allies to detect violations. In addition, the South Vietnamese forces had improved significantly, lending further strength to the allied military position.

Then Johnson asked the climactic questions. "In light of what you know, do you have any reluctance or hesitance to stop the bombing?" "No, sir," the General answered. "If you were President," Mr. Johnson pressed, "would you do it?" Avoiding a direct answer, General Abrams replied that he had "no reservations" about the proposed action, although he knew that it would be "stepping into a cesspool of cement." "I do think it is the right thing to do," he concluded. "It is the proper thing to do."

It was five o'clock in the morning when the President finished questioning General Abrams, fourteen hours before the United States, under the Paris agreement, was to end offensive actions against North Vietnamese territory. There remained the task of securing the concurrence of President Thieu, who was expected to readily agree. He had been kept closely informed of the negotiations and had already consented in principle to the deal; subject to an understanding that the allies would continue to press the offensive in the South and the interdiction campaign in Laos, and that the United States would resume bombing the North if the enemy violated Mr. Johnson's conditions.

President Thieu, however, had other ideas. Before the early morning White House meeting adjourned, Secretary Rusk received dismaying news from Ambassador Bunker. Thieu had refused to approve the agreement. The South Vietnamese president claimed that the interval between the bombing halt on 29 October and the opening of negotiations on 2 November was too short for him to assemble his delegation, which Vice President Ky was to head. Recon-

vening his weary advisers, President Johnson, after reviewing alternatives, decided to seek a postponement of the effective dates of the Paris agreement. When approached with this request, the North Vietnamese agreed, resetting the bombing halt for 0800 EST on 1 November and the opening of negotiations for 6 November.[28]

There followed two days of intensive discussions between Saigon and Washington in which the United States tried in vain to win Thieu's acquiescence in the forthcoming negotiations. The South Vietnamese president, however, stood fast, even in the face of a direct personal appeal and reassurances from President Johnson. Thieu's motives were various. He wanted to prove his independence of his American ally and bolster his political position in South Vietnam. According to Ambassador Bunker, Thieu's stand in fact increased his image as "a leader in his own right." Thieu also needed time to bring the rest of his government into line behind the negotiations. Substantively, Thieu and his colleagues balked at the prospect of meeting with representatives of the National Liberation Front under conditions that might imply an equality of status between that organization and the Saigon regime. There remained a fear in Saigon that the United States might seek a quick settlement through a ceasefire and a coalition government, whereas South Vietnam's growing military strength, together with the favorable trend of the war in the South, suggested to some South Vietnamese leaders that they had nothing to gain and everything to lose by negotiating at that time. Finally, Johnson and his advisors suspected, with some reason, that Thieu had assurances that he could obtain better terms from Richard M. Nixon if the Republican candidate won the presidential election.[29]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and COMUSMACV joined in the administration's effort to bring President Thieu around. General Wheeler informed General Abrams that President Johnson "must go ahead unilaterally, if necessary, because we are already too far down the road with Hanoi and the Soviet Union to be able to turn back." The Chairman instructed Abrams to use his own personal influence with Thieu. Abrams should point out that: 1) he himself, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, believed that the bombing cessation under the terms of the agreement was militarily sound; 2) the forces then engaged in attacking North Vietnam could and would be applied in Laos; 3) the President could not maintain US public support for the war if it became evident that a move toward the negotiating table was being blocked by what, in American eyes, would appear as "trivial and unfounded reasons." In conclusion, General Wheeler made clear his own anger at Thieu's intransigence:

> ... I urge that you speak forth in the firmest terms. As for me, I wish you to know that I consider the situation to be intolerable, and the position taken by President Thieu and his associates to be inimicable [sic] not only to the security interests of the US but to those of the Republic of Vietnam and all the rest of Southeast Asia.[30]

The United States, however, proved unable to bring Thieu around before the new deadline of 1 November. Ambassador Bunker spent most of the night of 31 October–1 November (Saigon time), trying unsuccessfully to overcome the objections of Thieu and his advisers. Bunker and his aides finally left the presidential palace empty-handed at 0745 on 1 November (1845 EST, 31 October). Everyone present knew by then that President Johnson would soon go on the air to announce the bombing halt, without the concurrence of the South Vietnamese government.[31]

ROLLING THUNDER Ends; Substantive Talks Begin

President Johnson planned to make a public announcement of the bombing halt on the evening of 31 October, roughly twelve hours before the agreement with Hanoi would take effect. That morning, the Joint Chiefs met and decided to send the President fresh assurance of their concurrence in his action. They agreed that:

> a. In the light of the understandings reached in Paris between our negotiators and those of the DRV, the military situation in Vietnam is such that cessation of bombing and other acts of force against the DRV constitute[s] a perfectly acceptable military risk.
>
> b. They [the JCS] hope the current problem of reaching agreement with the GVN can be handled in such a way that the effectiveness and prestige of the current government in Vietnam would not be jeopardized.
>
> c. They will, of course, support the decision of the President.[32]

In his address to the nation of 31 October, President Johnson briefly summarized the course of the Paris negotiations and of his conference with General Abrams two days earlier. He then announced that, "as a result of all these developments," he had ordered that all air, naval, and artillery bombardment of North Vietnam cease as of 0800, Washington time, on 1 November. "I have reached this decision," he declared, "on the basis of the developments in the Paris talks" and "in the belief that this action can lead to progress toward a peaceful settlement of the Vietnamese war." Mr. Johnson announced that a "regular" session of the Paris talks would convene on 6 November, at which representatives of the Saigon government would be "free to participate," and at which representatives of the National Liberation Front would be present. He went on to declare, "What we now expect—what we have a right to expect—are prompt, productive, serious, and intensive negotiations in an atmosphere that is conducive to progress."

The United States had made it clear, continued the President that such negotiations could not go on if the other side took "military advantage" of them. "We cannot have productive talks," he said, "in an atmosphere where the cities are

being shelled and where the demilitarized zone is being abused." Mr. Johnson thus revealed the substance of the "understanding" reached with Hanoi, though he was careful not to refer to "conditions" for the bombing halt.

In conclusion, President Johnson declared that since 31 March he had "devoted every resource of the Presidency to the search for peace in Southeast Asia." He promised to continue this effort while he remained in office:

> I do not know who will be inaugurated as the 37th President of the United States next January. But I do know that I shall do all that I can in the next few months to try to lighten his burdens. . . . I shall do everything in my power to move us toward the peace that the new President—as well as this President and, I believe, every other American—so deeply and urgently desires."[33]

With the Paris negotiations under way, the South Vietnamese government, after a show of obduracy, soon agreed to participate in talks with both Hanoi and the National Liberation Front. On 26 November, Saigon announced that it was prepared to join in new talks in Paris with "the Hanoi Delegation" to show "the good will of the Republic of Vietnam and to test the good faith of Hanoi." At the same time, in a joint statement designed to address President Thieu's fears for his regime's status, the US and South Vietnamese governments noted a clear understanding with Hanoi that "our side" would be "constituted as separate delegations of the Republic of Vietnam and the United States." The persons across the table, however, regardless of how they were organized, would be considered "as members of a single side, that of Hanoi, and for practical purposes as a single delegation." This position was "consistent with our view of the nature of the so-called National Liberation Front." The allied governments pointed out also that Hanoi had been informed during preceding discussions that NLF presence in the talks would involve "no element of recognition whatever." Moreover, in future negotiations, the Saigon delegation would "play a leading role" and would be "the main spokesman on all matters which are of principal concern to South Vietnam."[34]

Coincident with these announcements, President Johnson released a statement hailing Saigon's decision to join the Paris talks. Saigon's action, he said, "opens a new and hopeful phase in the negotiations." At the same time, he warned that "we must expect both hard bargaining and hard fighting in the days ahead."[35]

This prediction would prove all too true. For months, US "doves," whose ranks included some of the most prominent members of Mr. Johnson's own political party, had urged him to unilaterally stop the bombing. Vociferous opponents of the war, in the United States and around the world, had held as virtually an article of faith that only the stubborn insistence of the United States upon bombing a small nation prevented the conclusion of peace in Vietnam. In fact, the negotiations would continue through the first term of Mr. Johnson's successor. North Vietnam would hold unwaveringly to its aim of "liberating" South Vietnam and the United

States would try to disengage from the war while leaving Saigon with at least a fighting chance to survive. In the end, it would take major concessions by both sides, combined with renewed US bombing of North Vietnam, to end the war.

16

Pressing the Attack in the South

Following the end of the enemy's August offensive, the allies in South Vietnam pressed their attack against all elements of the opposing military and political forces. They did so with the hearty approval of President Johnson. On 16 October, even as the diplomats in Paris moved toward an agreement to halt bombing in the North, the President through Secretary Clifford directed that "constant, relentless, and persistent pressure" be maintained against the enemy in the South.[1] Carrying out these orders, the Americans and South Vietnamese kept up their attack on the Communist main forces, local forces, guerrillas, and political cadres. Late in the year, they added to this campaign a comprehensive new pacification offensive.

New Offensives and Plans

When he took command of MACV, General Abrams continued the military and pacification campaigns of his predecessor, but with variations shaped by the allied and enemy situations and changing political circumstances. As of late August 1968, the battlefield situation in South Vietnam was increasingly favorable to the allies. General Abrams possessed a balanced American combat force with a solid logistical base and a highly effective intelligence system, the result of the previous two years' buildup. In the CORDS organization, he had a powerful tool for promoting and guiding both US and South Vietnamese pacification efforts. The Saigon government and its armed forces had withstood the three major enemy offensives and appeared to be improving in stability and effectiveness. Abrams, however, understood that the political ground was shifting under him. In the US, public patience with the war was running out. The administration was not going to send any more US reinforcements and wanted to turn as much of the combat burden as possible

over to the RVNAF as soon as possible. At any time, the Paris negotiations might result in a ceasefire or other de-escalation that could hamper MACV's operations.[2]

Aware of the administration's desire to enlarge the South Vietnamese role in the war, General Abrams made a significant modification in the allies' Combined Campaign Plan for 1969, the basic document outlining the coming year's military objectives. Issued by MACV and the JGS on 30 September, the 1969 plan abolished the division of labor contained in previous years' plans under which the ARVN primarily conducted territorial security and pacification support operations while the US and FWMAF attacked the main VC/NVA forces and bases. The 1969 plan specified that there would be "no functional separation of responsibilities" between South Vietnamese and allied forces, all of which were to participate as needed in the main force war, the defense of the cities, and the support of pacification. In preparation for the time when the RVNAF "must assume the entire responsibility," ARVN divisions would "direct their primary efforts to the destruction of VC/NVA main force units." To this end, there was to be a gradual "phase down" of ARVN battalions committed to pacification support and their replacement by the Regional and Popular Forces as rapidly as improvement of the RF/PF permitted.[3]

During the remaining months of 1968, General Abrams, like his predecessor, concentrated the bulk of his American forces in III CTZ to defend Saigon, in I CTZ, and in the Central Highlands of II CTZ. Responding to indications of a major enemy concentration astride the border between Cambodia and III CTZ, he strengthened the defenses of Saigon by redeploying the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), from northern I CTZ, where the division had been operating since just before Tet. The movement of the division began late in October and was completed by the middle of November. In III CTZ, the division was to attack Communist bases and infiltration routes, seeking to pre-empt any new offensive against the capital.[4]

Although enemy military activity declined during the autumn, the Viet Cong were known to be making every effort to repair and rebuild their political and administrative apparatus in South Vietnam (the Viet Cong infrastructure or VCI), probably in anticipation of impending negotiations. Intelligence showed that the Viet Cong were attempting to organize "liberation" or "revolutionary" committees, nominally chosen by election, at every level from hamlet to district, to replace similar groups suppressed or destroyed in previous years. Then the Communists could triumphantly reveal this shadow hierarchy as the "legitimate" local administration in South Vietnam while the "Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces," the front organization formed just before the Tet offensive, offered the nucleus of a national "liberation" government to replace the "puppet" regime of President Thieu.[5]

To counter this enemy effort, MACV and the JGS in the closing months of the year focused their attention on the smaller enemy forces and their local political cohorts, which had been exposed by the withdrawal toward the borders of the battered main forces. "If we are now hopeful of moving from the military

to the political contest," Ambassador Bunker observed, "it is primarily because of the success of our military effort." General Abrams instructed his commanders to conduct an intensive drive against the VC political apparatus even as they continued spoiling and preemptive operations against main and local forces and base areas. They were to cooperate fully with the PHOENIX campaign against the VC infrastructure and support the Saigon government's expanded pacification efforts. He warned that the enemy must not be allowed to win politically what he could not gain on the battlefield.[6]

In a series of messages and directives late in 1968, General Abrams outlined his "One War" concept for carrying on the battle in South Vietnam. He declared that the allies must view the war as the enemy did—as a single struggle, not one that could be subdivided into big and little battles, or into military and political halves. He called upon allied forces to carry the fight to the enemy, "simultaneously, in all areas of the conflict." The "full spectrum of allied operations" was to be directed against "the full spectrum of Communist forces, organizations, activities, and facilities. The latter constitute, and are attacked, as a single coordinated system." In practice, all the instruments of allied power were to be directed continuously against the enemy main forces, guerrillas, and political cadres with the overall aim of securing Saigon's control of people and territory. "The one war concept," Abrams summed up, "puts equal emphasis on military operations, improvement of RVNAF, and pacification—all of which are interrelated so that the better we do in one, the more our chance of progress in the others.... As a practical matter, the relative priorities accorded these three efforts will vary with time and the requirements of any particular area."[7]

Looking toward the onset of the northeast monsoon season in November, General Abrams drafted plans for his own "winter-spring offensive" to take advantage of the expected weather patterns. In September, he proposed an intensified air interdiction effort in southern North Vietnam and the Laotian panhandle, plus a vigorous land campaign against enemy bases and infiltration routes in the Mekong Delta—the regions where the monsoon would bring favorable weather. Abrams planned to assign additional US forces to IV CTZ for this purpose. Admiral McCain and General Wheeler approved this plan. When apprised of the proposal, however, Secretary Clifford questioned the advisability of increasing American troop strength in the Delta. ARVN units had been carrying most of the burden there, Clifford pointed out, and it seemed undesirable to "Americanize" that theater of the war. General Abrams reassured the Secretary of Defense that the additional US forces would consist entirely of helicopter units except for one US airmobile brigade. The latter unit was needed for the duration of the campaign (approximately 90 days) to seal off the Cambodian border. ARVN and Vietnamese Marine Corps units, assisted by elements of the US 9th Division already in IV CTZ, would do the bulk of the searching for enemy forces and bases.[8]

The air interdiction campaign in Laos would make full use of the IGLOO WHITE sensor system, which was already providing valuable information on truck movements through southern Laos. Sensors had also proved their value as an adjunct to offensive ground operations. Indeed, these devices—acoustic, seismic, and electronic—were emerging as a major technological innovation of the war. In September, General Abrams certified the results of a sensor test program (DUCK BLIND) as highly successful. He requested permission from the JCS to make increased use throughout South Vietnam of sensors emplaced by hand or by helicopter. In October, the Joint Chiefs approved this program, which received the code name DUFFEL BAG.[9]

The increased use of sensors was a consideration in Abrams' decision, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved, to abandon once and for all the plan for a static anti-infiltration barrier below the DMZ based on fixed strong points. By the end of the year, he had adopted a concept that called for a sensor screen stretching from the coast to the Laotian border, backed by mobile reaction forces. As intelligence of enemy movements was fed to a central automated surveillance center, the tactical commander would order action by ground units, aircraft, or naval gunfire as appropriate. This method of countering infiltration promised to be more effective and cheaper than constructing a chain of fortifications, although the allies continued to garrison several existing strong points and fire bases in northern I CTZ. In addition, General Abrams expected the new system to reduce casualties to allied forces, which would no longer have to build and repair physical obstacles under North Vietnamese fire.[10]

Military Operations after 1 November 1968

After President Johnson's bombing halt announcement of 31 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately ordered the cessation of all offensive operations against North Vietnam, the DMZ, and the 12-mile territorial waters claimed by North Vietnam. The directives were to go into effect at the time indicated by the President (1300Z or 2100H, 1 November). US ground forces were to take position south of the DMZ, and naval surface units were to withdraw below the 17th parallel. Operations in Laos were not affected, but strike forces en route to or from Laotian targets were not to over fly North Vietnam or the DMZ. US forces could conduct immediate pursuit into North Vietnamese seas or airspace "in response to hostile acts and in pursuit of any vessel or aircraft whose actions indicate with reasonable certainty that it is operating in support of the VC/NVA insurgency in South Vietnam." Forces engaged in such pursuit, however, were not to attack other unfriendly targets except in their own defense.[11]

The JCS issued special rules of engagement for the Demilitarized Zone. In the event of battalion size or smaller enemy attacks across the DMZ, COMUSMACV

was authorized to conduct "timely and adequate" counteractions, including the destruction of forces penetrating across the zone. However, no US ground units were to enter the DMZ unless under "specific orders from highest authority." If fired upon from north of or within the DMZ, US forces could reply with ground or naval gunfire or air attack until the enemy guns were silenced. Friendly forces also were authorized to destroy SAM or AAA [anti-aircraft artillery] installations that fired at US aircraft from across or within the DMZ. In the event of "substantial or general" attacks across the Demilitarized Zone, COMUSMACV was to seek JCS authority at once for "appropriate" counteractions. These restrictions notwithstanding, all commanders retained their inherent right and responsibility to conduct operations in defense of their forces.[12]

The Joint Chiefs explained that the President had stopped the bombing on the basis of a US understanding that in return Hanoi would not only respect the DMZ but also refrain from attacking South Vietnam's population centers. Accordingly, the JCS issued special instructions for response to attacks on cities if they should occur. In the event of a minor attack, allied forces were to retaliate against VC/NVA forces or installations within South Vietnam (or against those within artillery range in or immediately north of the DMZ, as already authorized). Should a major attack occur, allied forces, if they received "approval by the highest authority," might launch air strikes or shore bombardments against targets in North Vietnam. In such a contingency, COMUSMACV would initiate local countermeasures and, after consulting with the Ambassador and the Saigon government, forward appropriate recommendations to Washington.[13]

The JCS enjoined all commanders to prevent any "unauthorized or inadvertent delivery of ordnance" on North Vietnamese territory or within the DMZ. Commanders were to use all available coordination procedures and control measures, and establish border warning procedures, to prevent over flights and to control attacks in the vicinity of North Vietnam's boundaries and the Demilitarized Zone. No target was to be attacked if there were any doubt about its identification or geographical position.[14]

These directives put an end to the ROLLING THUNDER bombing campaign, which had continued at a high level of activity up to the last moment. During the month of October, US aircraft flew 11,936 attack sorties over North Vietnam, an increase of more than 10 percent above September's figure of 10,646. On 1 November, American pilots flew a final 263 armed reconnaissance and 48 tactical strike sorties over the north. ROLLING THUNDER ended after nearly four years of operation, during which its effectiveness had been a source of much debate.[15]

If an understanding existed regarding respect for the Demilitarized Zone (which Hanoi never acknowledged), the North Vietnamese soon violated it. On 12 November, General Abrams reported that the enemy was making extensive use of the southern half of the DMZ to fire on US positions and that enemy troops had been observed in that area. He had ordered his subordinates to react immediately

and forcefully with fire attacks on the enemy positions. Although these instructions seemed entirely permissible under the JCS directives, General Wheeler referred the matter to Deputy Secretary Nitze and other high-ranking administration officials. They agreed that General Abrams's action was reasonable.[16]

Going further, Abrams argued that it was essential for US forces to operate in the southern half of the DMZ, up to the Provisional Military Demarcation Line (PMDL), in order to destroy the enemy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that it would be imprudent to approve this proposal in view of the political situation then surrounding the Paris negotiations (at this point, the US was still trying to persuade the South Vietnamese to participate). However, they told General Abrams that his information on enemy exploitation of the DMZ was being closely studied at high levels. It would help, they continued, if enemy troops in the zone could be positively identified as North Vietnamese. If that could be done, the US delegates at Paris would have facts to refute the North Vietnamese claim, when approached on this issue, that the troops in the DMZ were all South Vietnamese Viet Cong and the US should talk directly to the NLF about their actions.[17]

General Abrams then asked permission to send patrols into the southern half of the DMZ for the double purpose of monitoring enemy activity and capturing prisoners in order to provide proof of identity. The patrols would be of squad size with a platoon-size backup force to be sent in if necessary to assist in extraction. General Wheeler referred this request to the Secretary of Defense. President Johnson and his senior advisors took up the issue on 20 November at a Tuesday luncheon policy session and unanimously agreed to it. Secretary Clifford then approved the patrols for a ten-day period (24 November–3 December). Two days after beginning these patrols, Abrams was able to report the capture of soldiers in the DMZ who were unmistakably from North Vietnamese rather than Viet Cong units.[18]

At the end of the ten-day period, General Abrams requested and obtained permission to continue these limited patrols. He also sought removal of restrictions on the size of the forces he could send into the DMZ. President Johnson turned down this request, fearing that expanded operations in the zone would jeopardize the negotiations. At General Wheeler's urging, the President finally permitted COMUSMACV to employ whatever size force might be needed to extract a patrol squad, with the understanding that Abrams would use this authority with the utmost discretion. At the same time, the President instructed Ambassador Harriman in Paris to seek the genuine "demilitarization" of the miscalled DMZ. The enemy, however, continued to violate the DMZ; and General Abrams repeatedly and unsuccessfully sought authorization to respond with larger forces.[19]

Except for the restrictions on operations in the Demilitarized Zone, the administration left General Abrams free after 1 November to carry on the fight in South Vietnam and Laos. In fact, President Johnson made it clear to the MACV commander that he wanted no letup in pressure on the enemy during the negotiations. Talking with Abrams in Washington on 29 October, the President expressed

the view that the North Vietnamese never would negotiate seriously if the allies reduced offensive operations as had happened during the Korean War truce talks. Accordingly, Mr. Johnson told his general to "pour it on and keep pouring it on." Abrams passed this word to his commanders. In a message announcing the bombing halt, he declared: "the order of the day is to intensify your offensive against infrastructure, guerrillas, and local force units, while maintaining unrelenting pressure on the VC/NVA main force units. We must carry the fight to the enemy and complete his destruction."[20]

In the remaining months of 1968, allied forces in South Vietnam put these words into action. In IV Corps, Operation SPEEDY EXPRESS, the largest campaign yet undertaken in the Mekong Delta, began on 30 November, involving US and ARVN ground troops and a major part of MACV's assault helicopter and gunship resources. Supplementing this operation, US Navy riverine forces on 1 November launched a campaign, SEA LORDS, to deny the delta's waterways to the enemy and penetrate his previously secure strongholds. In I CTZ, two US Army and two US Marine divisions conducted operations against the 2nd and 3rd PAVN Divisions. In III CTZ, US and South Vietnamese units, assisted by a small Thai force, concentrated on clearing the approaches to Saigon and blocking infiltration routes from Cambodia. Smaller operations were under way in II CTZ. All forces provided full support to the accelerated pacification campaign recently initiated by the Saigon government.[21]

Air operations over Laos went on as before 1 November. On 15 November, allied forces launched Operation COMMANDO HUNT, the air interdiction plan for the northeast monsoon season, in the Laotian panhandle. Exploiting to the utmost the intelligence provided by the IGLOO WHITE sensor system, COMMANDO HUNT consisted of round-the-clock attacks by tactical aircraft, fixed-wing gunships, and B–52s on trucks, truck parks, and supply caches along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. First priority in these strikes went to choke points where converging roads could be cut, blocking traffic. Transshipment and storage sites received second priority, followed by sensor-assisted attacks on moving truck convoys. Fourth were attacks to silence the many antiaircraft guns defending the supply route. The first in a series of such operations, COMMANDO HUNT continued into 1969, destroying, according to Seventh Air Force claims, more than 4,000 trucks and sharply reducing the flow of supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[22]

General Abrams continued to make full use of the capability of his B–52 force. The enormous firepower dispensed by these aircraft, together with the ease with which they could be shifted from one target to another as occasion required, obviated the need to hold back troops to form a "strategic reserve" in the orthodox sense. The Deputy Secretary of Defense had authorized continuance of a B–52 sortie rate of 1,800 per month through 1968, subject to a proposed review of this decision within 60 days. That review never took place. In October, COMUSMACV recommended that this rate be continued indefinitely until a major

change occurred in the military situation. He received support for his recommendation from a careful and comprehensive appraisal of ARC LIGHT effectiveness by J–3 and the Defense Intelligence Agency, begun several months earlier and completed in November. The study concluded that no justification existed for any reduction in B–52 operations, since valid targets for ARC LIGHT strikes exceeded the force capability by a factor of 5 to 1.[23]

Before the Joint Chiefs acted on Abrams's recommendation, Deputy Secretary of Defense Nitze, on 26 November, suggested adoption of a variable rate of 1,400-1,800 sorties per month in 1969, with a ceiling of 19,200 for the entire year (a monthly average of 1,600). Mr. Nitze based his proposal on the assumption that the number of high priority targets would fluctuate in response to changes in the intensity of the war as a whole. In reply, the JCS provided a detailed refutation of this assumption and at the same time forwarded a copy of the J–3/DIA study of the subject. The matter remained unresolved at the end of 1968.[24]

As 1968 neared its end, proposals for various holiday ceasefires made their annual appearance. As in 1967, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC recorded their opposition to any such pauses in military action. Nevertheless, the United States agreed to a 24-hour Christmas truce, which was observed from 241800 to 251800 December (Saigon time). For New Years Day, the VC announced a three-day truce, from 30 December to 2 January; but allied forces observed no ceasefire on this occasion, which, as President Thieu pointed out, had no significance for Vietnamese. As of the beginning of 1969, the US and the Saigon government were still discussing a Tet truce, although they had tentatively agreed on a 24-hour period. The allies approached this subject with caution in the light of their disastrous experience with the last Tet holiday.[25]

Political Development and Pacification

At the same time as he pressed the military offensive, General Abrams, supported by Ambassador Bunker and the American mission, put increased emphasis on South Vietnam's political development and on pacification—the government's effort to regain control over and the allegiance of the rural population. The emphasis became more urgent with the 1 November bombing halt and the beginning of negotiations in Paris. The administration and its agents in Saigon saw indications that the enemy, after the failure of their three attacks on the cities, would seek to establish military and political control over as much of the countryside as possible so as to be able to confront the next US president with a call for a ceasefire and a coalition government. Allied success in pacification would help to counter this ploy, and also show the American home front that the allies were making real progress in South Vietnam. Impelled by these motives,

MACV and the American mission during November persuaded President Thieu to launch a major new pacification offensive.[26]

The pacification campaign could build on a stronger foundation than had existed previously. Indispensable to a sustained effort was a stable, reasonably competent Saigon government. Although still fundamentally dependent on the military for political and administrative support, South Vietnam's elected civilian government had been tested by the Tet offensive and emerged with enhanced strength and confidence. President Thieu had neutralized his military rival, Vice President Ky, and seemed to Ambassador Bunker increasingly to be trying to play the role of an elected civilian leader. He appeared to understand what his country's situation required and to recognize the importance of pacification and the need for effective local government institutions. He made a point of keeping in touch with public opinion through frequent trips to rural as well as urban areas. Thieu's display of resistance to the Paris talks had strengthened his image as a leader in the eyes of his countrymen and helped to counter Hanoi's charges that he was a US "puppet."

In Ambassador Bunker's view, South Vietnam's legislature, the National Assembly, was developing into a viable representative institution. Remaining in session during most of the year, the assembly compiled a record that Bunker judged as creditable, marked principally by the enactment of a mobilization law. The legislators showed a willingness both to cooperate with the executive and to assert their authority against that branch when occasion demanded. These developments notwithstanding, the Saigon government remained a military-dominated regime, flawed by corruption and inept leadership, and lacking a solid political connection to the mass of the people. Nevertheless, the government of 1968 was at least stable and in that respect alone constituted a major improvement over the revolving-door juntas of 1964–1967.[27]

Rural pacification showed encouraging progress in the months following the Tet offensive. The offensive initially had disrupted pacification, forcing the transfer of ARVN battalions from the countryside to the cities and temporarily diverting the US CORDS organization to urban relief activities. But as the confusion subsided, it became apparent that the disruption was less extensive than at first feared. The enemy in fact had largely bypassed rural targets. Out of approximately 5,000 small outposts and watchtowers, less than 480 had been abandoned or overrun. Casualties among pacification forces amounted to approximately 6,600 Regional and Popular Forces, 460 police, and 160 RD cadres—many suffered when these elements were thrown into defense of the towns. Tet, it turned out, had left something of a military power vacuum in the countryside, as local and provincial VC units also had gone into the cities and towns to fight and remained engaged in and around them, suffering heavy losses in the process.

Moreover, the pacification organization recovered quickly, pushed aggressively by Ambassador Robert Komer, Deputy COMUSMACV for CORDS. With the full support of General Westmoreland, Komer had worked to redeploy the ARVN, RF/PF,

and Revolutionary Development cadres back into the countryside as rapidly as possible. As early as the end of March, 545 of the 629 RD teams, 87 percent of the total, had returned to their hamlets, and 519 were sleeping there overnight. The proportion of the population living in "relatively secure" areas – those graded A, B, or C according to the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) instituted in January 1967—had dropped from 67.2 percent at the end of January 1968 to 59.8 a month later, but by the end of March it had risen again to 61.0 percent.[28]

According to US and South Vietnamese pacification indicators, lost ground continued to be recovered throughout the rest of the year. The enemy's May and August offensives, again aimed at the cities, had little adverse effect on pacification. By October, 69.8 percent of South Vietnam's population was considered relatively secure—more than on the eve of Tet. A month later, this figure had risen to 73.3 percent, slightly higher than the goal CINCPAC had set for the end of the year (72.0 percent). At the same time, the proportion of hamlets under Viet Cong control dropped from 15.3 percent in October to 13.4 percent in November, and that in the "contested" category from 14.9 to 13.3 percent. How accurately these statistics reflected the actual allegiance of the peasants no one, including allied officials, was totally sure; but the numbers did point to a favorable overall trend.[29]

Progress in pacification, together with allied military success, contributed to improved results in the Chieu Hoi program, Saigon's effort to induce defections from enemy ranks. The number of "ralliers" (Hoi Chanh) had reached a high monthly rate during the first half of 1967 but declined in the last six months. In January 1968, 1,179 ralliers came in; but the Tet offensive was followed by a sharp drop in February and March. Thereafter, the monthly rate steadily increased, reaching 2,381 in October and peaking at 3,148 in December. Although the total for 1968 of 18,298 was less than the corresponding figure for 1967 (27,178), allied officials found the upward trend during the last three months of 1968 highly encouraging.[30]

A new element of the pacification program, instituted early in 1968, was the PHOENIX (PHUNG HOANG) program, a politico-military operation aimed at eliminating, by defection, capture, or death, the Viet Cong's political infrastructure. Initially, the program fell far short of the goal of 1,000 "eliminations" per month that the South Vietnamese government had set for it. About 600 VCI members were eliminated during each of the first two months of the year. Thereafter, however, the monthly number shot up to over 1,200 and remained near that mark until October, when it increased to over 1,400. General DePuy, SACSA, who visited South Vietnam in September, attributed the improved results of the PHOENIX program to a "natural outgrowth of the improved overall military/political situation." However, he found the program still in its infancy. The number of District Intelligence and Operations Coordinating Centers (DIOCCs), the directing element of the effort, remained far short of what was required; and procedures for investigating, trying, and incarcerating VCI members were inadequate.[31]

In the final analysis, all hopes for successful pacification depended upon effective local defense against the Viet Cong. The Saigon government long had tried to form hamlet level part-time volunteer self-defense units able to free the full-time RF, PF, and ARVN regulars for offensive operations. This effort had lagged until the Tet offensive, when urban dwellers and villagers, in response to Communist attacks on their homes, began forming their own organizations for civil defense and disaster relief. Capitalizing on this popular movement, the Thieu government in August organized a mass militia, the People's Self-Defense Force, enrolling men too old or too young for the regular military components and also women. At American urging, the Saigon government, overcoming a long-standing reluctance to arm the populace, began distributing weapons to this new militia. By the end of September, the government claimed to have enrolled 658,934 persons in the PSDF, of whom 239,264 had received training and 58,318 had been issued arms. Although the military effectiveness of the PSDF was limited, it at least engaged the people *en masse* with the government in a way that they had not been before.[32]

Encouraged by these indications of progress, MACV and the Mission during September and early October persuaded President Thieu to launch an Accelerated Pacification Campaign. The campaign was based on Ambassador Komer's theory that rapid, if superficial expansion, of government control in the countryside would pay higher political dividends at this point than improving administration and security in regions currently dominated by Saigon, the approach Thieu initially had favored.[33]

The Accelerated Pacification Campaign was to begin on 1 November and run through 31 January 1969, the end date coinciding roughly with the Vietnamese Tet holiday and the inauguration of the new US President. The central goal of the campaign was to raise more than 1,200 hamlets rated contested or VC-controlled (categories D and E under the HES) to level C (partially government controlled) or higher by occupying them with RF/PF units, setting up local administrations, and organizing PSDF groups. If accomplished, this objective would expand at least nominal Saigon government control in the countryside, thus putting the government in a better position to compete politically with the Communists in the event of a ceasefire. An "intensive military spoiling campaign" was to keep enemy big units away from the areas being pacified. Other targets for the campaign were to secure 3,000 VCI "neutralizations" during each of the three months, bring in 5,000 Hoi Chanhs, and build the PSDF to a strength of 1,000,000, of whom 200,000 would be armed.[34]

During the last two months of 1968, the allies pushed the Accelerated Pacification Campaign with considerable vigor. US troops and the CORDS organization threw their weight behind the effort. In spite of his disagreement with the US over the Paris talks, President Thieu fully supported the campaign. He established a Central Pacification and Development Council, headed by his prime minister, to unify the South Vietnamese side of this and subsequent pacification campaigns. As

of the end of December, the government had upgraded 857 contested hamlets—just about two-thirds of the goal—and brought the percentage of the population in the "relatively secure" category up to 76.3 percent. By the end of the campaign in January, the 1,200 target had been reached. With a month still to go, the allies had more than met their goal of 5,000 ralliers; a total of 5,417 had come in during November and December. By the end of 1968, PSDF strength stood at 1,007,740, although only 98,520 members had been armed. The number of VCI eliminations, however, was lagging; the November figure of 2,338 was well below the campaign target, although it represented a 50 percent increase over October. American officials recognized that pacification in the newly occupied hamlets was far from complete and that the campaign had proceeded against only limited and scattered enemy opposition. Nevertheless, it had raised Saigon's flag over much of the countryside and given the Thieu government new confidence in its own capacities.[35]

Encouraged by these results, the allies prepared a more ambitious and comprehensive campaign for 1969. For that year, and each of the remaining years of the war, the US and South Vietnamese drew up a national Pacification and Development Plan parallel to their annual military Combined Campaign Plan. The pacification plan for 1969 set goals of bringing 90 percent of the population into the "relatively secure" category; eliminating 33,000 VCI members; establishing local government in every village; expanding the PSDF to 2,000,000; and rallying 20,000 Hoi Chanh. To allocate pacification resources, the plan established priority areas on the basis of population density, strategic location, and economic potential. The allies promised to emphasize the strengthening of local self-government by granting more autonomy to village councils, particularly in the development and supervision of self-help projects.[36]

To Ambassador Bunker, appraising the state of the nation-building effort at the end of 1968, the accomplishments of the past year seemed to promise well for the future. In a message to the President, Mr. Bunker drew attention to a number of actions that were still required: to improve the effectiveness of the government, especially in rural areas; to develop a sound political organization; to strengthen further the RVNAF, particularly the territorial forces; and to provide a better standard of living for the masses. But, continued the Ambassador,

> I think it is undeniable that progress has been and is being made in all of these areas. What is especially encouraging is the fact that the rate of progress has accelerated in recent months. I am convinced that the tide is running more strongly with us than at any time in the past. I believe that 1968 will go into history as the year in which the strength and love of freedom of the South Vietnamese people was most severely tested and not found wanting.... I am convinced that if we continue patient and confident in our own strength, we will get next year the kind of peace we have sought through so many grim trials.[37]

US and Free World Force Levels

With the arrival of the Program 6 reinforcements, US strength in South Vietnam reached its high point of the war, an authorized ceiling of 549,500 men. Actual numbers in country usually were several thousand short of that figure. With these troops, plus those of the third-country allies and of the rapidly expanding RVNAF, COMUSMACV was able to defeat the enemy's two post-Tet offensives, drive his main forces back to their border bases, and initiate a broad new pacification effort.

The principal ground combat element added by Program 6—the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized)—reached Vietnam in July. It was intended to replace the 27th Marine Regimental Landing Team, which had come over in February to meet the Tet emergency. Since the tactical situation in July made it inadvisable to release the 27th RLT at that time, General Abrams, with JCS concurrence, secured permission to retain the Marine unit in I CTZ until September, when it departed for the United States.[38]

The last major element planned for deployment under Program 6 was the 1st Squadron, 18th Armored Cavalry Regiment. This California National Guard unit, 1,094 men strong, was one of the reserve organizations mobilized after Tet. In September, two months before the squadron was scheduled to arrive in South Vietnam, General Abrams recommended that its complement of equipment be shipped without the personnel. The situation had changed greatly, he declared, since Program 6 was approved; the crying need now was for equipment, particularly armored personnel carriers, for the expanding South Vietnamese forces. CINCPAC concurred in this view.[39]

Abram's proposal, however, had political complications. The personnel of the 1/18th Cavalry, aided by relatives, had begun agitating to escape assignment to South Vietnam. Friends of the unit had bombarded the White House and Congress with mail on the subject. To cancel the squadron's planned deployment, even on wholly military grounds, administration officials feared, might give the appearance of yielding to this pressure and thus start an unfortunate chain reaction. Nevertheless, Secretary Clifford, after discussing the matter with Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland, decided to approve General Abrams's request. Accordingly, the Defense Department sent the heavy equipment of the 1/18th Cavalry to Vietnam but reassigned the unit itself to the Strategic Army Forces in the United States. No change was made in the Program 6 personnel ceiling.[40]

At the end of the year, the strength of US forces in South Vietnam stood at 536,644. Of these troops, 360,034 were in Army units, including 95 maneuver and 61 artillery battalions. The Navy accounted for 36,346 personnel. Marines in South Vietnam totaled 80,792 in 25 maneuver and 10 and 2/3 artillery battalions as well as a large aircraft wing of fixed-wing and helicopter squadrons. The Air Force had in country 59,029 personnel and 58 fixed-wing aircraft squadrons of various types. A small Coast Guard contingent of 443 officers and men rounded out the force.[41]

Enhancing the capabilities of this force, the US had by the end of 1968 essentially finished building its logistics base in South Vietnam. Especially notable during the year was the near-completion of a massive construction program at six seaports to supplement the long overburdened facilities in Saigon. "Progressing from the crash efforts of the 1965–66 buildup years, a sound logistics structure has been established in Vietnam which has both flexibility and staying power," reported CINCPAC at the end of the year. "Commanders are provided all logistics support required to prosecute their mission." No combat operations had to be curtailed or restricted because of supply problems. Through an extensive network of bases and ports flowed a steady stream of munitions, POL, and other items needed by an army that relied to an unprecedented degree on firepower and mobility.[42]

Among the other troop contributing countries, the Republic of Korea continued to provide the largest contingent. Two ROK Army divisions (Capital and White Horse) constituted a major element of allied strength in II CTZ, while a Korean marine brigade operated in I CTZ. A tentatively planned increase of approximately 20 percent in Korean troop strength in South Vietnam had failed to materialize. In December 1967, after considerable discussion between their governments, President Johnson and ROK President Park Chung-hee had agreed informally that South Korea would furnish an additional light division of 11,000 men. Contingent upon additional US assistance, South Korea would send 6,000 more troops to Vietnam and obtain the rest of the division by retraining or replacing its logistical troops already in the country.[43]

Events early in 1968 scuttled this plan. Aggressive guerrilla and sabotage actions by North Korea against the ROK, coupled with Pyongyang's seizure of the USS *Pueblo* in January 1968, caused President Park to question the wisdom of sending more soldiers to South Vietnam. At a minimum, South Korean officials sought a higher price in US aid than had originally been envisioned. Accordingly, Washington and Seoul allowed the matter to drop early in 1968. When South Korea raised the issue again in August 1968, constraints on available US funds had become even greater. General Wheeler and General Abrams both concluded that the asking price was excessive and that the equipment already earmarked for the ROK light division (then in storage on Okinawa) would be better employed if made available for the ARVN. The administration accepted this judgment. No agreement was reached with the South Koreans, and the equipment went to the South Vietnamese army.[44]

The only significant increase in third-country strength during 1968 came from Thailand, which had sent a regiment to South Vietnam in 1967. After extensive discussions among the Joint Chiefs of Staff, COMUSMACV, and COMUSMACTHAI [Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Thailand] and between the two governments, the US and Thailand agreed in 1967 that about 10,000 men would be added to the small Thai force. Accordingly, some 5,500 men of the Royal Thai Army's Black Panther Division landed in South Vietnam in July and August 1968. The rest of the force was scheduled to deploy in January 1969. Australia also

increased her contribution to the war by sending a tank squadron to Vietnam in February and March 1968, in accord with a decision reached the previous year.[45]

The Republic of the Philippines, on the other hand, withdrew approximately 230 men of its Civic Action Group (PHILCAG). President Fernando Marcos, under political and budgetary pressure, at first announced that half of the 2,000-man group would be withdrawn. The United States, however, prevailed upon him to reconsider this decision.[46]

As of the end of 1968, the total strength of the Free World Military Assistance Forces in South Vietnam was 65,731 men. All told, these contingents, aggregating about 12 percent of US numbers, contributed 28 maneuver battalions and 11 artillery battalions to MACV's combat forces. Their presence in Vietnam had a political and psychological as well as military value, representing as it did regional support for the American and South Vietnamese cause.[47]

The Military Situation at the End of the Year

By the end of 1968, the weight of allied numbers and the cumulative pressure of the military and pacification offensives, combined with heavy Communist losses in their own three offensives, had begun to tell upon the enemy in South Vietnam. A post-war Communist official history eloquently recounted what General Abrams's "one war" campaign looked like from the other side:

> In the second half of 1968, and using the large U.S. expeditionary army as their base, the enemy mobilized the entire puppet army to carry out their rural "pacification" program. U.S. troops were used as the main force to conduct sweep operations in contested areas and liberated zones to erode the strength of our main force units. Meanwhile, part of the U.S. army worked with puppet troops to sweep key areas in the rural lowlands, searching out and eliminating our cadre, Party members, and local armed forces, gathering civilians into concentration areas....The enemy built thousands of new outposts, upgraded puppet forces, drafted new troops, and expanded the puppet army, especially local forces and people's self defense forces used to oppress the population. They blocked our entry points and attacked our supply routes from the lowlands to our base areas. The enemy also collected and tightly controlled the people's rice crops in order to dry up local sources of supply for our armed forces.[48]

Where the allies could not control enemy bases, they "burned, bombed, and spread defoliants" over them. In some places, they "bulldozed the terrain flat to create empty zones covering dozens of square kilometers and eliminate the springboard positions we needed to launch our attacks." In retrospect, enemy analysts acknowledged that, because of their concentration on attacking South Vietnam's cities, the government's pacification campaign caught the Viet Cong and North

Vietnamese off balance, causing the revolution to lose territory and people. In addition, the enemy's "horrible, insidious pacification program" achieved more success than had been expected in weaning the people away from the revolutionary cause. In sum, allied operations by the end of the year had "created immeasurable difficulties and complications for our armed forces and civilian population."[49]

Difficulties notwithstanding, the leaders in Hanoi, freed from attacks on their base in North Vietnam, had no other thought than to fight on. Indeed, as the year ended, US commanders saw indications that the enemy was preparing to try still another major offensive early in 1969. In a message on 24 December, replying to a query from the President, CINCPAC detailed the changes in the enemy's military posture in southern North Vietnam and Laos since the end of ROLLING THUNDER on 1 November. His logistic center of gravity, Admiral McCain reported, had been moved southward; new supply depots had been established close to the DMZ. "At present," CINCPAC declared, "the enemy has the capability of dramatically increasing his forces in northern South Vietnam in a matter of approximately two weeks rather than about two months as in the past." Even more ominous, the enemy had been observed moving heavy antiaircraft ammunition (85mm and 100mm) into both Laos and South Vietnam, suggesting an intention to escalate the level of conflict, not merely to maintain the status quo in the south. "If this trend continues," Admiral McCain warned, "and there appears to be little reason to anticipate otherwise, a direct and continuing threat of substantial proportions will be created for free world forces early in 1969."[50]

17

Conclusion

During 1967–1968 American officials made important changes in the United States policy in Vietnam. During 1967, the Johnson administration continued to build up US forces in South Vietnam while gradually intensifying its air campaign against the North. Even as the American military effort grew, however, so did doubts within the administration about its effectiveness and the wisdom of further escalation of the war. Among senior administration officials, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, author of the escalation policy, became the chief dissenter against it. As the military campaign generated increasing costs and casualties but made modest progress toward the objective of a non-Communist South Vietnam, the administration's internal debate intensified, as did opposition to the war in the Congress and among the American press and public. Diplomatic feelers during the year produced no movement toward negotiations with North Vietnam; although President Johnson, in the San Antonio formula, offered to end ROLLING THUNDER if Hanoi would agree to talk. By the end of the year, the administration, while issuing public claims of progress in the war, was moving toward leveling off the US force in South Vietnam, limiting the ROLLING THUNDER campaign to about its existing intensity, and seeking to prepare the South Vietnamese to take on more of the burden of combat.

Early in 1968, the enemy's Tet offensive profoundly shocked the administration, as well as the American Congress, news media, and public. To outsiders and those within the government, the Tet attacks seemingly invalidated the administration's claims of progress and raised the possibility that the war might in fact be lost. Those who doubted gained in influence and conviction, while believers in the American and South Vietnamese cause dwindled in numbers and determination.

In response to the shock of Tet, President Johnson moved to level off and de-escalate the US military effort in South Vietnam, the course of action he had tentatively adopted before the Communist offensive. Withdrawing from the 1968 presidential race to concentrate on the search for peace, Mr. Johnson unilaterally

curtailed the bombing of North Vietnam and indicated willingness to stop it entirely if the North Vietnamese would enter into negotiations. He rejected military recommendations for heavier attacks on the North, a major reinforcement of MACV, and a large reserve mobilization. When the North Vietnamese agreed to open talks in Paris, the President accepted Hanoi's agenda—discussions leading to a total bombing halt. As the negotiations unfolded, the President gradually abandoned any effort to gain a military quid pro quo for a bombing cessation from the North Vietnamese. Ultimately, he ended ROLLING THUNDER with no conditions beyond North Vietnam's agreement to negotiations, in which both Saigon and the National Liberation Front would be represented, and an "understanding," stated by the US, of what military actions North Vietnam would refrain from taking. Along the DMZ, the North Vietnamese, who did not acknowledge the understanding, promptly violated it.

Johnson's diplomatic retreat occurred as the allied military situation in South Vietnam improved. While producing devastating psychological effects in the United States, the Tet offensive and its two follow-on attacks failed on the ground and left Communist forces much weakened. The Saigon government and its armed forces survived the test and displayed new signs of institutional vitality. Orchestrated by General Abrams, allied forces battered the enemy main forces and guerrillas in repeated offensives even as a renewed pacification campaign ate away at Viet Cong control of the population. By the end of 1968, as the Vietnamese Communists' official histories later acknowledged, this pressure drove their forces in the South into a defensive and survival posture that would prevail for the next three years. While these successes created a position of strength for the allies, the Johnson administration could not take advantage of it. The loss of domestic public support, and the lack of a clear vision of a military solution to the war, shaped the administration's approach to the negotiations. In the end, the improving battlefield situation served only to reduce the military risks of de-escalation and ultimately to facilitate an American withdrawal under the Nixon administration.

Throughout this period of policy upheaval, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took every opportunity to press their views upon the President and the Secretary of Defense. Along with CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs consistently advocated heavier bombing of North Vietnam and the mining of its ports; and they disapproved of proposals to cut back ROLLING THUNDER. With regard to South Vietnam, they supported, and in some instances invited, ground troop reinforcement requests from CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. For the most part, the JCS favored the expansion of operations into Laos and Cambodia. Increasingly concerned about Vietnam's effect on the US global strategic posture, the Chiefs urged the President to mobilize additional reserve forces. While supporting improvement and modernization of South Vietnam's armed forces, the JCS warned that any turnover of the fighting to Saigon would take time and require much interim US military assistance.

Following the Tet offensive, President Johnson and Secretaries of Defense McNamara and Clifford rejected most JCS recommendations on the conduct of

the war. During 1967, the civilian authorities allowed limited expansion of ROLLING THUNDER and sent General Westmoreland as many additional troops as they could furnish without a reserve callup. However, Secretary McNamara questioned the Joint Chiefs' military assessments, especially the likely effectiveness of intensifying ROLLING THUNDER. After Tet, Johnson and McNamara's successor, Clark Clifford, completely rejected the Chiefs' calls for further escalation and set the United States on the opposite course.

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff carried out presidential policies without open dissent, they mounted two significant challenges to the civilians' strategic approach. The first occurred in the Stennis subcommittee hearings in the summer of 1967. Before a panel of senators generally favorable to their viewpoint, the Joint Chiefs engaged in what amounted to an open, if muted, debate with Secretary McNamara over the military merits and direction of ROLLING THUNDER. The second challenge came early in 1968 following Tet. At that time, General Wheeler attempted to force the mobilization issue by eliciting a large reinforcement request from General Westmoreland. This ploy helped to push the administration toward a decision to de-escalate the US military effort—the opposite result to what Wheeler intended.

At the two critical decision points on the reduction and termination of ROLLING THUNDER in 1968, General Wheeler and the other Chiefs, when asked for their opinions, assented to President Johnson's actions. Consulted after Mr. Johnson had set his course, they could find no valid military reason to declare the bombing cuts excessively disadvantageous to the United States. Considering the partial bombing halt in March, General Wheeler pointed out to Secretary Clifford that monsoon weather would curtail the air offensive for the next several months. When the total bombing cessation came up for decision in November, the Joint Chiefs, given the improving situation in South Vietnam, could not claim the action would place US forces in any acute danger. Indeed, they declared that under the circumstances the bombing halt constituted a "perfectly acceptable military risk."

Why did the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have such limited influence on President Johnson's decisions in this period of the war? The answer seems clear. The JCS consistently offered the President courses of action that carried with them a certainty of high costs and risks while at best containing only tenuous promises of decisive and favorable political and military results. While willing to listen to the Chiefs' views, Johnson for the most part disregarded them and acted upon what he deemed urgent and compelling political imperatives. At critical points, he "consulted" the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but only to gain their formal assent for the course he already had set.

As 1968 ended, United States military escalation in Vietnam had reached its peak. The incoming Nixon administration would follow the general policy President Johnson had established: gradual withdrawal of US troops from South

Vietnam; a major effort to improve and modernize Saigon's forces; and public and private negotiations with North Vietnam in search of an acceptable peace settlement. For the United States, the path leaving Vietnam would be long and tortuous, but the ultimate destination was set.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAA	Anti-aircraft artillery
AID	Agency for International Development
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BLTs	battalion landing teams
CG	Commanding General
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief, Pacific
CINCSAC	Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command
CMH	US Army Center of Military History
COMUSMACTHAI	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Thailand
COMUSMACV	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
CONUS	continental United States
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
COSVN	Central Office of South Vietnam
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zone
DCPG	Defense Communications Planning Group
DFE	division force equivalents
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DIOCC	District Intelligence and Operations Coordinating Centers
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DOD	Department of Defense
DPM	draft Presidential memorandum
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FAC	Forward Air Control
FFORCEV	Field Force, Vietnam
FMFPAC	Fleet Marine Force, Pacific
FWMAF	Free World Military Assistance Forces
GVN	Government of Vietnam
HES	Hamlet Evaluation System

ICEX	Infrastructure Intelligence and Exploitation Program
ISA	International Security Affairs
ISC	Infiltration Surveillance Center
J-2	Intelligence Directorate
J-5	Plans and Policy Directorate
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JGS	Joint General Staff
JSOP	Joint Strategic Operations Plan
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAF	Marine Amphibious Force
NAVFORV	US Naval Forces, Vietnam
NLF	National Liberation Front
nm	nautical miles
NSC	National Security Council
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
NVN	North Vietnamese
OASD	Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PF	Popular Forces
PHILCAG	Philippines Civic Action Group
PMDL	Provisional Military Demarcation Line
POL	Petroleum, Oils and Lubricants
ProvCorps	Provisional Corps, Vietnam
PSDF	People's Self-Defense Force
PX	post exchange
R&R	rest and relaxation
RCT	regimental combat team
RD	Revolutionary Development (previously Rural Development)
RF	Regional Forces
RF/PF	Regional and Popular Forces
RLT	Regimental Landing Team
ROK	Republic of Korea
RP	Route Package
RT	Rolling Thunder

RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SACSA	Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities
SAM	Surface-to-air missile
SPOS	Strongpoint/Obstacle System
STRAC	Strategic Army Corps
SVN	South Vietnam
TAORs	tactical areas of responsibility
TFS	tactical fighter squadron
USARV	US Army, Vietnam
VC	Viet Cong
VCI	Viet Cong Infrastructure
VNMC	Vietnamese Marine Corps

Principal Civilian and Military Officers

President and Commander in Chief	
Dwight D. Eisenhower	20 Jan 53–20 Jan 61
John F. Kennedy	20 Jan 61–22 Nov 63
Lyndon B. Johnson	22 Nov 63–20 Jan 69
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs	
Gordon Gray	24 Jun 58–13 Jan 61
McGeorge Bundy	20 Jan 61–28 Feb 66
Walt W. Rostow	01 Apr 66–02 Dec 68
Secretary of State	
Christian A. Herter	22 Apr 59–20 Jan 61
David D. Rusk	21 Jan 61–20 Jan 69
Deputy Secretary of Defense	
Thomas S. Gates, Jr.	02 Dec 59–20 Jan 61
Robert S. McNamara	21 Jan 61–29 Feb 68
Clark M. Clifford	01 Mar 68–20 Jan 69
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff	
General Nathan F. Twining, USAF	15 Aug 57–30 Sep 60
General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, USA	01 Oct 60–30 Sep 62
General Maxwell D. Taylor, USA	01 Oct 62–01 Jul 64
General Earle G. Wheeler, USA	03 Jul 64–02 Jul 70
Chief of Staff, US Army	
General Lyman L. Lemnitzer	01 Jul 59–30 Sep 60
General George H. Decker	01 Oct 60–30 Sep 62
General Earle G. Wheeler	01 Oct 62–02 Jul 64
General Harold K. Johnson	03 Jul 64–02 Jul 68
General William C. Westmoreland	03 Jul 68–30 Jun 72
Chief of Naval Operations	
Admiral Arleigh A. Burke	17 Aug 55–01 Aug 61
Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr.	01 Aug 61–01 Aug 63

Admiral David L. McDonald	01 Aug 63–01 Aug 67
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer	01 Aug 67–01 Jul 70
Chief of Staff, US Air Force	
General Thomas D. White	01 Jul 57–30 Jun 61
General Curtis E. LeMay	30 Jun 61–31 Jan 65
General John P. McConnell	01 Feb 65–01 Aug 69
Commandant, US Marine Corps	
General David M. Shoup	01 Jan 60–31 Dec 63
General Wallace M. Greene, Jr.	01 Jan 64–31 Dec 67
General Leonard F. Chapman, Jr.	01 Jan 68–31 Dec 71
Commander in Chief, Pacific	
Admiral Harry D. Felt	31 Jul 58–30 Jun 64
Admiral Ulysses S. G. Sharp	30 Jun 64–31 Jul 68
Admiral John S. McCain, Jr.	31 Jul 68–01 Sep 72
Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam	
General Paul D. Harkins	08 Feb 62–20 Jun 64
General William C. Westmoreland	20 Jun 64–02 Jul 68
General Creighton W. Abrams, USA	02 Jul 68–29 Jun 72

Notes

Chapter 1. The Situation, January 1967

1. The course of ROLLING THUNDER through the end of 1966 is summarized in Jacob Van Staaveren, *Gradual Failure: The Air War over North Vietnam, 1965–1966* (Washington, DC: US Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), pp. 309–324.

2. Combined Campaign Plan, 1967 (AB 142), 7 Nov 66, cited in *MACV Command History 1967*, Vol. I, pp. 317–322; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 01928 to Sharp, 26 Feb 67, Westmoreland Msg Files, William C. Westmoreland Papers, US Army Center of Military History, hereafter Westmoreland Msg Files.

3. Graham A. Cosmas, "MACV: The Joint Command: The Years of Escalation" (Ms. Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2002), Ch. 9, pp. 2–6.

4. George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 6–16, 27–30; Lawrence J. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 118–121.

5. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 29–30.

6. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 14–15; H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 327–333; Dale R. Herspring, *The Pentagon and the Presideney: Civil-Military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), pp. 150–183.

7. For an account of the Chinese role based on Chinese sources, see Xiaoming Zhang, "The Vietnam War: A Chinese Perspective, 1964–1969," *Journal of Military History* 60 (Oct 96): 731–762.

8. McNamara's views are in US Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense* (12 vols. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971), sec. 4.C(a), pp. 81–91 and 105–119; Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1989), pp. 13–16.

9. This debate is summarized in Cosmas, "MACV, The Joint Command," Ch. 12, pp. 26–31.

10. Quotation is from *US-Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.C.6(a), pp. 81–91.

11. Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War*, p. 25.

12. The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*. Trans. By Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 195.

Chapter 2. Action on the Diplomatic Front

1. (TS) Memo, W.W. Rostow to Vance, Helms, and Bundy, 22 May 67, JMF 911/300 (19 May 67); (S) Rpt, Taylor to Pres, 30 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 2472/6, JMF 911/080 (30 Jan 67); for an example of the enemy view, see The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*. Trans by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 195.

2. Sources available to the author do not reveal whether the JCS as a group or the Chairman separately, ever discussed these negotiations with the Secretary of Defense, the President, or other high-level officials.

3. Unless cited otherwise, this account of MARIGOLD is based on a Dept of State Summary in (S) Msg, State 112886 to Rome, 9 Jan 67.

4. (TS) Msgs, State 83786 to Saigon, 13 Nov 66; State 84238 to Saigon, 14 Nov 66.

5. (TS) Msg, Saigon 12247 to State, 1 Dec 66; Msg, State 102960 to Saigon, 14 Dec 66.

6. George Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 104–107 argues that Johnson's restriction of knowledge of MARIGOLD to a handful of close advisers prevented effective coordination of military operations with diplomacy during this period.

7. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, CINCPAC to JCS, 030650Z Dec 66, JCS IN 64742, and 080940Z Dec 66, JCS IN 73338; (S) CM-1994-66 to CNO, CSA, CSAF, CMC, 10 Dec 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 66; MSG, State 102960 to Saigon, 14 Dec 66.

8. (TS) Msg, State 102960 to Saigon, 14 Dec 66; (TS) Msg, State 106358 to Warsaw, 21 Dec 66.

9. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2135 to CINCPAC, 232114Z Dec 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 13.

10. For a summary of recent evidence and speculation on this point, see Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 106–107.

11. The text of Goldberg's letter is in Dept of State *Bulletin*, LVI (9 Jan 67), pp. 63–64.

12. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LVI (23 Jan 67), pp. 137–139.

13. *NY Times*, 4 Jan 67, 1.

14. (TS) Msgs, State 11296 to Moscow, 5 Jan 67, and Moscow 2966 to State, 10 Jan 67.

15. (TS) Msgs, State 120335 to Moscow, 17 Jan 67, and Moscow to 3126 to State, 20 Jan 67.

16. (TS) Msg, Moscow 3218 to State, 27 Jan 67; (S-GP 3) Msg, State 133736 to Paris, Wellington, Ottawa, Djakarta, Rome, Bern, 8 Feb 67; *NY Times*, 29 Jan 67, 6.

17. (TS), Msgs, State 128486 to Moscow, 31 Jan 67, and Moscow 3321 to State, 2 Feb 67.

18. (TS) Msgs, London 6315 and 6316 to State, 6 Feb 67.

19. (TS) Msgs, State 132481 to London, 7 Feb 67, and Moscow 3412 to State, 8 Feb 67. The text of the Johnson letter to Ho Chi Minh is in *NY Times*, 22 Mar 67, 10.

20. (TS) Msg, State 135748 to London, 12 Feb 67. The Anglo-American misunderstanding is recounted in Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 108–111.

21. (TS) Msg, Moscow 3503, 15 Feb 67. The text of Ho's letter is in *NY Times*, 22 Mar 67, 10.

22. US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. 5, *Vietnam 1967* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2002), pp. 106–108; hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*.

23. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 134–135, 164–167.

24. Taylor was acting as a consultant to the President on Vietnam. His report is in *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 63–73. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-107-67 to SecDef, 27 Feb 67 (derived from JCS 2472/6-3); (S-GP 1) JCS 2472/6-4, 3 Apr 67; JMF 911/080 (30 Jan 67), sec. 1.

Chapter 3. ROLLING THUNDER Gains Momentum, February–June 1967

1. The strategic importance of Route Package VI is summarized in Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: The US Air Force and North Vietnam, 1966–1973* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), p. 71.

2. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 43–44.

3. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 02224Z Feb 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 67; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 182210Z Jan 67, JCS IN 53524.

4. (S) Msg, JCS 1337-67 to CINCPAC, 18 Feb 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec. 15.

5. A sortie is one mission by one aircraft.

6. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6955 to CINCPAC, 230308Z Feb 67; (TS) Memo, J–3 to CJCS, ROLLING THUNDER with draft execute message, 21 Feb 67, same file.

7. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250312Z Feb 67, OCJCS 091 File Vietnam, Feb 67.

8. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC, *ROLLING THUNDER Digest*, Jan–Mar 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67), sec 1A.

9. (TS), Msg, JCS 1422-67 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 22 Feb 67; (S) Msg, JCS 1497-67 to CINCPAC, 25 Feb 67; (S) Msg, JCS 1691-67 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 6 Mar 67; all in JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec 15.

10. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 46–67 through 95–67, 25 Feb through 24 Apr 67. (TS) Telecon, NMCC to CINCPAC, 171840Z Mar 67; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9614 to CINCPAC, 222314Z Mar 67; (TS) Msg, JCS 2601-67 to CINCPAC, 10 Apr 67; all in JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec. 15.

11. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3451 to CINCPAC, 222239Z Apr 67.

12. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040334Z Jan 67, JCS IN 27052; (S-GP 1) CINCPAC *Rolling Thunder Digest*, Jan–Mar 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67) sec 1A.

13. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 230037Z Mar 67, JCS IN 83893; (TS) Telecon, NMCC to CINCPAC, 231816Z Mar 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec 15.

14. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 130432Z Apr 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 54, sec 15.

15. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3451 to CINCPAC, 222239Z Apr 67. (S) Msg, JCS 3011-67 to CINCPAC, 24 Apr 67; (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 250402Z Apr 67; both in JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 55, sec 16. Political reaction is described in Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 64–65.

16. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 95–67 through 100–67, 24 through 29 Apr 67. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC *ROLLING THUNDER Digest*, Apr–Jun 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67), sec 1D. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 300055Z Apr 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 55, sec 16. (TS) Msg, JCS 3223-67 to CINCPAC, 2 May 67, same file, sec 17. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, p. 64.

17. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 96–67 through 103–67, 25 Apr through 3 May 67.

18. (TS) Memo, CJCS to Joint Staff, with penciled notation, 25 Apr 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 67) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17.

19. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4255 to CINCPAC, 022248Z May 67. (TS-GP 3) Draft Execute Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, Tab 2A, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17.

20. (S) Msg, JCS 3168-67 to CINCPAC, 29 Apr 67; (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 022202Z May 67; (TS) Msg, JCS 3223-67 to CINCPAC, 2 May 67; all in JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17. The WALLEYE was television-guided. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, p. 65.

21. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 110–67, 11 May 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5404 to CINCPAC, 162108Z May 67. The US halted military operations on Buddha's birthday but authorized naval gunfire and air operations against observed substantial military supply activity in North Vietnam south of 20 degrees. (TS) Fact Sheet, "Operation Hickory (U)," 16 May 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 67.

22. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 118–67 and 119–67, 20 and 22 May 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CTG 77.7 to CINCPACFLT, 100846Z Jun 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17.

23. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC, *ROLLING THUNDER Digest*, Jan–Mar 67 and Apr–Jun 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67), secs 1A and 1D. (TS) Briefing for SecDef and CJCS, "Air Campaign in North Vietnam," 8 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 67.

24. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967, p. 351.*

25. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 367, 401–403.

26. The group is described in Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 68–69.

27. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 399–401, 404–405.

28. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 417–418, 420–421.

29. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 May 67, JMF 9155/55 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 420–422. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 69–71. For the MACV reinforcement issue, see Chs. 4 and 5.

30. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 May 67, JMF 9155/55 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 103–67 through 127–67, 3 May through 1 Jun 67.

31. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 240120Z May 67; (TS) Msg, JCS 3903-67 to CINCPAC, 25 May 67; both in JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 290506Z May 67, JCS IN 40905.

32. (TS) Msg, JCS 3903-67 to CINCPAC, 25 May 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, CINCPAC to JCS, 290506Z May 67, JCS IN 40905 and 030424Z Jun 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 67.

33. (TS-GP 3) Telecon, JCS 4561 to CINCPAC, 171550Z Jun 67; (TS-GP 3) Memo, J–3 to CJCS, "ROLLING THUNDER (U)," n.d. (c 3 Jul 67); (TS-GP 3) Telecon, NMCC to CINCPAC, 101810Z Jul 67; all in JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8177 to CINCPAC, 162237Z Jun 67. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 280439Z Jun 67, JCS IN 17531.

34. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 4027 to CINCPAC, 291323Z Apr 67, JCS 8177, 162237Z Jun 67, JCS 9143, 291737Z Jun 67. (S) Msg, JCS 4880 to CINCPAC, 291929Z Jun 67, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 56, sec 17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9315 to CINCPAC, 302108Z Jun 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT and CINCPACAF, 010430Z Jul 67, JCS IN 24937.

35. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 210430Z Jun 67, JCS IN 93233. (TS) Briefing for SecDef and CJCS, "Air Campaign in North Vietnam," 8 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

Chapter 4. Launching the General Offensive: Operations in South Vietnam, January–May 1967

1. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 13 Oct 66, JCS IN 63249. Unless otherwise cited, this chapter is based on *USMACV Command History, 1967*, Vol. I, pp. 349–558.

2. Combined Campaign Plan, 1967 (AB 142), 7 Nov 66, cited in *USMACV Command History, 1967*, Vol. 1, pp. 317–322.

3. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 2 Jan 67, JCS IN 24930.

4. This controversy is summarized in George L. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive, October 1966 to October 1967. The US Army in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1998), pp. 17–19; and in the introductory essay by William J. Duiker in The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*. Trans. By Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. xiii–xiv, see also p. 195.

5. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA/JCS Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Jul 68, p. A–62; (S-GP 4) CINCPAC, *Evaluation of Progress in Southeast Asia*, Jan 67, pp. 1–2, JCS RAIR Br.

6. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA/JCS Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Jan 67, pp. A–24, A–39, A–47.

7. *CINCPAC Command History, 1967*, Vol. II, pp. 685–694. (S-GP 3) Msg, Bangkok 11165 to State, 2 Mar 67, JCS IN 41885. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7903 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 2 Mar 67, JMF 9158 (24 May 66), sec. 5.

8. (S-GP 3) Msgs, SecDef 7668 to JCS, 2 Mar 67; JCS 7757 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 3 Mar 67.

9. For a detailed account of this operation, see MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, pp. 96–112.

10. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, pp. 113–143. The enemy view can be found in *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 197–199.

11. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 80–67, 6 Apr 67, p. 1.

12. North Vietnamese artillery preparations are described in *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 200–201.

13. (TS) Msgs, JCS 1422–67 and JCS 6957 to CINCPAC, 22 and 23 Feb 67. (S-GP 2) FMFPAC, *Operations of US Marine Forces Vietnam, April 67*, pp. 17–21, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 67. This monograph contains a summary of Marine operations during the period of July 1966–April 1967.

14. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 7 Apr 67, JCS IN 53337.

15. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 3474 to CINCPAC, 12 Apr 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 67.

16. (S-GP 4) JCSM-208-67 to SecDef, 14 Apr 67 (derived from JCS 2472/45); (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2843 to CINCPAC, 15 Apr 67; both in JMF 911/377 (14 Apr 67).

17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4549 to CINCPAC, 5 May 67. (S-GP 2) FMFPAC, *Operations of US Marine Forces, Vietnam, May 1967*, pp. 11–20, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 67.

18. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2986 to CINCPAC, 061927Z Jan 67.

19. (TS-GP 3) MACV PRACTICE NINE Requirements Plan, 26 Jan 67, encl to (TS-GP 3) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 00057, 3 Feb 67, att to JCS 2471/3, 6 Feb 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67). For III MAF's role, see Jack Shulimson, et. al., *US Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year 1968* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps, 1997), p. 23; hereafter cited as Shulimson, *Marines in Vietnam, 1968*.

20. (TS-GP 3) MACV PRACTICE NINE Requirements Plan, 26 Jan 67, encl to (TS-GP 3) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 00057, 3 Feb 67, att to JCS 2471/3, 6 Feb 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67).

21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 060820Z Feb 67, JCS IN 87183, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec. 1.

22. Marine Corps objections are summarized in Shulimson, *Marines in Vietnam, 1968*, pp. 22–25.

23. (S) Note to Control Div, 17 Feb 67; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-97-67 to SecDef, 22 Feb 67 (derived from JCS 2471/3-3); JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec 2.

24. (TS-GP 1) CM-2134-67 to SecDef, 22 Feb 67, encl. A to JCS 2471/3-3, 18 Feb 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec. 2.

25. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 6 Mar 67, att to JCS 2471/3-4, 7 Mar 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec. 2.

26. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-162-67 to SecDef, 23 Mar 67 (derived from JCS 2471/3-5), JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec. 3.

27. (TS-GP 1) Memo, Sec Def to CJCS, 8 Apr 67, att to JCS 2471/3-7, 10 Apr 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec. 3.

28. (TS-GP 3) MACV PRACTICE NINE Air-Supported Anti-Infiltration Plan, 11 Mar 67, encl to (TS-GP 3) Ltr, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 11 Mar 67, att to JCS 2471/3-3, 4 Apr 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec 5.

29. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-204-67 to SecDef, 17 Apr 67 (derived from JCS 2471/11/1), JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec 6.

30. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 Apr 67, att to JCS 2471/11-2, 28 Apr 67; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 8 May 67, att to JCS 2471/11-3, 10 May 67; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-400-67 to SecDef, 15 Jul 67 (derived from JCS 2471/11-5); (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 25 Jul 67, att to JCS 2471/11-6, 27 Jul 67; all in JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), secs 6 and 7.

31. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-322-67 to SecDef, 8 Jun 67, encl A to JCS 2471/3-9, 8 Jun 67, JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec 7.

32. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Jun 67, att to JCS 2471/3-10, 16 Jun 67; (TS-GP 3) Memo, DCPG to SecDef, 23 May 67, encl B to JCS 2471/3-9, 8 Jun 67; JMF 911/321 (9 Jan 67), sec 7. (TS-GP 1), SEA Br, J–5, OCJCS, interviewed by author on 3 Apr 69. The III MAF effort is summarized in Shulimson, *Marines in Vietnam, 1968*, pp. 24–25.

33. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 4 May 67, JCS IN 79155.

34. Msg, Wheeler JCS 1284-67 to Sharp and Westmoreland, 17 Feb 67, Westmoreland Msg Files, William C. Westmoreland Papers, US Army Center of Military History.

35. Concerned with accelerated inflation in South Vietnam, Secretary McNamara in October 1966 set a ceiling of 42 billion piasters on US military spending in South Vietnam. By various economy measures, MACV had kept the piaster cost of the 470,000-man force well under the ceiling, thus removing one argument against additional reinforcements. Graham A.

Cosmas, "MACV, The Joint Command: Years of Escalation" (Ms, US Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 2002), Ch. 12, pp. 28, 34.

36. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 180403Z Mar 67, JCS IN 75713, JMF 907/372 (18 Mar 67), sec. 1. The strength for the minimum essential and optimum forces stated in this message were 78,433 and 201,250. The figures given in the text were adjustments submitted in (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 28 Mar 67, JCS IN 93855. Supplemental authorizations had increased the Program Four force level to 479,231 by this date. Cosmas, "Years of Escalation," Ch. 12, p. 35 covers Westmoreland's estimates of the length of the war.

Chapter 5. The Debate over Escalation

1. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 51–54; and Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), pp. 60–71 describe the increasingly tense relationships within the administration. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 83–84 evaluates and finds unsubstantiated the JCS resignation stories.

2. (TS-GP 3) CM-2192-67 to D/JS, 22 Mar 67; (TS-GP 3) DJSM-374-67 to OpDeps, 25 Mar 67; both in JMF 907/372 (18 Mar 67), sec. 1. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 310825Z Mar 67, JCS IN 10326.

3. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2339/255-2, 13 Apr 67, JMF 907/372 (18 Mar 67), sec. 3.

4. (TS-GP 3) CSAFM-M-57-67 to JCS, 14 Apr 67, JMF 907/372 (18 Mar 67), sec. 3.

5. The JCS recommended deployment of a Marine division/wing team in lieu of an Army division requested by CINCPAC. The JCS noted that the spaces approved on 9 April for PRACTICE NINE would apply against the forces recommended for FY 68.

6. The estimated required FY 1968 end strength increase for the Navy and Marine Corps was 133,303. The Air Force estimated that it would not require a strength increase, and the Army did not submit a figure.

7. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-218-67 to Sec Def, 20 Apr 67 (derived from JCS 2339/255-3), JMF 907/372 (18 Mar 67), sec. 4.

8. (S-GP 3) CM-2255-67 to D/JS, 20 Apr 67, att to JCS 2101/538-1, 22 Apr 67, JMF 372 (18 Mar 67).

9. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2101/538-3, 1 May 67; (C) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2101/538-3," 3 May 67; both in JMF 372 (18 Mar 67).

10. The Joint Strategic Operations Plan (JSOP) specifies the forces that the Joint Chiefs believe are required to carry out the national military strategy. JSOP 69-76 called for 21 Army and 4 Marine division/wing teams while the Vietnam War lasted and 18 Army and 3 Marine division/wing teams thereafter. (TS) Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. IX: *1965–1968* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, JCS, 1985), pp. 154–155.

11. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2101/538-4, 11 May 67; (S) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2101/538-4," 12 May 67; both in JMF 372 (18 Mar 67), sec. 2.

12. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-288-67 to SecDef, 20 May 67 (derived from JCS 2101/538-5), JMF 372 (18 Mar 67), sec. 3.

13. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-286-67 to SecDef, 20 May 67 (derived from JCS 2472/50-2), JMF 912/432 (23 Feb 67).

14. (TS-GP 3) CM-2377-67 to SecDef, 24 May 67, att to JCS 2472/56-2, JMF 907/732 (26 Apr 67).

15. (S) Msg, Wellington 1735 to State, 7 Mar 67. (U) Msg, Bangkok 8316 to State, 4 Jan 67, quoted in *USMACV Command History, 1967*, p. 266.

16. *USMACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 248–250, 253–255, 266–268.

17. A sampling of these views can be found in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. V, *Vietnam 1967* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2002), pp. 344–348, 361–367, 370–377, 381–383. Hereafter cited as *FRUS Viet-*

nam, 1967. See also George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 51–53.

18. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 423–438. This memo was drafted by John McNaughton, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. A slightly different version can be found in (TS-GP 1) Draft Memorandum for the President, "Future Actions in Vietnam," 19 May 67, encl. to JCS 2472/72, 22 May 67, JMF 911/300 (19 May 67).

19. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al, 20 May 67, att to JCS 2472/71, 22 May 67, JMF 912/323 (20 May 67), sec. 1. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2472/72, 22 May 67, JMF 911/300 (19 May 67).

20. (TS-GP 1) BGen Robert N. Ginsburgh, USAF, CSG, interviewed by Kenneth W. Condit, 24 Jan 69. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-307-67 to SecDef, 1 Jun 67, encl to JCS 2472/72-2, 29 May 67, JMF 911/300 (19 May 67).

21. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-312-67 to SecDef, 2 Jun 67 (derived from JCS 2472/71-3), JMF 912/323 (20 May 67), sec. 1. For the ROLLING THUNDER program then in progress, see Ch. 3.

22. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecAF to SecDef, 3 Jun 67, att to JCS 2472/71-4, 14 Jun 67, JMF 912/323 (20 May 67), sec 1.

23. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecN to SecDef, "Alternative Bombing Programs in North Vietnam," 2 Jun 67, att to JCS 2472/85, 6 June 67, JMF 912/323 (20 May 67), sec. 2.

24. Like the 19 May DPM, this one was drafted by Assistant Secretary McNaughton. (TS) Draft Memo for Pres, "Alternative Military Actions against North Vietnam," 12 Jun 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, May 67. An unclassified copy is in *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 474–481.

25. (S) TP "Alternative Military Actions against North Vietnam," 16 Jun 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 67.

26. MACV's plans for Laos and the opposition to them are described in Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV, The Joint Command: Years of Escalation* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2002), Ch. 11. Gen Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The Twenty-Five Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984), pp. 182–186 is a thoughtful exposition of the anti-Ho Chi Minh Trail strategy and its advantages.

27. Msgs, Sharp to Westmoreland, 13 Jun 67; Westmoreland MAC 5601 to Sharp, 13 Jun 67; Westmoreland Msg Files, William C. Westmoreland Papers, US Army Center of Military History (hereafter Westmoreland Papers, CMH).

28. (S) CM-2499-67 to JCS, 12 Jul 67, JMF 911/374 (12 Jul 67), sec. 1.

29. Enthoven's study is summarized in US Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense* (12 vols. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971), sec. 4.C (b), pp. 195–196 (hereafter cited as *US-Vietnam Relations*.

30. Briefings are described in *US-Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.C.6 (b), pp. 197–208; quotations are from p. 208. Cosmas, *MACV: Years of Escalation*, Ch. 12, pp. 38–39; *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, p. 593.

31. (TS) Briefing, CINCPAC, CG 7th AF, and COMSEVENTHFLT for SecDef, CJCS, and USecState, "Air Campaign North Vietnam, July 1967," OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67. Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: The US Air Force and Vietnam, 1966–1973* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), p. 76.

32. (S) CM-2506-67 to D/JS, 13 Jul 67, JMF 911/374 (12 Jul 67). Notes of these meetings by one of Johnson's assistants are in *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 600–614; Westmoreland quotation is on p. 613.

33. App to (S-GP 4) JCSM-416-67, 20 Jul 67, JMF 911/374 (12 Jul 67).

34. (S-GP 4) JCSM-416-67 to SecDef, 20 Jul 67 (derived from JCS 2472/115), JMF 911/374 (12 Jul 67).

35. (TS-GP 4) JCSM 505-67 to SecDef, 15 Sep 67 (derived from JCS 2472/115-5); (S) Memo, SecDef to Service Secys and CJCS, 5 Oct 67, encl to JS 2472/115-8, 6 Oct 67; both in JMF 911/374 (12 Jul 67).

36. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1859 to CINCPAC, 202044Z Jul 67; (TS) Msgs, CJCS 1859 and 5741 to CINCPAC, 20 Jul 67 and 22 Jul 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67. Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: The US Air Force and North Vietnam, 1966–1973* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), pp. 76–77.

Chapter 6. ROLLING THUNDER at It's Zenith: Operations against North Vietnam, July 1967–January 1968

1. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1859 to CINCPAC, 202044Z Jul 67. (TS-GP 1) Memo, Jt Staff to CJCS, "CINCPAC Priority Targets (U)" 17 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 67.

2. (TS-GP 1) Memo, COL Robert J. Dunn, USAF, to Distribution, "Report on Significant Areas of Interest—Vietnam Investigative Tour of Messrs. Gilleas and French (Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee—Chairman Stennis)," 27 Jul 67; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1859 to CINCPAC, 202044Z Jul 67; (TS) Msg, CJCS 5661-67 to CINCPAC, 20 Jul 67; all in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 67.

3. Other members of the subcommittee were: Stuart Symington (D, Missouri), Henry M. Jackson (D, Washington), Howard W. Cannon (D, Nevada), Robert C. Byrd (D, West Virginia), Margaret Chase Smith (R, Maine), Strom Thurmond (R, South Carolina), and Jack Miller (R, Iowa).

4. For background on the hearings, see Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: The US Air Force and North Vietnam, 1966–1973* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), pp. 78–79; George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 54–55; and Robert S. McNamara with Brian Vandemark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 284; hereafter McNamara, *In Retrospect*.

5. US Senate, 90th Congress, 1st Session, *Air War against North Vietnam: Hearings before the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1967), pp. 4–10, 13. Hereafter cited as *Stennis Hearings*.

6. *Stennis Hearings*, pp. 124–128, 131–132.

7. *Stennis Hearings*, pp. 130–133.

8. Statements can be found in *Stennis Hearings*, pp. 200–206 (McConnell), 242–243 (Moorer), 385–386 (Johnson), 438–439 (Greene). Quotation is from p. 388.

9. *Stennis Hearings*, pp. 274–282. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 286–289.

10. *Stennis Hearings*, pp. 278, 287–289.

11. First quotation is from McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 283–284. The second is from a personal letter of Acheson to former British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, August 1967, cited in Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), pp. 72–73.

12. *Stennis Hearings*, pp. 304–305. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 284.

13. US Senate, 90th Congress, 1st Session, *Summary Report by Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services on Air War against North Vietnam* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1967), pp. iii, 1–10.

14. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 83–84; Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 56–57; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 294–295, 313–314.

15. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3365 to CINCPAC, 090005Z Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4091 to CINCPAC, 171459Z Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4344 to CINCPAC, 191432Z Aug 67. (S) NMCC Memos for Record, 12 and 13 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Aug 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1), NMCC OPSUMs 195- and 196-67, 21 and 22 Aug 67.

16. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4343 to CINCPAC, 191430Z Aug 67. (TS) Memo, AsstSecState for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to SecState, 9 Apr 68, OCJCS File, Vietnam Mission, May 68; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 295.

17. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 295–299. Text of the instruction is in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, vol. V, *Vietnam 1967* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 2002), p. 687; see also pp. 759–761. Hereafter cited as *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*.

18. (TS-GP 3), Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 20223IZ Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Aug 67. McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 299; *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, p. 760.

19. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 914–922; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 299–302.

20. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3365 to CINCPAC, 090005Z Aug 67. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 290105Z Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jul 67.

21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 030424Z Jun 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 290445Z Jun 67, JCS IN 19952. (TS) Msg, CJCS 5999-67 to CINCPAC, 29 Jul 67; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 290105Z Jul 67; both in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

22. (TS) Msg, CJCS 5999-67 to CINCPAC, 29 Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67. (TS) Msg, CJCS 6106-67 to CINCPAC, 1 Aug 67, same file, Aug 67.

23. (TS) Msgs, CINCPAC to CJCS, 031933Z Aug 67 and 030123Z Aug 67; (TS-GP 3) Memo, Jt Staff to CJCS, "CHICOM Buffer Zone Targets," 4 Aug 67; (TS) Msg, CJCS 6377-67 to CINCPAC, 8 Aug 67; all in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3365 to CINCPAC, 9 Aug 67.

24. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3365 to CINCPAC, 090005Z Aug 67. (TS) Msg, CJCS 6377-67 to CINCPAC, 8 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4091 to CINCPAC, 171459Z Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5073 to CINCPAC, 301356Z Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5480 to CINCPAC, 052113Z Sep 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5073 to CINCPAC, 301356Z Aug 67. (TS) Memo, CJCS to SecDef, "RT," 30 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

25. (S) Msg, CJCS 7125 to CINCPAC, 30 Aug 67; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT, 260002Z Aug 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

26. For the 20 May proposal, see Ch. 5.

27. (TS-GP 3) "CSAF Concept for Isolation of the Port of Haiphong," att to (TS) SM-519-67 to CINCPAC, 22 Jul 67, JMF 912/432 (19 Jul 67).

28. (TS) Msg, CJCS 6106-67 to CINCPAC, 1 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

29. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 030123Z Aug 67; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 050244Z Aug 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT and CINCPACAF, 052234Z Aug 67, JCS IN 95324. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 062347Z Aug 67, JCS IN 96713.

30. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5480 to CINCPAC, 052113Z Sep 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 204-67 through 227-67, 31 Aug through 28 Sep 67. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA to CJCS et al, Fact Sheet, "Haiphong Port Clearance," 27 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 120157Z Oct 67, JCS IN 39404.

31. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 270028Z Sep 67, JCS IN 10882. (TS) Msg, Actg CJCS 8205-67 to CINCPAC, 30 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67. (TS) Fact Sheet, "ROLLING THUNDER Actions Pending," 16 Oct 67, same file, Oct 67. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5480 to CINCPAC, 052113Z Sep 67.

32. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 231941Z Aug 67; (S) Msg, CJCS to SecDef, 240829Z Aug 67; (TS) Msg, Actg CJCS to CINCPAC, 250107Z Aug 67; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

33. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250838Z Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

34. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 210028Z Sep 67, JCS IN 90642. (TS) CM-2660-67 to SecDef, 22 Sep 67; MFR, "NMCC Reports on MIG Engagements over NVN – 25 Sep 67," 26 Sep 67; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7303 to CINCPAC, 262109Z Sep 67; (TS) MFR, "Phuc Yen Strikes," 28 Sep 67; all in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67. (TS) Fact Sheet, "ROLLING THUNDER Actions Pending (U)," 16 Oct 67; (TS-GP 3) CM-2676-67 to SecDef, 4 Oct; both in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 67. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, p. 89.

35. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 080726Z Oct 67, JCS IN 32563. (TS-GP 3) CM-2684-67 to SecDef, 1 Oct 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9674 to CINCPAC, 232212Z Oct 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 249-, 250-, and 251-67, 24, 25, and 26 Oct 67. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, p. 90.

36. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 202352Z Sep 67, JCS IN 90536. (TS) CM-2660-67 to SecDef, 22 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67.

37. (TS-GP 3) CM-2676-67 to SecDef, 4 Oct 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8239 to CINCPAC, 061826Z Oct 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9045 to CINCPAC, 170003Z Oct 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 236-67 through 248-67, 9 through 23 Oct 67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9674 to CINCPAC, 232212Z Oct 67.

38. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACAF et al, 252248Z Oct 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 67. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 249-67 through 1–68, 24 Oct 67 through 2 Jan 68. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 84–85.

39. (TS) Msg, CJCS 9610-67 to CINCPAC, 8 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67. The Bac Mai incident is recounted in Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 92–93.

40. (S-GP 4) J-3 Briefing Sheet for CJCS, "JCS 2343/751-1," 21 Dec 66, JMF 9155.3 (7 Dec 65). (S) Msg, JCS 2729 to CINCPAC, 14 Apr 67; (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2385 to CINCPAC, 082343Z Nov 67; both in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.

41. (S) Memo, DepDir for Ops, NMCC to SecDef, "Aircraft Losses over North Vietnam, 17–20 November 1967," 20 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67. The North Vietnamese defense is described in The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*. Trans by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 203–205.

42. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, p. 95.

43. (TS-GP 1) CINCPAC *ROLLING THUNDER Digest*, Oct–Dec 67, JMF 912/323 (10 Feb 67), sec. 1B. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 090435Z Feb 68, JCS IN 90743. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 072330Z Apr 68, JCS IN 30389.

44. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6402 to CINCPAC, 032158Z Jan 68. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6700 to CINCPAC, 062148Z Jan 68. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6818 to CINCPAC, 092026Z Jan 68. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 090735Z Jan 68; (S-GP 1) Telegram, USUN to State, 232344Z Jan 68; (TS) Memo, NMCC to SecDef, 8 Jan 68, "Alleged Bombing of Soviet Merchant Ship of 4 January 1968"; (TS) Telecon Item, JCS 010/68 to CINCPAC, 141720Z Jan 68; all in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

45. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 150705Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

46. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7402 to CINCPAC, 162247Z Jan 68. (TS) Msg, CJCS 00489-68 to CINCPAC, Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

47. (S-GP 4) CINCPAC Rept, "Measurement of Progress in Southeast Asia, 31 March 1968," 10 Jun 68, pp. 75–76, 78, 95, JMF 911/337 (31 Mar 68).

48. For contrasting Western observations from Hanoi, see Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 44–48 and 94. North Vietnamese historians describe the air campaign of 1967 as a "great victory of the soldiers and civilians of North Vietnam" over the American "war of destruction." See *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 204–205.

49. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) IDA, "JASON, The Bombing of North Vietnam," (U), 16 Dec 67.

50. (TS) AFCSA Briefing of Special Study for JCS, "The Air Campaign against North Vietnam," 31 Jul 67, JMF 912/323 (31 Jul 67).

51. (TS-GP 1) OCJCS SEA CABIN Study Group, "Study of the Political-Military Implications in Southeast Asia of the Cessation of Aerial Bombardment and the Initiation of Negotiation (S)," 22 Nov 67.

52. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-62-68 to SecDef, 31 Jan 68 (derived from JCS 2339/66-3), JMF 907/305 (29 Sep 67), sec 2.

Chapter 7. Military Operations in South Vietnam, June 1967–January 1968

1. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 041216Z Jun 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 67.

2. COMUSMACV, *Command History, 1967*, I, pp. 382–395. Operation FAIRFAX is described in George L. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive, October 1966 to October 1967*. (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1998), pp. 155–162.

3. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 2 Oct 67, JCS IN 21700. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, pp. 372–374.

4. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, pp. 377–378, 389–390.

5. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 10 Oct 67, JCS IN 35776. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, pp. 411–430.

6. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 6 Sep 67, JCS IN 63618.

7. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 10 Oct 67, JCS IN 35776.

8. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 10 Oct 67, JCS IN 35776.

9. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 6 Sep 67, JCS IN 63618. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, pp. 255–259.

10. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 10 Oct 67, JCS IN 35776. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, pp. 257, 263–264.

11. (TS) Memo, CMC to Pres, "Situation in the Area of the Vietnam Demilitarized Zone," 22 Sep 67, JMF 911/321 (22 Sep 67).

12. (TS-GP 4) CMCM 31-67 to JCS, 24 Sep 67, Att to JCS 2472/158, JMF 911/321 (22 Sep 67).

13. (TS) Msg, JCS 7987 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 25 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67. (S) Not to Control Div, "CMCM-31-67. . . ," 25 Sep 67, JMF 911/321 (22 Sep 67).

14. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 9056 to Actg CJCS, 270438Z Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 67.

15. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecA, 22 Sep 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-1, 25 Sep 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 16 Sep 67, Att to JCS 2472-153, 21 Sep 67; JMF 911/375 (16 Sep 67).

16. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 281500Z Sep 67, JCS IN 14370. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 0110608Z Oct 67, JCS IN 19184. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive*, pp. 264–265.

17. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 30673 to CINCPAC, 161208Z Sep 67, JCS IN 82485; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 180740Z Sep 67, JCS IN 85864; JMF 911/321 (16 Sep 67). (TS-GP 3) JCSM-517-67 to SecDef, 19 Sep 67 (derived from JCS 2471/41)(not sent); (TS) Memo, CSAF to Actg CJCS, 22 Sep 67, Att to (TS-GP 3) 1st N/H to JCS 2471/41, 26 Sep 67; JMF 911/321 (17 Sep 67). Marine commanders remained opposed to the entire barrier concept. See Jack Shulimson et al, *US Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, USMC, 1997), pp. 21–31.

18. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 16 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-2, 17 Oct 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 20 Oct 67, and (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecA, 21 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-3, 23 Oct 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 31 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-4, 1 Nov 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecA, 6 Nov 67, Att to JCS 2472/153-5, 8 Nov 67; all in JMF 911/375 (16 Sep 67).

19. (TS-GP 3) CSAFM R-10-67 to JCS, 4 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/166, 4 Oct 67; (S) Note to Control Div, "Increase in B–52 Sorties to 1200/Month," 4 Oct 67; JMF 907/323 (4 Oct 67).

20. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-55-4-67 to SecDef, 14 Oct 67 (derived from JCS 2477/166-5); (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecAF, CJCS, ASD(ISA), 10 Nov 67, Att to JCS 2472/166-7, 14 Nov 67; JMF 907/323 (4 Oct 67).

21. (S-GP 3) JCSM-532-67 to SecDef, 2 Oct 67 (derived from JCS 2472/157); (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 28 Nov 67, Att to JCS 2472/157-1, 30 Nov 67; JMF 912/323 (11 Sep 67).

22. (TS-GP 3) CM 2668-67 to SecDef, 28 Sep 67, JMF 911/321 (27 Sep 67).

23. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 160113Z Dec 67, JCS IN 75000, and 120100Z Nov 67, JCS IN 12346. *MACV Command History, 1967*, I, p. 375. The campaign's role in enemy plans is described in The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*. Trans. By Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 212.

24. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 160113Z Dec 67, JCS IN 75000, and 120100Z Nov 67, JCS IN 12346. *MACV Command History, 1967*, I, pp. 378–379.

25. *MACV Command History, 1967*, I, pp. 363–367, 393–394, and 396–398.

26. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA/JCS, "Southeast Asia Military Fact Book," Jul 67, p. A–85. *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 169–171 is a North Vietnamese account of the expansion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

27. *MACV Command History, 1967*, I, pp. 438–441. *CINCPAC Command History, 1967*, II, 660–666.

28. *CINCPAC Command History, 1967*, II, pp. 741–745. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 7248 to CINCPAC, 251907Z Feb 67. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 6319 to CINCSAC et al., 142123Z Feb 67.

29. (TS) Initial Rept, Jt State-Def-CIA Study Gp for Cambodia, n.d., JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66), sec. 1A. (TS) Ltr, USecState to DepSecDef, 9 May 67; (TS) Memo, ASD (ISA) to DepSecDef, 15 May 67; (TS-GP 1) Ltr, DepSecDef to USecState, 17 May 67; Att to JCS 2343/820-6, 24 May 67. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5937 to CINCPAC, 221958Z May 67.

30. *MACV Command History, 1967*, I, pp. 252–266. *CINCPAC Command History, 1967*, II, pp. 567–569.

31. COMUSMACV and CJGS, RVNAF, AB 142, "Combined Campaign Plan, 1967," 7 Nov 66, JMF 9155.3/3100 (7 Nov 66), sec 1A. *MACV Command History, 1967*, II, p. 765. CINCPAC-COMUSMACV, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, Jun 68, p. 296.

32. *MACV Command History, 1967*, II, pp. 808–816.

33. (S-GP 4) JCSM-458-67 to SecDef, 19 Aug 67 (derived from JCS 2472/130); (S-GP 4) Msg, DEF 5000 to Saigon, 29 Aug 67; Memo, Acting VD/JS to ASD (I&L), 18 Jul 68, Att to JCS 2472/330, 20 Jul 68; JMF 911/479 (7 Aug 67). *MACV Command History, 1967*, II, p. 816.

34. CINCPAC-COMUSMACV, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, Jun 68, p. 292.

35. *CINCPAC Command History, 1967*, II, pp. 897–900. (S-GP 4) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, 7 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/146-1; (S-GP 4) JCSM-677-67 to SecDef, 4 Dec 67 (derived from JCS 2472/146-4); (C-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 19 Jan 68, Att to JCS 2472/146-5, 22 Jan 68; all in JMF 911/420 (5 Sep 67), secs 2 and 3.

36. *CINCPAC Command History, 1967*, II, pp. 722–723, 853. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2478 to CINCPAC, 112316Z Apr 67.

37. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Service Secys and CJCS, 12 Dec 66, Att to JCS 2315/349-23, 15 Dec 66; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 8 Feb 67, Att to JCS 2315/349-24, 10 Feb 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 8 May 67, Att to JCS 2315/349-25, 12 May 67; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Service Secys, 21 Jul 67, Att to JCS 2315/349-26; all in JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65), secs 4 and 5.

38. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Combat Analysis Group, J–3, "Statistical Digest of Military Developments in Southeast Asia," CAG Statistical Series, vol. I, no. 7, 3 Feb 69.

39. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010156Z Jan 68, JCS IN 12089.

Chapter 8. Pacification and Nation Building—1967

1. (U) Msg, USIA to All Principal USIS Posts, 17 Aug 67, JCS IN 3812. (S) Msg, State 97909 to Saigon, 6 Dec 66, JCS IN 71508. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 1142–1143.

2. (U) Msg, USIA to All Principal USIS Posts, 17 Aug 67, JCS IN 38212. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 1143–1146.

3. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 010020Z Jul 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67. (S) Msg, State 202550 to Saigon, 25 May 67, JCS IN 34643. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) Information Msg CIA 030922Z Jul 67, JCS IN 28054, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 67.

4. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 1147–1154.

5. (S) Msg, State 202559 to Saigon, 25 May 67, JCS IN 34643. (S) Msg, Saigon 21073 to State, 3 Apr 67, JCS IN 15705. (S) Msg, State 117709 to Saigon, 12 Jan 67, JCS IN 65555. (S) Msg, Saigon 19123 to State, 28 Feb 67, JCS IN 38291. (S) Msg, State 133730 to Saigon, 8 Feb 67, JCS IN 93315.

6. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 1148–1149. (S) Msg, Saigon 2972 to State, 12 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67, pt. 1.

7. (U) Msg, USIA to All Principal USIS Posts, 17 Aug 67, JCS IN 38212. *MACV Command History, 1967*, p. 1143. *NY Times*, 5 Sep 67, p. 1.

8. *MACV Command History, 1967*, p. 1153. (S) Msg, Saigon 10479 to State, 6 Nov 67, JCS IN 92565.

9. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 1035–1036, 1046–1051. The club scandals are recounted in William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1968–1973* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1996), pp. 191–193.

10. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 1035–1038.

11. NSAM 362 to SecState and SecDef, 9 May 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 67. *MACV Command History, 1967*, p. 587. Graham A. Cosmas, "MACV, the Joint Command: The Years of Escalation" (MS. US Army Center of Military History, 2002), Ch. 10, pp. 26–27.

12. Quotation is from Cosmas, "Years of Escalation," Ch. 10, pp. 24–25. (S) CM-2197-67 to DJS, 27 Mar 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 67. (S) SACSA-M 341-67, 12 Apr 67, SACSA Files. (U) CM-2261-67 to SACSA, 24 Apr 67, JMF 031 (24 Apr 67).

13. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 594–596.

14. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 602–604. (TS-GP 3) OCJCS, "1968 Year-End Review of Vietnam," p. 5–19.

15. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 509–613. The desertion rates of both the RVNAF and Viet Cong are analyzed in Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 518–519.

16. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 622–625, 627.

17. Clarke, *Final Years*, p. 209, notes the varying fortunes of RVNAF advice and support.

18. (S-GP 4) JCS 2472/151, 28 Sep 67; (S-GP 4) JCSM-530-67 to SecDef, 28 Sep 67 (derived from JCS 2472/151); both in JMF 911/535 (26 Jul 67).

19. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 261145Z Apr 67, JCS IN 62616. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 261220Z Jul 67, JCS IN 75415. (S-GP 4) App A to JCSM-630-67 to SecDef, 28 Sep 67 (derived from JCS 2472/151), 20 Sep 67, JMF 911/535 (26 Jul 67).

20. (S-GP 4) JCSM-630-67 to SecDef, 28 Sep 67 (derived from JCS 2472/151, 20 Sep 67); (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 7 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/151-1, 11 Oct 67; JMF 911/535 (26 Jul 67). (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8670 to CINCPAC, 112108Z Oct 67. Clarke, *Final Years*, p. 215.

21. *MACV Command History, 1967*, pp. 736–738. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 281011Z Aug 67, JCS IN 65481. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 260329Z Aug 67, JCS IN 99164. (TS-GP 4) DJSM-1214-67 to J–4, 4 Oct 67, Att to JCS 1725/758, 4 Oct 67; (TS-GP 4) JCSM-472-67 to SecDef, 12 Oct 67, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 1725/758, 16 Oct 67; (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 24 Oct 67, Att to JCS 1725/758-1, 26 Oct 67; all in JMF 489 (4 Oct 67).

22. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 3635 to CINCPAC, 13 Jan 67. (S-GP 4) Msg, CNO to CINCPAC and CMC, 251918Z Nov 66, JCS IN 53568. (S-GP 4) Msg, CSAF 90850 to CINCPAC, 092251Z Dec 66, JCS IN 84390. (S-GP 4) Msg, CMC to CINCPAC, 300239Z Nov 66, JCS IN 84391. (S-GP 4) Msg, DA 813287 to CINCUSARPAC, 042009Z May 67, JCS IN 79784.

23. *CINCPAC Command History, 1967*, p. 920.

24. Clarke, *Final Years*, Chs. 8, 12, and 13 covers the successes and failures of RVNAF reform in the 1966–1967 period.

25. Dept of State, Policy Planning Council, Paper, "Possible Alternatives to the Present Conduct of the War in Vietnam," 15 Jun 67, Tab A–13, Westmoreland History File no. 18; Msgs JCS 9449-67 and 9680-67 to Westmoreland, 3 and 10 Nov 67, Westmoreland Msg Files; all in William C. Westmoreland Papers, CMH.

26. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 279–280. Cosmas, "Years of Escalation," Ch. 12, pp. 50–52.

27. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LVII (11 Dec 67), pp. 781–784.

Chapter 9. Domestic Dissent and Policy Debate

1. *NY Times*, 22 Jan and 3 Mar 67. US Senate, 90th Congress, 1st Session, *Asia, the Pacific, and the United States, Hearing before Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*, 31 Jan 67 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1967), with Former Ambassador to Japan Edwin O. Reischauer. US Senate, 90th Congress, 1st Session, *Conflicts between United States Capabilities and Foreign Commitments, Hearing before Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*, 21 Feb 67 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1967), pp. 3, 25.

2. The shifting mood of the media is traced in William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988); see especially pp. 291, 310–314, 320–325, 339.

3. Paul J. Scheips, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1945–1992* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2005), Chs. 7 and 9, provide an overview of the 1967 disturbances and the federal response.

4. *NY Times*, 10 Apr 67, 31 July 67, and 29 Aug 67. Hammond, *Military and Media, 1962–1968*, p. 387 discusses the impact of American casualties on public opinion.

5. US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The US Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Pt. IV: July 1965–January 1968 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1994), pp. 894–895.

6. (S) Msgs, CJCS to COMUSMACV, JCS 6105, 1 Aug 67 and JCS 7126, 30 Aug 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 67.

7. Text of the speech is in Dept of State *Bulletin*, LVII (23 Oct 67), pp. 519–522.

8. *NY Times*, 4 Oct 67, 1.

9. *NY Times*, 12 and 14 Nov 67, 1.

10. *NY Times*, 16 Dec 67, 1.

11. *NY Times*, 19 and 26 Dec 67, 1.

12. (TS) Study, "SEA CABIN," 22 Nov 67, OCJCS File, Vietnam Negotiations. (S) CM-2700-67 to LTG Goodpaster, 19 Oct 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Negotiations through Apr 68.

13. (TS-GP 1) CM-2803-67 to DJS, 5 Dec 67, Att to JCS 2339/266; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-698-67, 16 Dec 67 (derived from JCS 2339/266-1); (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 28 Dec 67, Att to JCS 2339/266-2; JMF 907/305 (29 Sep 67), sec 1. (TS-GP 1) MFR, Dir J–5, "Bundy Planning Group," 22 Jan 68, OCJCS File, Vietnam Negotiations.

14. (S) CM-2640-67 to Gens McConnell and Greene and Adm McDonald, 12 Sep 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Sep 67. (TS) Briefing Sheet, "JCS 2472/167–Increased Pressures on North Vietnam (U)," 5 Oct 67, JMF 911/320 (2 Sep 67).

15. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-555-67, 17 Oct 67 (derived from JCS 2472/167), JMF 911/320 (2 Sep 67).

16. (TS) Msg, JCS 9566 to COMUSMACV, 8 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.

17. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 091610Z Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.

18. (TS-GP 1) DJSM-1381-67 to CJCS, 13 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67.

19. "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, pp. 249–254.

20. Gen William C. Westmoreland, "Address to National Press Club, Washington, DC, 21 Nov 67," copy in US Army Center of Military History files.

21. *NY Times*, 6, 14, 19, and 26 Nov 67; 5, 6, 11, 19, and 20 Dec 67.

22. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, p. 942.

23. *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 943–950.

24. Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDe, as in 1966 Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Victnam* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 311–314. Deborah Shapley, *Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993), pp. 436–441.

25. Rusk quotation is from *FRUS Vietnam, 1967*, pp. 1037–1040; for other advisors' comments, see pp. 971–974, 978–980, 986–987, 991–994, 1006–1013, 1032–1035, and 1059–1061.

26. *FRUS Victnam, 1967*, pp. 1040–1042.

27. *FRUS Victnam, 1967*, pp. 1118–1120.

Chapter 10. The TET Offensive

1. Thomas K. Latimer, "Hanoi's Leaders and Their South Vietnam Policies, 1954–1968" (PhD Diss., Georgetown University, 1972), Chs. 8 and 9, summarize the debate. See also William J. Duiker, "Introduction" to The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. xiii–xiv. Hereafter *Victory in Vietnam*.

2. Quotation is from War Experiences Recapitulation Committee of the High Level Military Institute, *Victnam: The Anti-US Resistance War for National Salvation, 1954–1975, Military Events* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1980. Trans. By Joint Publications Research Service, Doc. No. 80968, 1982), p. 100.

3. A Communist account of the planning is in *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 206–207, 214–216.

4. Col Gen Tran Van Tra, *Vietnam: History of the Bulwark B2 Theater*, vol. 5, *Concluding the 30-Years War* (Ho Chi Minh City, 1982. Trans. by Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Joint Publications Research Service, Southeast Asia Report no. 1247, 2 Feb 83), p. 35. The same point is made in *Victory in Victnam*, p. 224.

5. These preparations are summarized in *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 207–214. See also James J. Wirtz, *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 75–76.

6. PENNSYLVANIA is discussed in Ch. 6. Other political moves are summarized in Don Oberdorfer, *Tet: The Turning Point in the Vietnam War* (Rev. Ed. New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), pp. 60–66.

7. The CIA study is summarized in Harold R. Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes, 1962–1968* (Washington: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1998), pp. 119–121.

8. Wirtz, *Tet Offensive*, Ch. 3, examines allied assumptions that contributed to the surprise.

9. (TS) Msg, Saigon 8432 to State, 130934Z Oct 67, JCS IN 42411; (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 34790 to CINCPAC, 221152Z Oct 67, JCS IN 59001; (TS-NOFORN-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 200132Z Oct 67, JCS IN 54974. For MACV's role in developing the ceasefire proposal, see Graham A. Cosmas, "MACV, The Joint Command: The Years of Withdrawal, 1968–1973" (Ms. US Army Center of Military History, 2004), Ch. 2, pp. 12–13; hereafter Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal."

10. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-567-67 to SecDef, 23 Oct 67 (derived from JCS 2472/177-1), JMF 911/305 (6 Oct 67).

11. (C) Msg, Saigon 11408 to State, 180920Z Nov 67, JCS IN 23776.

12. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 72761 to Saigon, 212139Z Nov 67, JCS IN 30502; (S) CM-2773-67 to ASD(ISA), 20 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091, Vietnam Nov 67; (S-GP 2) Msg, State 74877 to Saigon, 260205Z Nov 67, JCS IN 38981; (S) Msg, Saigon 12799 to State, 061040Z Dec 67, JCS IN 56195; (S-GP 3) Msg, State 80713 to Saigon, 070130Z Dec 67, JCS 1N 58244.

13. The phrase "abnormally great" was inserted by the State and Defense Departments; the JCS had proposed the term "major" activities.

14. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-687-67 to SecDef, 9 Dec 67 (derived from JCS 2472/197); (TS) Memo, DepASD(ISA) to LTG Brown, 15 Dec 67; Msg, JCS 5343 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 160120Z Dec 67; all in JMF 911/305 (6 Oct 67).

15. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 300-67, 26 Dec 67. (S-NOFORN) DIA 1B 251-67, 28 Dec 67.

16. (S-GP 1) Msg, State 90178 to Saigon, 28 Dec 67; (S) Msg, Saigon 14540 to State, 280945Z Dec 67; (TS) Msg, DEPCOMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 282216Z Dec 67; all in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 67.

17. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Actg CJCS to Actg SecDef, "New Year's Ceasefire (U)," 28 Dec 67; (S) Msg, AFSSO 13AF to SSO CINCPAC, 291155Z Dec 67 (readdressed by CINCPAC, info Actg CJCS, 291912Z Dec 67); (S) Msg, Saigon 14610 to State, 290721Z Dec 67; (S) Msg, State 90905 to Saigon, 29 Dec 67; all in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 67.

18. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 44204 to JCS, 301028Z Dec 67; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to Actg CJCS, 300255Z Dec 67; (TS) CM-2877-67 to SecDef, 30 Dec 67; all in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 67. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 1-68, 2 Jan 68.

19. US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. VI, *Vietnam January–August 1968* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2002), pp. 1–2. Hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, January–August 1968*.

20. *FRUS Vietnam, January–August 1968*, pp. 3–11, 18–25, 32–33, 42–51 document the course of these exchanges.

21. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 2, pp. 14–15, summarizes the growing intelligence.

22. *FRUS Vietnam, January–August 1968*, pp. 44–51.

23. (U) Msg, Westmoreland MAC 12397 to Wheeler, 20 Dec 67, Westmoreland Msg Files, William C. Westmoreland Papers, US Army Center of Military History (CMH). See also Ford, *CIA and Vietnam*, pp. 120–121.

24. (U) Msg, Sharp to Wheeler, 26 Dec 67, Westmoreland Msg Files, CMH.

25. MACV's assessments and plans are summarized in Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 2, pp. 17–18.

26. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 216.

27. (S-GP 4) "Fact Sheet" on Khe Sanh, 17 Apr 68, encl. to DJSM-448-68 to CJCS, same date, JCS 2472/277, 26 Apr 68, JMF 911/175 (28 Mar 68). Cited hereafter as "Khe Sanh Fact Sheet."

28. The reinforcement effort is summarized in Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 2, pp. 19–20.

29. (TS) Msg, JCS 00343 to COMUSMACV, 11154Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

30. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00547 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 121422Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

31. *FRUS Vietnam, January–August 1968*, pp. 30–32. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 142146Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

32. The opening of the siege is described in Jack Shulimson et. al., *U. S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, USMC, 1997), pp. 255–269. Hereafter Shulimson, et. al., *Defining Year*.

33. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00992 to CINCPAC, 210945Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 17-68, 20 Jan 68. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-63-68 to

Pres, 29 Jan 68, JMF 911/301 (29 Jan 68). Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 2, pp. 19–20. (S-GP 4) Khe Sanh Fact Sheet.

34. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01108 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 231329Z Jan 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01060 to CINCPAC, 230138Z Jan 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. For nuclear planning, see Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 2, pp. 21–22.

35. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 01215 to CINCPAC, 251237Z Jan 68 and MAC 01233, 260445Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 2, pp. 26–30 describes the circumstances leading to Westmoreland's decision.

36. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-63-68 to Pres, 29 Jan 68, JMF 911/301 (29 Jan 68).

37. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 00943 to Wheeler and Sharp, 20 Jan 68, Westmoreland Msg Files, CMH.

38. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 2, pp. 32–33.

39. CIA Paper, "The Intelligence Background of the Current Communist Offensive, 15 Feb 68, p. 4, copy in US Army Center of Military History. William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1976), p. 318.

40. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00338 to CINCPAC, 090331Z Jan 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 092115Z Jan 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01665 to CINCPAC, 160415Z Jan 68, JCS IN 38608. (S) Msg, Saigon 16071 to State, 160400Z Jan 68, JCS IN 39064.

41. (TS) Msg, JCS 00554 to COMUSMACV, 182104Z Jan 68; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 200323Z Jan 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 00943 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 200843Z Jan 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. (TS) CM-2927-68 to SecDef, 20 Jan 68, JMF 911/305 (6 Oct 67); a declassified version of this JCSM is in *FRUS Vietnam, January–August 1968*, pp. 55–56.

42. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 01165 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 241239Z Jan 68; Saigon 16815 to State, 241230Z Jan 68; JCS IN 55711. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250216Z Jan 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68.

43. (TS-GP 3) Msg, State 104215 to Saigon, 25 Jan 68, JCS IN 57706. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01219 to CJCS, 251416Z Jan 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8282 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 261714Z Jan 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 68. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 2, pp. 37–40.

44. A convenient overview of the Tet offensive is in *USMACV Command History, 1968*, Vol. 1, pp. 38, 536, and Vol. 2, Annex A. The classic journalistic account is Oberdorfer, *Tet!* Casualties are summarized in MACV Fact Sheet, "Losses for Period 29/1800 Hrs. Jan 68 to 05/2400 Hrs. Mar 68, Tab 16, William C. Westmoreland Historical File no. 30, Westmoreland Papers, CMH.

45. For typical evaluations of the enemy defeat, see *USMACV Command History, 1968*, Vol. 1, pp. 73–74 and Vol. 2, Annex A, pp. 894–895. Vietnamese Communist accounts, although claiming Tet as a great strategic victory, acknowledge military miscalculations and shortcomings; see for example *Vietory in Vietnam*, pp. 217, 219–223.

46. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 3, pp. 8–12 summarizes the allied response.

47. Shulimson et. al., *Defining Year*, pp. 269–290 recounts events of the siege. Vietnamese Communist historians consider that the siege continued after PEGASUS, ending only with US evacuation of Khe Sanh in July 1968; see *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 222–223, 229–230. This volume interprets the evacuation as "a serious military and political failure for the American imperialists."

48. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 3, pp. 18–20. Marines contended that MACV Forward unnecessarily complicated command relations in I Corps. See Shulimson, et. al., *Defining Year*, pp. 237–239.

49. Claims of pacification progress are summarized in Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 3, pp. 12–14.

50. News coverage of Tet is analyzed in Peter Braistrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and TV Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet in Vietnam and Washington* (2 vols. Boulder, CO: Westview Press and Freedom House, 1977). William M. Hammond,

Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988), Chs. 15 and 16 summarizes the impact of Tet on both official and nonofficial Americans.

Chapter 11. A New Departure in Policy

1. (TS) CSAF-A-34-68, 31 Jan 68; (TS) Note to Control Div., "ROLLING THUNDER," 31 Jan 68; (TS) JCS 2472/222, 1 Feb 68 (revised Dec On, 2 Feb 68); (TS) JCSM-78-68, 3 Feb 68; all in JMF 912/323 (31 Jan 68).

2. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 138–140.

3. (TS) Memo, DJS to CJCS, "Comments on IDA JASON Study on 'The Bombing of North Vietnam,'" 7 Feb 68; (TS) DJSM-148-68, 7 Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 68. (TS) Secy, JCS, Dec On "ROLLING THUNDER Targets," 19 Feb 68, JMF 912/323 (31 Jan 68).

4. (TS) J–5 T 9-68, "Forces Available for Emergency Deployment to Southeast Asia," 5 Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68). For service problems, see Graham A. Cosmas, "MACV, The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal" (MS. US Army Center of Military History, 2004), Ch. 3, pp. 32–33; hereafter Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal."

5. (S) Note to Control Div, "Forces Available for Emergency Deployment to Southeast Asia," 5 Feb 68; (TS) J–5 T 12–68, same sub, 7 Feb 68; (C) Note to Control Div, same sub and date; (TS) J–5 Briefing Sheet for CJCS on JCS 2472/226, 5 Feb 68; all in JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

6. General Wheeler summarizes his concerns in Interview 11 by Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 7 May 1970, pp. 5–6; hereafter Wheeler LBJL 11 Interview. Herbert Y. Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 107–109. A convenient summary of Korean events is Maj Verdon E. Jenerette, USA (Ret), "The Forgotten DMZ," *Military Review*, v. LXVIII, no. 5 (May 1988), pp. 32–43.

7. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 01614 to Wheeler, 4 Feb 68, Westmoreland Msg Files, William C. Westmoreland Papers, US Army Center of Military History (CMH). Wheeler LBJL 11 Interview, p. 5. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 3, pp. 6–7, 33.

8. Msgs, Westmoreland MAC 01586 and MAC 01717 to Wheeler info Sharp, 3 and 7 Feb 68, Westmoreland Msg Files, CMH.

9. (TS) Msg, JCS 01529 to COMUSMACV, 080448Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 68. Schandler, *Unmaking of a President*, pp. 95–99 emphasizes Wheeler's initiative on the reinforcement issue.

10. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01810 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 081440Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 68.

11. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 01812 to Wheeler info Sharp, 8 Feb 68, Westmoreland Msg Files, CMH.

12. (TS) Msg, JCS 01590 to COMUSMACV, 090021Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 68.

13. Notes of the 9 Feb 68 meeting are in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 158–168. Wheeler quotations are from this source.

14. (S) MFR, CJCS, "Actions in Southeast Asia," 9 Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

15. (TS) JCS 2472/226-1, 10 Feb 68; (S) Note to Control Div, "Emergency Reinforcement of COMUSMACV," 10 Feb 68; JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

16. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01858 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 091633Z Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68). (TS-NOFORN) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01924 to CJCS, 110308Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 68.

17. (S) Msg, JCS 1695 to COMUSMACV, 120108Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 68. Meeting notes are in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 175–182; Rusk quotation is from this source.

18. (TS) JCS 2472/226-2, 11 Feb 68; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-91-68 to SecDef, 12 Feb 68; both in JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68), sec 2.

19. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and CJCS, 120612Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 68. (TS) Msg COMUSMACV MAC 02018 to CJCS, 121823Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Troop Build-up and Call-up, 1 Feb–15 Mar 68. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 3, pp. 36–37.

20. McNamara-Johnson telecon is in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 186–188. (S) Note to Control Div, "Deployments to SVN," 12 Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

21. Notes of the meeting are in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 188–196. Note to Control Div, "Deployments to SVN," 12 Feb 68, JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

22. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 3, pp. 37–38.

23. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2472/231, 13 Feb 68; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-96-68 to SecDef, 13 Feb 68; JMF 911/374 (5 Feb 68).

24. (TS) JCS 2472/234, 14 Feb 68; (TS) JCSM-99-68 to SecDef, 15 Feb 68; JMF 911/384 (13 Feb 68).

25. (TS) CM-2976-68 to CSA et al., 16 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 1 Feb–15 Mar 68.

26. Msg, Wheeler JCS 1974 to Westmoreland info Sharp, 17 Feb 68, Westmoreland Msg Files, Westmoreland Papers, CMH. In same collection, see Wheeler JCS 02113 to Westmoreland info Sharp, 21 Feb 68. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, p. 227.

27. For circumstances and atmosphere of the visit, see *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, p. 263; William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1976), p. 354; and Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946–1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 501–502.

28. Ltr, Brigadier General John R. Chaisson, USMC to Mrs. Chaisson, 26 Feb 68, box 7, John R. Chaisson Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA. Gen Chaisson was chief of the MACV Combat Operations Center and a close confidante of Gen Westmoreland. He accompanied Westmoreland and Wheeler on their flight to Da Nang. See also Schandler, *Unmaking of a President*, pp. 109–111; and Wheeler LBJL II Interview, pp. 3–6.

29. William C. Westmoreland, Paper, "The Origins of the Post-Tet 1968 Plans for Additional Forces in RVN," 18 Apr 70, copy in Historians' Files, CMH, pp. 17–20, 22; hereafter Westmoreland, "Additional Forces." Wheeler LBJL II Interview, pp. 3–6. For COMUSMACV's interest in operations in Laos and Cambodia, see Msg, Westmoreland MAC 2962 to Wheeler info Sharp, 2 Mar 68, Westmoreland Msg Files, Westmoreland Papers, CMH.

30. (TS) JCS 2472/237, 28 Feb 68, JMF 911 (27 Feb 68). Westmoreland, "Additional Forces," p. 21. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 263–266. Schandler, *Unmaking of a President*, pp. 109–111.

31. Westmoreland, "Additional Forces," pp. 21 and 23, Wheeler LBJL II Interview, p. 9.

32. The President had the report in hand by 27 February and held a preliminary discussion of it with Rusk, McNamara, Clifford, and other civilian advisers the same day. See *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 260–262.

33. (TS) JCS 2472/237, 28 Feb 68, JMF 911 (27 Feb 68). *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 263–275; quotations are from this source.

34. (TS) Msg, JCS 02430 to COMUSMACV, 292339Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 1 Feb–15 Mar 68.

35. The fluctuations of public reaction to Tet are summarized in William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 371–373; hereafter Hammond, *Military and Media*.

36. *NY Times*, 4, 9, 13, 14, and 18 Feb 68. Walter Cronkite quotations are from Hammond, *Military and Media*, pp. 369–370.

37. (TS) Msg, JCS 02430 to COMUSMACV, 292339Z Feb 68; (TS) CM-3067-68 to CSA et al., 28 Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 1 Feb–15 Mar 68. Besides Generals Wheeler and Taylor, the committee included Secretary Rusk, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Fowler, Paul Nitze, Paul Warnke, Phil Goulding, Philip Habib, and William Bundy.

38. (TS) Msg, JCS 02430 to COMUSMACV, 292339Z Feb 68; (TS-NOFORN) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 02951 to CJCS, 020947Z Mar 68; MAC 02956, 021109Z Mar 68; MAC 02962, 021223Z Mar 68; all in OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 1 Feb–15 Mar 68.

39. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 010823Z Mar 68, JCS IN 44082. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 032253Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 68. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 092348Z Mar 68, JCS IN 62030.

40. (TS) Rpt by SEA Br, J–5, "Comparison of Two Courses of Action in Vietnam," 29 Feb 68, OCJCS File, VN, SecDef Mtgs, Strategies, Misc. (TS) Rpt by Short Range Br, J–5, "Analysis of COMUSMACV Force Requirements and Alternatives," 1 Mar 68, OCJCS File, Black Book. An unclassified version of the latter report is in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 292–297. (TS) Memo, CSA to CJCS, same title, 2 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 1 Feb–15 Mar 68.

41. The deliberations of the Clifford committee, and the input it received, are summarized in US Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense* (12 vols. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), sec. 4.C.6.(c), pp. 16–51; hereafter *US Vietnam Relations*. See also Schandler, *Unmaking of a President*, pp. 116–176, 182–184.

42. Evolution of Clifford's position is described in Schandler, *Unmaking of a President*, pp. 213–217, 241–255, 311–312; quotation is from p. 216. Clifford recounts his conversion in Clark Clifford, "A Vietnam Reappraisal: The Personal History of One Man's View and How It Evolved," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 47, no. 4 (July 1969), pp. 601–622. See also *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 262, 307.

43. (TS) Msg, JCS 02590 to COMUSMACV, 051658Z Mar 68; (TS) "Draft Memorandum Prepared by Special Committee," 4 Mar 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 1 Feb–15 Mar 68. An unclassified version of the latter memo is in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 314–316.

44. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 02590 to COMUSMACV, 051658Z Mar 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2766 to COMUSMACV, 090045Z Mar 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 02777 to CS MACV, 092243Z Mar 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 1 Feb–15 Mar 68. (TS) Memo, SecA to CSA, no subj, 13 Mar 68; (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to JCS, "Southeast Asia Deployments," 14 Mar 68, encl. B to JCS 2339/271, 15 Mar 68; JMF 911/374 (9 Mar 68).

45. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 3, p. 47.

46. (TS) Msg, CJCS to COMUSMACV, JCS 2767, 8 Mar 68, JMF 911/374 (9 Mar 68). *NY Times*, 8 Mar 68.

47. *NY Times*, 11 Mar 68. Hammond, *Military and Media*, pp. 380–381. General Wheeler blamed individuals in the administration for leaking the troop request story to the media; see Wheeler LBJL II Interview, pp. 8–9. The *Times* reporters, however, claimed that they drew their stories from a number of sources, not one major leak. For their version, see Hammond as cited in this note.

48. *NY Times*, 17 Jan 68, 17 Mar 68. (TS) Msg, JCS 03024 to COMUSMACV, 162045Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 16 Mar-.

49. Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), p. 415. See also Schandler, *Unmaking of a President*, pp. 194–228, 231–232; and *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, p. 462.

50. Westmoreland History Notes, 1–31 Mar 68, tab 1, Westmoreland Historical Files, Westmoreland Papers, CMH. Wheeler LBJL II Interview, pp. 9–10. Schandler, *Unmaking of a President*, p. 236.

51. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 459–465 prints notes of the 26 March meeting. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 4192 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 271333Z Mar 68; (S) Msg, JCS 3449 to COMUSMACV, 280152Z Mar 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 16 Mar.

52. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #6," 4 Apr 68, JMF 907/374 (14 Mar 68). (TS) MACV Troop List, OSD Program 6 Add-on, 28 Mar 68, prepared by Pacific Division, J–3, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 16 Mar-. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5766 to CINCPAC et al., 061701Z Apr 68.

53. (S) Troop List, Program 6 Add-On Forces, SVN, Encl. A to (S-GP 3) MJCS 197-68, 10 May 68, JMF 907/374 (14 Mar 68).

54. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 5 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 68. For a recent account of the bombing debate, see Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: The US Air Force and North Vietnam, 1966–1973* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), pp. 135–137.

55. (TS) Msg, JCS 03023 to CINCPAC, 161657Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 68. (TS) Msgs, State 131732 to Saigon, 16 Mar 68; Saigon 22548 to State, 20 Mar 68.

56. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, p. 135. Wheeler's memo to Clifford is in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 422–424.

57. (UNK) "Schedule and Participants in Special Meetings," n.d., OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Troop Build-Up and Call-Up, 16 Mar- (filed under date 25 Mar 68). (TS) Brigadier General Robert N. Ginsburgh, Chairman's Staff Group, interviewed by Robert J. Watson, 24 Jan 69.

58. Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back*, pp. 136–138. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 457–458, 471–474.

59. Senators Mansfield and Russell were privy to the decision at least by 27 Mar 68. (U) *Congressional Record*, vol. 114, 2 Apr 68, pp. 3776–3777. (S) Msg, JCS 3583 to CINCPAC, 011951Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 68.

60. (S) Msg, JCS 3583 to CINCPAC, 011951Z Apr 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 3561 to CINCPAC et al., 310232Z Mar 68; (S) Msg, JCS 3564 to COMUSMACV, 310304Z Mar 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 68.

61. MFR of this meeting is in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 488–490.

62. Text of the President's address of 31 Mar 69 in Dept of State *Bulletin*, LVIII (15 Apr 68), pp. 481–486.

Chapter 12. De-escalation and the Quest for Talks

1. (TS) Msg, JCS 3583 to CINCPAC, 1 Apr 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5145 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5183 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 1 Apr 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

2. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5291 to CINCPAC, 2 Apr 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 3561 to CINCPAC et al., 31 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

3. (S) Msg, JCS 3564 to COMUSMACV, 31 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (14–31 Mar 68).

4. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 010315Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

5. (TS) Msg, JCS 3583 to CINCPAC, 1 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

6. (S) Dept of State, Memo of Conversation, "Swiss Offer Geneva as a Site for Peace Talks," 4 Apr 68, OCJCS File CROCODILE Outgoing, 1–30 Apr 68. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 722–723.

7. *NY Times*, 3 Apr 68, pp. 1 and 14. Transcript of Mansfield's conversation with Johnson and Clifford is in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 503–508.

8. (U) Msg, DEF 5321 to CINCPAC et al., 2 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

9. (S) Msg, JCS 3652 to CINCPAC, 2 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

10. (S) Msg, JCS 3564 to COMUSMACV, 31 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (14–31 Mar 68).

11. (TS) "Summary Chronology – Operation CROCODILE," Encl. to Memo, ExecSecy, Dept of State to SecDef et al., 6 Apr 68, p. 2, OCJCS File, CROCODILE, Outgoing (1–30 Apr 68); hereafter cited as (TS) "Summary Chronology – Operation CROCODILE."

12. (TS) "Summary Chronology – Operation CROCODILE," p. 2. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 523–528, 534.

13. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 5380 and 5420 to CINCPAC, 3 Apr 68; (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 5381 and 5491 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 3 and 4 Apr 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 3668 to CINCPAC, 3 Apr 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

14. (S) CM-3189-68 to SecDef, 8 Apr 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC HWA 1213 to CJCS, 13 Apr 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68). (TS) "Summary Chronology – Operation CROCODILE," p. 6.

15. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 5540, 5617, and 5686 to CINCPAC et al., 4, 5, and 6 Apr 68; (TS) Msg, VIENTIANE 5814 to CINCPAC, 12 Apr 68, JCS IN 39897; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

16. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 4893 to JCS, 12 Apr 68; (S) Msg, JCS 4013 to COMUSMACV, 12 Apr 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

17. (TS-Gp 1) Msg, JCS 6226 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 11 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68).

18. (TS) "Summary Chronology – Operation CROCODILE," p. 2. (TS) Project B, OCJCS File, Vietnam Negotiating Book.

19. (TS) "Summary Chronology – Operation CROCODILE," pp. 4–5. (TS-GP 3) Msg, State 143729 to Vientiane, 9 Apr 68, JCS IN 33785, OCJCS File, CROCODILE Outgoing (1–30 Apr 68).

20. (TS) "Summary Chronology – Operation CROCODILE," pp. 11–12. *NY Times*, 14 Apr 68, p. 1.

21. (TS) "Summary Chronology – OPERATION CROCODILE," pp. 26, 30–32, 36–37, 39.

22. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS et al., 130212Z Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (1–15 Apr 68). For a Communist account of their preparations, see *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 227–228.

23. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 180508Z Apr 68, JCS IN 50236; (S-GP 2) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 272158Z Apr 68, JCS IN 71044; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16–30 Apr 68). (S) DIA Intelligence Bulletin (IB), 29 Apr 68, pp. S–1, 2.

24. (S) DIA IB, 24 Apr 68, p. A–3; IB, 25 Apr 68, p. A–6.

25. (S) DIA IB, 29 Apr 68, p. A–5.

26. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7218 to CINCPAC, 23 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16–30 Apr 68).

27. *NY Times*, 2 May 68, p. 1. For an itemization of the units involved in the enemy build-up, see *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 227.

28. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4569 to CINCPAC, 28 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16–30 Apr 68).

29. Mr. Paul Kearney, Administrative Asst to the CJCS, interviewed by J. F. Schnabel on 9 Jan 68.

30. Notes of the 30 April meeting are in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 614–617. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 7996 to CINCPAC, 2 May 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (16–30 Apr 68).

31. *NY Times*, 3 May 68, p. 1.

32. (TS) "Summary Chronology – Operation CROCODILE," pp. 70–71. Quotation is from *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, p. 631.

33. "The President's News Conference of May 3, 1968," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 741–742. The start of the offensive is noted in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, p. 634. See also below, Ch. 14.

Chapter 13. Strengthening the RVNAF

1. The ups and downs of advice and support during these years are covered authoritatively in Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years 1965–1973* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1988); hereafter cited as Clarke, *Final Years*.

2. Clarke, *Final Years*, Chs. 12 and 15 cover these developments. RVNAF strength figures are from (S) Intv, Robert J. Watson and Arthur A. Chapa with CDR Paul F. Abel, USN, Revolutionary Development South Vietnam Branch, Office of SACSA, 3 Feb 69.

3. *USMACV Command History 1967*, pp. 317–320. (TS) Memo, J–5 to CJCS, "Comparison of Objectives," 1 Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68. RVNAF, JGS and USMACV, "Combined Campaign Plan 1968," 11 Nov 67, Historians' Files, US Army Center of Military History (CMH).

4. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 273–278. Wheeler quotations are from Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 2006), p. 428; hereafter cited as Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*.

5. For the administration policy shift, see Ch. 9, pp. 125–129. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 10726 to CJCS, 9 Nov 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 67. Until this point, advisory functions had been fragmented within the MACV staff. See Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, pp. 288–290. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 279–280 describes the turnover plan.

6. Clarke, *Final Years*, p. 286. (S) Tab C to CM-3116-68 to SecDef, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

7. Absentee rates are from Graham A. Cosmas, "MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal" (Ms. US Army Center of Military History), Ch. 2, p. 38.

8. MACV Fact Sheet, "Losses for Period 29/1800 Hrs Jan 68 to 05/2400 Hrs Mar 68," 8 Mar 68, Tab 16, William C. Westmoreland History File no. 30, Westmoreland Papers, CMH. CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, *Report on the War in Vietnam, Jun 68*, p. 282. (S-GP 4) MACV, Report-Reassessment of RVNAF Status as of 29 Feb 68, 21 Mar 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

9. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 3, pp. 12–14.

10. (S) Msg, DCG USARV to CSA, 121200Z Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (TS) CM-2973-68 to SpecAsst to Pres for National Security Affairs, 13 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 12–29 Feb 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 20928 to State, 1 Mar 68; (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69; JCS IN 38225.

11. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 01586 to CJCS, 3 Feb 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. Tab C to CM-3116-68 to SecDef, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68). (TS) MFR, ASD (I&L), "Actions in Response to MACV Msg on 'Additional Help Required,'" 3 Feb 68; (TS-Gp 3) Msg, CJCS 1303 to COMUSMACV, 3 Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1–12 Feb 68.

12. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 313–314. Thieu quotation is from *NY Times*, 1 Apr 68, p. 26. (S) Tab B to CM-3116-68 to SecDef, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

13. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 06882 to CINCPAC, 9 Mar 68, JCS IN 61553, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 16–30 Apr 68. (S) Tab B to CM-3116-68, 13 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/137), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68). Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 293–294.

14. (TS) Msg, Saigon 21733 to State, 11 Mar 68, JCS IN 64635.

15. (S-NOFORN-GP 4) CM-3128-68 to SecDef, 19 Mar 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68). (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 07327 to CINCPAC, 15 Mar 68, JCS IN 72264.

16. *NY Times*, 1 Apr 68, p. 26.

17. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 945 to CSA, 4 Apr 68, JCS IN 23458, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68. *COMUSMACV Report on the War in Vietnam*, Jun 68, p. 278.

18. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "Increase in FY 1968 RVNAF Force Level (U)," 4 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

19. (S-GP 4) JCSM-233-68 to SecDef, "Accelerated Expansion of the RVNAF (U)," 15 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

20. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (U)," 16 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68) sec 1.

21. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 294–295. (S-NOFORN) Msg, JCS 6703 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 68, JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

22. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 5388 to CINCPAC, 23 Apr 68; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 030314Z May 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 68.

23. (TS) Note to Control Div, "Discussion Topic for SecDef-JCS meeting, Monday, 29 Apr 68," 26 Apr 68; (TS) J–3 TP 42-68, 29 Apr 68; JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

24. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 295–296. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) JCSM-324-68 to SecDef, 23 May 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), sec. 1A.

25. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "Accelerated Expansion of RVNAF (U)," 24 May 68 (derived from JCS 2472/264-1), JMF 911/535 (13 Mar 68).

26. Clarke, *Final Years*, p. 298.

27. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (U)," 25 Jun 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-2), JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), sec. 2.

28. This point is emphasized in Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 298–299.

29. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 299–300. Clarke's account is based on Draft Memo, Wheeler to SecDef, "Republic of Vietnam's Ministry of Defense Plan Six," circa Jul 68, Historian's Files, US Army Center of Military History.

30. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 3920 to CINCPAC, 2 Jul 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 4080 to CINCPAC, 5 Jul 68; JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), sec. 2. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 19762 to CINCPAC, 9 Jul 68, JCS IN 29587, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), sec. 3.

31. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 19762 to CINCPAC, 9 Jul 68, JCS IN 29587; (S-GP 4) JCSM 455-68 to SecDef, 19 Jul 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-4); (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecA et al., "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (U)," 30 Jul 68; all in JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), secs. 2 and 3.

32. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6931 to CINCPAC, 12 Aug 68. Admiral Houser was replaced in Nov 68 by Brigadier General A. J. Bowley. See CM-3753-68 to SecDef, 5 Nov 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1 Nov 68.

33. (S-GP 4) JCSM-524-68 to SecDef, 29 Aug 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-7, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), sec. 3. (S-GP 3) JCMS 577-68 to SecDef, 2 Oct 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-9), same file, sec. 4A.

34. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecA et al., "Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces: Improvement and Modernization (U)," 23 Oct 68, att to JCS 2472/272-15, 25 Oct 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), sec. 8. (S-GP 3) JCSM-577-68 to SecDef, 2 Oct 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-9), same file, sec. 4A.

35. (S-GP 3) Briefing Sheet for CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (Force Structure Increase)(U)," 23 Oct 68, on JCS 2472-14; (S-GP 4) JCSM-633-68 to SecDef, 25 Oct 68 (derived from JCS 2472/272-15); JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), sec. 8. See also Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 300–301.

36. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecA et al., "Increase in RVNAF Force Structure (U)," 1 Nov 68, att to JCS 2472/272-16, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), sec. 8. (C-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5528 to CINCPAC and CSA, 14 Nov 68; (C-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7087 to CNO and CINCPAC, 6 Dec 68; same file, sec. 9.

37. (S-GP 4) JCSM-678-68 to SecDef, 13 Nov 68, JMF 911/535 (16 Apr 68), sec. 8. (S-GP 3) Tab B to J–5 BP 65–68, 20 Nov 68, JMF [not bound].

38. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 300–301. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 34325 to CINCPAC, 9 Nov 68, JCS IN 93364. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 18 Nov 68, JCS IN 20488. (S-GP

4) MACV Report, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization—Phase II," 25 Dec 68, JCS 2472/406, JMF [not bound].

39. (S-NOFORN-GP 4) Msg, D/JS 14353 to MACV, 21 Dec 68.

40. (S-NOFORN-GP 4) Msg, D/JS 14353 to MACV, 21 Dec 68. (S-GP 3) Tab A to J–5 BP 65-68, 20 Dec 68, JMF [not bound].

41. (S) Note to Control Div, "T-Day Planning and Improvement and Modernization of the RVNAF," 2 Dec 68; (S-NOFORN-GP 4) JCSM-732-68 to SecDef, 12 Dec 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7580 to CINCPAC, 12 Dec 68; JMF 907/305 (9 Dec 68).

42. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecA et al., Att to JCS 2472/272-27, 19 Dec 68, JMF [not bound].

43. (S-GP 3) JCSM-6-69 to SecDef, 4 Jan 69 (derived from JCS 2472/272-28), JMF [not bound].

44. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC OPLAN 67-69 (originally 67-68), "A Post-Hostilities Plan for Vietnam," 31 Mar 67; (TS) JCS 2054/705-5, 21 Jun 67; JMF 346 (31 Mar 67) CINCPAC 67.

45. (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., "T-Day Planning," 10 Oct 67, Att to JCS 2472/170, 11 Oct 67; (S-GP 4) JCSM-686-67 to SecDef, 9 Dec 67 (derived from JCS 2472/170-1, 1 Dec 67); JMF 907/305 (10 Oct 67), sec. 1. (S-GP 4) JCSM-189-68 to SecDef, 28 Mar 68 (derived from JCS 2472/170-5, 18 Mar 68); (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., "T-Day Planning," 24 Jul 68, Att to JCS 2472/170-7, 29 Jul 68; same file, sec. 2.

46. (S-GP 4) JCSM-531-68 to SecDef, 3 Sep 68 (derived from JCS 2472/170-9, 29 Aug 68); (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "T-Day Planning," 17 Oct 68, Att to JCS 2470/170-18, 21 Oct 68; JMF 907/305 (10 Oct 67), secs. 4 and 6.

47. (S-GP 1) CINCPAC OPLAN 69-69, "A T-Day Plan for Redeployment of Forces," 30 Dec 68, JMF 346 (30 Dec 68) CINCPAC 69. (S-GP 3) JCSM-733-68 to SecDef, 13 Dec 68, JMF 907/305 (10 Oct 67), sec. 8A (derived from JCS 2472/170-24, 9 Dec 68, same file, sec. 8). (S-GP 3) CM-3737-68 to SecDef, 30 Oct 68, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2472/170-18, 1 Nov 68, same file, sec. 6.

48. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) OCJCS Study Group, *1968 Year-End Review of Vietnam (U)*, 15 Jan 69, pp. 5–14. CDR Paul F. Abel, USN, Revolutionary Development South Vietnam Br, Office of SACSA, interviewed by Robert J. Watson and Arthur A. Chapa, 3 Feb 69. (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69, JCS IN 38225.

49. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012225Z Jan 69, JCS IN 10811. (S) Msg, Saigon 894 to State, 16 Jan 69, JCS IN 38225. (S) DIA IBs 219-68 and 6-69, 7 Nov 68 and 9 Jan 69, supplements, "Statistical Summary on South Vietnam. (TS-GP 3) OCJCS Study Group, *1968 Year-End Review of Vietnam (U)*, pp. 1–6.

50. (C) Tab D to J–5 BP 65–68, 20 Dec 68, JMF [not bound]. (C) Msg, Saigon to State, 14 Sep 68, JCS IN 66904; (C) Msg, COMUSMACV 41264 to JCS, 11 Dec 68, JCS IN 62883; (C) Msg, COMUSMACV 17134 to CJCS, 15 Dec 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68. Clarke, *Final Years*, pp. 518–519 notes that the Union army during the Civil War had higher desertion rates than the ARVN.

51. (C) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization," 1 Nov 68; (C-GP 4) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "RVNAF Officer/NCO Strengths and Promotions," 18 Nov 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 68.

52. (C) J–5 BP 65–68, Tab C: "RVNAF Officer/NCO Structure," 20 Dec 68. (C-GP 4) CM 3770-68 to SecDef, 19 Nov 68; (C-GP 4) CM-3803-68 to SecDef, 3 Dec 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68. (C-GP 4) CM-3840-68 to SecDef, 30 Dec 68, Att to JCS 2472/358-4, 2 Jan 69, JMF 911/535 (30 Jul 68).

53. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 17134 to CJCS, 15 Dec 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68. Clarke, *Final Years*, p. 514 argues that the Americans never solved the problem of poor RVNAF leadership.

Chapter 14. After TET: The May and August Offensives

1. *NY Times*, 2 Mar 68, p. 3. For the circumstances of McNamara's departure, see Ch. 9 above, pp. 126–127.

2. *NY Times*, 23 Mar 68, p. 1; 11 Apr 68, p. 1. For planning for Westmoreland's departure, see Graham A. Cosmas, "MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal" (MS. US Army Center of Military History), Ch. 1, pp. 2–3. Hereafter cited as Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal." Abrams had been appointed Deputy COMUSMACV in May 1967 with a view to his eventually succeeding Westmoreland.

3. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 2–3. *NY Times*, 11 Jun 68, p. 1; 4 Jul 68, p. 3; 4 Jun 68, p. 31. (TS) HQ USMC, *Commandant's Vietnam Chronology*, entry 31 Jul 68.

4. (TS-NOFORN) Msg, COMUSMACV 02984 to CJCS, 030238Z Mar 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 68.

5. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 60-68, 12 Mar 68; 66–68, 19 Mar 68; 84–68, 9 Apr 68. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," May 68. CINCPAC-COMUSMACV *Report on the War in Vietnam*, Jun 68, p. 245. *NY Times*, 11 Apr 68.

6. Operation DELAWARE is described in Jack Shulimson et al., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968* (Washington: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1997), pp. 252–253. Hereafter Shulimson, *Defining Year*.

7. (TS) Msg, JCS 03965 to COMUSMACV, 112212Z Apr 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 4899 to CJCS, 121212Z Apr 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 7–8.

8. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 159_4 (one digit illegible) to CINCPAC, 071442Z May 68, JCSIN 94380. The text of this directive, originally transmitted from COMUSMACV to his subordinate commanders as COMUSMACV 12854, 061047Z May 68, is quoted in full in (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 15262 to Paris, 271808Z May 68, JCS IN 39239.

9. (S-NOFORN) CIA/DIA, "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam, 1 Apr–30 Jun 68," (S-3198/AP-YA). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) OCJCS Study Group, "1968 Year-End Review of Vietnam (U)," 15 Jan 69, vol. II, pp. 4–2 – 4–3; hereafter cited as "1968 Year-End Review." (S) OASD (SA) "Interdiction Campaign since March 31," 22 Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Combat Analysis Group, J–3, "Statistical Digest of Military Developments in Southeast Asia," CAG Statistical Series, vol. I, no. 7, 3 Feb 69.

10. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 4–4. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 10917 to CINCPAC, 180508Z Apr 68, JCS IN 50236. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 12886 to CJCS, 062357Z May 68, JCS IN 88481. (S) OASD (SA), "Interdiction Campaign since March 31," 22 Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

11. (FOUO) *CINCPAC-COMUSMACV REPORT, Jun 68*, p. 78. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3–16 – 3–17.

12. Enemy plans are described in *Vietory in Vietnam*, pp. 227–228. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 1–18, Fig. 1–10.

13. (S-NOFORN) DIA *IB*s 76-68, 17 Apr 68; 77–68, 18 Apr 68; 82–68, 25 Apr 68; 84–68, 29 Apr 68. (S) Msgs, Saigon 25643 to State, 250900Z Apr 68, JCS IN 86582; and 26229, 021134Z May 68, JCS IN 80438. (S) CM-3228-68 to SecDef, 23 Apr 68, OCJCS 091 Vietnam Apr 68. *CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68*, p. 249.

14. (C) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 6183 to CJCS et al., 111115Z May 68; MAC 6260, 131242Z May 68; MAC 6299, 141252Z May 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 68. Convenient summaries of the action are in Hq MACV, "'One War,' MACV Command Overview, 1968–1972," Ch. 3, pp. 9–10, and Ch. 4, pp. 19–24, 27–28, Ms in US Army Center of Military History; and *USMACV Command History, 1968*, vol. I, pp. 38, 132–133. Enemy difficulties in attacking Saigon are acknowledged in *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 228.

15. (S) Memo, SecDef to GEN Wheeler, 13 May 68; (TS) JCSM-315-68 to SecDef, 21 May 68 (derived from JCS 2472/291-1, 18 May 68, as amended by Dec on 20 May 68); JMF 911/372 (13 May 68).

16. (S) Msg, Saigon 26826 to State, 091022Z May 68, JCS IN 95726. (S-NOFORN) DIA *IB* 200-68, 11 Oct 68, Supplement. Quotation is from *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 229.

17. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 6210 to CINCPAC, 120858Z May 68; MAC 6222, 121419Z May 68; MAC 6264, 131446Z May 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 68. The evacuation and its rationale are described in Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 9, 14–15.

18. (S) Msgs, Saigon 27121 to State, 131128Z May 68, JCS IN 11157; 27497, 161220Z May 68, JCS IN 18320; 28566, 291140Z May 68, JCS IN 43930. (C) Msg, Saigon 27539 to State, 171048Z May 68, JCS IN 15635. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, p. 11.

19. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 119-68, 20 May 68. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 7605 to CINCPAC, 091112Z Jun 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68. (S) Msgs, Saigon 28566 to State, 291140Z May 68, JCS IN 43930; 29565, 101157Z Jun 68, JCS IN 64371; 29880, 131200Z Jun 68, JCS IN 72383.

20. These measures are summarized in Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 10–11.

21. (U) MFR, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, "Ground Operations SVN, 2 Jun 68," 2 Jun 68; (U) Memo, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, to CJCS, "Accidental Delivery of Ordnance," 4 Jun 68; (FOUO) Msg, COMUSMACV 16447 to JCS and CINCPAC, 080817Z Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68.

22. (C) Msg, JCS 6117 to COMUSMACV, 042315Z Jun 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68. For the public affairs aspect, see William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1968–1973* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1996), pp. 26–28; hereafter Hammond, *Military and Media 68–73*.

23. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 7871 to CJCS, 141007Z Jun 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8035 to CJCS, 180022Z Jun 68; (S-GP 4) CM-3424-68 to SecDef, 24 Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 11–12.

24. (S-NOFORN) DIA *IB* 200-68, 11 Oct 68, Supplement. *CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68*, p. 254. For interpretation of the lull, see *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 930–933.

25. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 14–15.

26. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 8046 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 180433Z Jun 68; MAC 8206, 211017Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 8250 to CJCS, 220420Z Jun 68; (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 181231Z Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 30199 to State, 171210Z Jun 68, JCS IN 77962.

27. (TS) Msgs, JCS 6703 to COMUSMACV, 181355Z Jun 68; JCS 6781, 191959Z Jun 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 6844 to COMUSMACV, 202134Z Jun 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 68.

28. Hammond, *Military and Media 68–73*, pp. 34–38. *NY Times*, 27 Jun 68, p. 1. Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 8756 to CJCS et al., 010920Z Jul 68; MAC 9072, 070954Z Jul 68; OCJCS File 24-Hour Summaries 1 through 50. North Vietnamese historians view this as the real end of the siege of Khe Sanh and interpret the US evacuation as a major Communist victory. See *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 229–230.

29. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3–25 – 3–26.

30. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3–27 – 3–28. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 02461 to CINCPAC, 230100Z Jan 68, JCS IN 52226. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 15840 to CINCPAC, 020625Z Jun 68, JCS IN 49618. (S-GP 3) Memo, DepSecDef to Dir Def Communications Planning Group, "Increased Use of DYE MARKER/MUSCLE SHOALS Resources for Operations against the NVA/VC," 5 Apr 68, Att to JCS 2471/66-1, 8 Apr 68; (S-GP 3) JCSM-320-68 to SecDef, 21 May 68 (derived from JCS 2471/66-3, 17 May 68); (S-GP 3) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "DUCK BLIND Plan for Expanding the Use of Intrusion Detection Capability against the Enemy in South Vietnam," 6 Jan 68, Att to JCS 2471/66-5, 7 Jun 68; JMF 911/321 (5 Apr 68).

31. (S) OASD (SA), "Interdiction Campaign since March 31," 22 Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68. (S-NOFORN) CIA-DIA, "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam, 1 Jul–31

Oct 68," (S-3378/AP-4A). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 4-8, Fig. 4-2. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 18202 to CDR 7th AF, 250141Z Jun 68, JCS IN 92362. (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Combat Analysis Group, J–3, "Statistical Digest of Military Developments in Southeast Asia," CAG Statistical Series, vol. 1, no. 7, 3 Feb 69. Bernard C. Nalty, *The War against Trucks: Aerial Interdiction in Southern Laos 1968–1972* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2005), Ch. 1 describes planning for Ho Chi Minh Trail Interdiction.

32. (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 1–18, Fig. 1–10. (TS) CM-3489-68 to Pres, 19 Jul 68, Att to JCS 2472/331, 22 Jul 68, JMF 911/399 (19 Jul 68).

33. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3–13 – 3–14. *CINCPAC-COMUSMACV Report, Jun 68*, p. 241. (C-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 10794 to DIA, 161810Z Apr 68, JCS IN 47706.

34. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 1909 to CINCPAC, 101410Z Feb 68; (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9947 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 131611Z Feb 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 68. (S-GP 3) JCS 2472/254-2, 2 Apr 68, JMF 911/323 (13 Feb 68).

35. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 8069 to CINCPAC, 220008Z Mar 68, JCS IN 87562. (S-GP 3) JCS 2472/254-2, 2 Apr 68, JMF 911/323 (13 Feb 68). (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., "Southeast Asia Deployment Program 6," 4 Apr 68, JMF 907/374 (14 Mar 68).

36. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "B–52 Sortie Rate," 15 Apr 68, Att to JCS 2472/274, 17 Apr 68, JMF 911/323 (15 Apr 68).

37. (S-GP 3) JCSM-257-68 to SecDef, 23 Apr 68 (derived from JCS 2472/270-1, 18 Apr 68); (S) Memo, Mil Asst to SecDef to CJCS et al., "B–52 Sortie Rate," 29 Apr 68, Att to JCS 2472/270-2.

38. (S-GP 3) JCSM-333-68 to SecDef, 29 May 68 (derived from JCS 2472/274-1, 24 May 68), JMF 911/323 (15 Apr 68).

39. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "B–52 Sortie Rate," 22 Jun 68, Att to JCS 2472/274-2, 24 Jun 68, JMF 911/323 (15 Apr 68).

40. (TS) CM-3489-68 to Pres, 19 Jul 68, Encl to JCS 2472/331, 22 Jul 68, JMF 911/399 (19 Jul 68), sec 1. (S) MACV Briefing for SecDef, 15 Jul 68, same file, sec 1A. *FRUS Vietnam Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 875–885 prints Clifford's views and notes on the briefing for the President.

41. (S) Msg, JCS 8442 to COMUSMACV, 261911Z Jul 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 68.

42. *FRUS Vietnam Jan–Aug 68*, p. 887.

43. (S) Msg, JCS 8442 to COMUSMACV, 261911Z Jul 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 68.

44. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 10181 to CJCS, 280742Z Jul 68; (S) Msg, JCS 8593 to COMUSMACV, 300219Z Jul 68 (retransmitted as 302313Z Jul 68; originally addressed in error to CINCPAC); OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 68.

45. (S) Msg, JCS 8594 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 302020Z Jul 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8756 to CINCPAC, 021949Z Aug 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 68 and Aug 68. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIX (19 Aug 68), pp. 193–194. Quotation is from *FRUS Vietnam Jan–Aug 68*, p. 922. W. Averill Harriman and Cyrus Vance, the US negotiators in Paris, had suggested on 29 July that the administration consider a total halt to bombing of the North in return for Hanoi's agreement to de-escalate in the South, including a halt to attacks on the cities. See *FRUS Vietnam Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 912–918, 924–926.

46. (S-NOFORN) DIA *IB*s 151-68, 2 Aug 68 through 161–68, 16 Aug 68. (S) CM-3573-68 to Pres, 12 Aug 68, Encl to JCS 2472/345, 12 Aug 68, JMF 912/292 (12 Aug 68).

47. (S-GP 2) Msg, State 220696 to Saigon, 141949Z Aug 68, JCS IN 98570. (S) Msg, Saigon 35464 to State, 151135Z Aug 68, JCS IN 99286. (S) Msg, Saigon and COMUSMACV MAC 11243 to ASD(PA) and AsstSecState (PA), 200207Z Aug 68 (with messages on same subject 17 and 18 Aug 68), OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

48. The action is summarized in *USMACV Command History 1968*, vol. I, pp. 38, 133–136. (S) Msg, Saigon 36596 to State, 291115Z Aug 68, JCS IN 37720. (S) "Report on Situation in Vietnam," 26 Aug 68, apparently prepared by NMCC for CJCS, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam

Aug 68. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 11822 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 010943Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

49. (S) Msg, Saigon 36596 to State, 291115Z Aug 68, JCS IN 37720.

50. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 11672 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 290805Z Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68.

51. (S) CIA Memo, "Increasing Role of North Vietnamese in Viet Cong Units," 17 Sep 68, Encl to Memo, Actg DepDir for Intelligence, CIA, to CJCS, 20 Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

52. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 231. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 13–14 cites the similar conclusions of another North Vietnamese history as well as 1968 reports of enemy commanders' complaints.

53. (S-NOFORN) DIA *IB* 2-69, 3 Jan 69, Supplement. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Sep 68.

54. (S-NOFORN) DIA *IB* 2-69, 3 Jan 69, Supplement. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Nov 68. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 268-68, 14 Nov 68; 269-69, 15 Nov 68. Quotation is from *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 237–238.

55. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 13146 to CJCS, 281241Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

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1. Dept of State *Bulletins*, LVIII (15 Apr 68), p. 482; LVII (23 Oct 67), p. 521.

2. (TS) State/ISA/Joint Staff Memo, no signature, for Mr. Bundy, "'No Advantage' Criteria," 3 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations) Through Apr 68.

3. (TS) Contingency Study Group/Vietnam, "Instructions for Governor Harriman" [draft as reviewed at White House, 6 Apr 68], OCJCS File, Briefing Book Prepared for VN Mission in Paris.

4. (TS) Tab A to J–5 T-34-68, 5 Apr 68; (TS-GP 4) J–5 T-34-68, 5 Apr 68; (TS) CNOF 128-68, 10 Apr 68; (C) Note to Control Div, "J–5 T-34-68, Actions Pertaining to Talks with North Vietnam," 10 Apr 68; (S-GP 4) CSAM 186-68, 14 Apr 68; (S-GP 1) Briefing Sheet for CJCS on JCS 2472/267-1, 18 Apr 68; all in JMF 907/503 (5 Apr 68).

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6. (S) "Vietnam Negotiations: Dangers and Opportunities," 8 Apr 68, evidently prepared by Amb Bunker or reflecting his views, OCJCS File, "Vietnam Negotiating Book" (Black Book No. 4). (TS) Memo, AsstSecState for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to State, "Instructions for Governor Harriman," 9 Apr 68, OCJCS File, Briefing Book for VN Mission in Paris. (TS-GP 1) Memo, MG DePuy and MG Seignious to CJCS, "Negotiations," 8 Apr 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations) Through Apr 68. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, p. 561.

7. (TS) Memo, BG R. N. Ginsburgh to CJCS, 7 May 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam (Negotiations) May 68. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 641–646.

8. (U) "Vietnam Mission Delegation List," Tab A of OCJCS File, Briefing Book for VN Mission in Paris.

9. (S) Msg, LTG Goodpaster to CJCS, CROC 003, 100945Z May 68; (TS-GP 1) Msg, Acting CJCS to COMUSMACV, JCS 5059, 101223Z May 68; (C) Msg, CJCS to CAS Paris [LTG Goodpaster], JCS 5106, 102104Z May 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5135 to CAS Paris, 111714Z May 68; (S) Msg, State 160945 to Paris, 9 May 68; (S) Msg, CAS Paris to SSO Brussels [CJCS], CROC 002, 100954Z May 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 6521 to LTG Goodpaster, 181204Z May 68; OCJCS File Paris/Viet Mission, to/from Goodpaster, May–14 Jul 68.

10. (U) List of GVN Observers and List of TCC Observers in OCJCS File, Briefing Book Prepared for VN Mission in Paris. (S) Msgs, Saigon 24711, 24904, and 25167 to State, 13, 16, and 19 Apr 68, JCS IN 42116, 46284, and 54489. (S) Msg, State 158415 to Saigon et al., 4 May 68, JCS IN 84725.

11. *NY Times*, 14 May 68, p. 18.

12. (TS) "Summary Chronology," Encl to Memo, ExecSecy, Dept of State to Holders of the Harvan Chronology, 17 May 68, pp. 4–6 (hereafter cited as "Summary Chronology"), OCJCS File, HARVAN, 1 Sep–30 Oct 68. (TS) Msg, CJCS to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, JCS 9019, 091649Z Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68. (S) Msg, Paris 14365 to State, 20 May 68, JCS IN 25509.

13. (S) Msg, Saigon 26928 to State, 10 May 68, JCS IN 96067. (S) Msg, State 162732 to Saigon and Paris, 11 May 68, JCS IN 10965.

14. (TS) Msg, JCS 5362 to CAS Paris, CROC 40, 16 May 68, with Att (TS) Msg, White House to AmEmb Paris, CAP 81131, 16 May 68, OCJCS File Paris/Viet Mission, to/from Goodpaster, May–14 July 68.

15. (TS) Msg, Saigon 27938 to State, 22 May 68, JCS IN 29204. *NY Times*, 24 May 68, p. 1.

16. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Possible U.S. Courses of Action if Paris Talks Stall or Break Down," 24 May 68, JMF 911/305 (24 May 68).

17. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-343-68 to SecDef, 29 May 68 (derived from JCS 2472/298-1, 28 May 68), JMF 911/305 (24 May 68). An unclassified version is in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 735–738.

18. (S) Msg, Paris 14694 to State, 25 May 68, JCS IN 36076.

19. (S) Msg, Paris 15436 to State, 3 June 68, JCS IN 53908. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 723–733.

20. (S) Msg, Paris 16113 to State, 12 Jun 68, JCS IN 68559.

21. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 659–660, 786–787. (S) Msgs, State 189086 to Paris, 24 Jun 68; 190068 to Paris, 25 Jun 68; Paris 17053 to State, 26 Jun 68; 17153 to State, 28 Jun 68; JCS IN 92823, 98490, 95930.

22. (S) Msg, Paris 18692 to State, 29 Jul 68, in *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 912–915.

23. *FRUS Vietnam, Jan–Aug 68*, pp. 916–919. (TS) Msgs, JCS 9364 and 9366 [CJCS] to COMUSMACV, 18 Aug 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 68. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIX (9 Sep 68), pp. 275–279.

24. US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. VII, *Vietnam September 1968–January 1969* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2003), pp. 399–403 summarizes this process. Hereafter *FRUS Vietnam, Sep 68–Jan 69*.

25. *FRUS Vietnam, Sep 68–Jan 69*, pp. 399–401.

26. (C) Msg, State 265238 to Saigon et al., 1 Nov 68, JCS IN 80526.

27. This paragraph and the following account of the 29 October meeting is drawn from meeting notes in *FRUS Vietnam, Sep 68–Jan 69*, pp. 399–416.

28. *FRUS Vietnam, Sep 68–Jan 69*, pp. 413–416.

29. (C) Bunker Background Press Briefing to US Correspondents, 4 Nov 68; (S) Msg, Saigon 41768 to State, 3 Nov 68; Msg, Saigon 42066 to State, 6 Nov 68; OCJCS File Correspondence/Messages Pertaining to 1 November 1968 Cessation of the Bombing in North Vietnam. Suspicions of Nixon are expressed in *FRUS Vietnam, Sep 68–Jan 69*, pp. 413–416.

30. (TS) Msg, JCS 12492 to COMUSMACV, 301859Z Oct 68, OCJCS File Correspondence/Messages Pertaining to 1 November 1968 Cessation of the Bombing in North Vietnam.

31. (C) Bunker Background Press Briefing to US Correspondents, 4 Nov 68; (S) Msg, Saigon 41768 to State, 3 Nov 68; OCJCS File Correspondence/Messages Pertaining to 1 November 1968 Cessation of the Bombing in North Vietnam.

32. (TS) CM-3743-68 to Pres, 31 Oct 68, OCJCS File Correspondence/Messages Pertaining to 1 November 1968 Cessation of the Bombing in North Vietnam.

33. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIX (18 Nov 68), pp. 517–519.

34. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIX (16 Dec 68), pp. 621–622.

35. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LIX (16 Dec 68), pp. 621–622.

Chapter 16. Pressing the Attack in the South

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2. Gen Abrams's situation is described in Graham A. Cosmas, "MACV, the Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal" (Ms. US Army Center of Military History), Ch. 4, pp. 28–29; hereafter Cosmas "Years of Withdrawal."

3. Combined Campaign Plan 1969, AB 144, 30 Sep 68, JMF 911/350 (30 Sep 68). Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, p. 31.

4. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 14472 to CINCPAC, 271008Z Oct 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 3–7. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Nov 68. Cosmas, Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 31–32.

5. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "Trip Report," 30 Sep 68 and Encl. A, "The Political Situation in the Countryside"; (S) Msg, JCS 10895 to COMUSMACV, 242104Z Sep 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep and Oct 68. (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 2–11 – 2–12. (S-NOFORN) DIA *IBs* 223-68, 14 Nov 68; 246.68, 18 Dec 68.

6. (S) Msg, Saigon 41523 to State, 30 Oct 68, JCS IN 75427. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 13117 to CJCS, 280610Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68.

7. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 13848 to CINCPAC et al., 130945Z Oct 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 41523 to State, 30 Oct 68, JCS IN 75427. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 36–37.

8. (TS-NOFORN) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 12535 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 170257Z Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. (TS-GP 3) CM-3662-68 to SecDef, 20 Sep 68, Att to JCS 2472/364, 21 Sep 68; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Northeast Monsoon Campaign Planning," 5 Oct 68, Att to JCS 2472/364-1, 8 Oct 68; (TS) CM-3723-68 to SecDef, 23 Oct 68, Att to N/H of JCS 2472/364-1, 25 Oct 68; JMF 911/520 (20 Sep 68).

9. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 231-68, 1 Oct 68. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 200540Z Sep 68; (S-GP 3) JCS 2471/77, 14 Oct 68; (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3414 to CINCPAC, 182028Z Oct 68; JMF 911/321 (20 Sep 68). (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 3–28. For the air interdiction plan, see Bernard C. Nalty, *The War against Trucks: Aerial Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1968–1972* (Washington: US Air Force History and Museums Program, 2005), Ch. 5; hereafter Nalty, *War against Trucks.*

10. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 3–27. (S-GP 3) DJSM-1435-68 to CJCS, 27 Nov 68; (S-GP 3) CM-3796-68 to DepSecDef, 2 Dec 68, Att to JCS 2471/80, 3 Dec 68; JMF 911/321 (27 Nov 68).

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19. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 16511 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 020045Z Dec 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 14187 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 032243Z Dec 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6850 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 032155Z Dec 68; (TS-GP 3) CM-3800-68 to SecDef, 2 Dec 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 041742Z Dec 68; (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 16625 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 040905Z Dec 68; (TS) Msg, JCS 14235 to COMUSMACV, 060056Z Dec 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68.

20. These directives are quoted in Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 27–28.

21. (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 17450 to CJCS et al., 230940Z Dec 68; MAC 17719, 301109Z Dec 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 42365 to JCS, 160834Z Dec 68, JCS IN 72070. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3–7 – 3–8, 3–16 – 3–19. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 274-68, 21 Nov 68; 290-68, 11 Dec 68. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Dec 68. SPEEDY EXPRESS, which continued well into 1969, ran up impressive body counts but became the subject of public controversy over allegations that the participating US 9th Infantry Division inflicted excessive casualties among Vietnamese civilians. See William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media 1968–1973* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1996), pp. 239–241.

22. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-610-68 to SecDef, 16 Oct 68 (derived from JCS 2339/285, 10 Oct 68), JMF 911/520 (20 Sep 68). (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 4–5 – 4–7. A recent definitive account is in Nalty, *War against Trucks*, pp. 102–114.

23. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS et al., 191152Z Oct 68, JCS IN 48683. (S-GP 3) "ARC LIGHT Follow-On Study," 18 Nov 68, CAG 4-68, JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68).

24. Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "ARC LIGHT Sortie Rate," 26 Nov 68, Att to JCS 2472/389, 27 Nov 68; (S-GP 3) JCSM-711-68 to SecDef, 4 Dec 68 (derived from JCS 2472/389-1, 30 Nov 68); (S-GP 3) CM-3805-68 to SecDef, 4 Dec 68; JMF 911/323 (26 Nov 68).

25. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 16283 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 270403Z Nov 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 272258Z Nov 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 16464 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 301041Z Nov 68; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8246 to CINCPAC, 232256Z Dec 68; (S-GP 4) OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov and Dec 68. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 302-68, 26 Dec 68. Msg, Saigon 43858 to State, 2 Dec 68, JCS IN 45810. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8467 to CINCPAC, 280017Z Dec 68.

26. These considerations are summarized in Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 15–16.

27. The foregoing account of political trends during 1968 is drawn from Ambassador Bunker's weekly situation reports to the President and from (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," pp. 5–22 – 5–29.

28. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 3, pp. 12–14. (S) Msgs, Saigon 18582 to State, 8 Feb 68; 20175, 22 Feb 68. (S) Msg, Saigon 22579 to State, 20 Mar 68, JCS IN 85672. (S) Msg, Saigon 22386 to State, 181200Z Mar 68, JCS IN 78612. (C) Msg, Saigon 23150 to State, 27 Mar 68, JCS IN 97060. (S) Msg, Saigon 24361 to State, 9 Apr 68, JCS IN 33674, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 68 (filed under date 10 Apr). (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 0649 to CINCPAC, 051500Z Mar 68, JCS IN 52109.

29. (S) Msgs, Saigon 27497 to State, 16 May 68, JCS IN 18320; 30500, 20 Jun 68; JCS IN 85053; 37046, 4 Sep 68, JCS IN 48279. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 5–4.

30. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 3–22, 5–8, 5–17.

31. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 5–19 – 5–21. (S) Msg, Saigon 31757 to State, 4 Jul 68, JCS IN 22071. (C-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 25488 to CINCPAC et al., 300435Z Aug 68, JCS IN 39329. (TS-GP 1) Encl B to Memo, SACSA to CJCS, "Trip Report," 30 Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

32. (S) Msgs, Saigon 22579 to State, 20 Mar 68, JCS IN 85672; 24361, 9 Apr 68, JCS IN 33674; 34694, 7 Aug 68, JCS IN 84286; 36074, 22 Aug 68, JCS IN 24226; 40697, 19 Oct 68, JCS IN 51528; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar–Oct 68.

33. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, p. 16.

34. (S) Msg, Saigon 39342 to State, 030600Z Oct 68, JCS IN 14623. (TS-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 5–4 – 5–7. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012225Z Jan 68, JCS IN 10811.

35. Commander Paul F. Abel, Revolutionary Development Division, SACSA, interviewed by R. J. Watson, 3 Feb 69. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 4, pp. 17–18.

36. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, pp. 5–31 – 5–34. For subsequent pacification plans, see Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 8, pp. 29–30.

37. (S) Msg, Saigon 45163 to State, 19 Dec 68, JCS IN 79360.

38. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Jul 68. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "Deployment of the 27th RLT," 19 Jul 68, with Att "Deployment Adjustment Request JS-68-113," 11 Jul 68, JCS 2472/333, 23 Jul 68; (S) CM-3534-68 to DepSecDef, 2 Aug 68, Att to N/H of JCS 2472/333, 5 Aug 68; (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, "Redeployment of RLT 27," 8 Aug 68, Att to JCS 2472/333-1, 9 Aug 68; JMF 907/374 (19 Jul 68). (TS) HQ USMC, Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, entries 10 and 16 Sep 68.

39. (C-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8601 to CSA and CINCSTRIKE, 031410Z Aug 68. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 12189 to CINCPAC, 091123Z Sep 68; (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 112341Z Sep 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68.

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41. (S) NMCC, "Summary of US and Third Nation Military Units in Southeast Asia," 30 Dec 68. Personnel figures are as of 26 December.

42. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012225Z Jan 69, JCS IN 10811. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, Chs. 6 and 7.

43. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) "1968 Year-End Review," II, p. 1–16. *COMUSMACV Command History 1967*, 1, pp. 263–264. Dept of State *Bulletin*, LVIII (15 Jan 68), pp. 71–72.

44. (S-NOFORN-GP 4) Msg, COMUSK UK 51984 to CINCPAC, 080950Z May 68; (S-NOFORN-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 120201Z May 68; (S) Msg, COMUSK KRA 2394 to CINCPAC, 090540Z Aug 68; Msg, JCS 9038 to CINCPAC and CINCUNC, 092053Z Aug 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 10825 to CINCPAC, 101138Z Aug 68; (S) Memo, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, to Bromley Smith, White House, "Request for Information," 7 Sep 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May, Aug, Sep 68.

45. *COMUSMACV Command History 1967*, I, pp. 272–276. (S-GP 4) HQ USARPAC, "Highlights of USARPAC Activities," Jul 68. (S) Memo, DepDir for Opns, NMCC, to Bromley Smith, White House, "Request for Information," 7 Sep 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 68. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 9322 to CINCPAC, 030145Z Apr 68, JCS IN 20746.

46. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 280913Z Jul 68; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 10366 to CJCS, 010901Z Aug 68; (S-GP 4) DJSM-976-68 to CJCS, 3 Aug 68; (S) Msg, JCS 8884 to CINCPAC, 062036Z Aug 68; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul and Aug 68.

47. (S) NMCC, "Summary of US and Third Nation Military Units in Southeast Asia," 30 Dec 68. Figures for personnel are as of 26 December, for units, 30 December.

48. *Victory in Vietnam*, p. 239.

49. *Victory in Vietnam*, pp. 239–240. Cosmas, "Years of Withdrawal," Ch. 8, pp. 33–34.

50. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 240620Z Dec 68, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 68.

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BURMA
Dien Bien Phu
Black R
HANOI
Red River Delta
Haiphong
GULF OF TONKIN
Mekong R
LAOS
Co Am
Thanh Hoa
HAINAN
Vinh
VIENTIANE
Mekong R
THAILAND (SIAM)
Hue
Da Nang
BANGKOK
CAMBODIA
ANNAM
Tonle Sap
Mekong R
GULF OF THAILAND (SIAM)
PHNOM PENH
Bien Hoa
SAIGON
My Tho
COCHINCHINA
PHU QUOC
Vinh Long
REGIONS OF VIETNAM
SOUTH CHINA SEA
0 150 MILES
0 150 KILOMETERS